An Online Environmental Scan of Right-wing Extremism in Canada

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About this report

This report documents the second-year findings of a study by researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) which tracks the online ecosystems used by RWEs (right wing extremists) in Canada. This work is delivered in the context of a larger study into Canadian right-wing extremism (RWE), led by a team of researchers at Ontario Tech University (OTU) in partnership with Michigan State University and the University of New Brunswick. It contains an update to the findings laid out in an interim report published in 2020 which detailed RWE Canadian social media activity throughout 2019. The interim report used the same methodological and definitional framework laid out in this report.[1]

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Executive summary

On 3 February 2021, the Government of Canada announced that the extreme right-wing organisations the Proud Boys, Atomwaffen Division, the Base, and the Russian Imperial Movement would be designated as terrorist organisations, bringing the total number of designated extreme right-wing organisations up to six.[2] Public Safety Minister Bill Blair explained that the decision was informed by 'the growing threat of ideologically motivated extremism'.[3]

It was a decision that took place following a turbulent year. Throughout the course of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted lives around the world, killing over two million people, drastically impacting employment, and resulting in the implementation of emergency responses that infringed on personal freedoms.

The pandemic has also created a febrile environment for radicalisation, by ensuring that millions of people have spent more time online.[4] In an environment of heightened anxiety,[5] the situation has been an easy one for extremists to capitalise on.[6] As a result of the pandemic, extremist conspiracy theories have flourished,[7] and minority communities – in particular Asians – have been subject to increased hate crimes and harassment.[8]

In the United States (US), extreme right-wing activity surged around the presidential election, creating an online ecosystem rife with misinformation.[9] The situation climaxed on 6 January, when thousands of individuals stormed the US Capitol building.[10] This activity has had a noted impact on extremist communities globally,[11] and in his announcement, Mr. Blair acknowledged that the decision to designate the Proud Boys as a terrorist organisation in Canada was influenced by the storming of the Capitol.[12]

Against a global backdrop of surging violence and terrorism perpetrated by the extreme right,[13] and at a time where more people than ever are spending time online, understanding the digital strategies of right-wing extremists (RWEs) is essential.

To help meet this need, researchers at ISD have collaborated with a team of analysts at Ontario Tech University (OTU), Michigan State University, and the University of New Brunswick to track the online habits of Canadian RWEs over a period of two years. This report contains the findings of the second year of this study and presents key trends in the online activity of Canadian RWEs in 2020. It adds to the analysis provided in our interim report, which contains an overview of extremist trends from 2019.

This study draws on an analysis of over 3 million messages sent by over 2,400 groups, channels and accounts associated with Canadian RWE across Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, 4chan, and Telegram, and is supplemented by ethnographic analysis of other, more fringe, platforms. The following report provides an overview of the key trends across social media platforms, before delving into an analysis of dynamics on specific social media ecosystems.

Key Findings

Trends in RWE activity

We identified 2,467 RWE accounts, channels, and pages which were active in 2020, which produced a total of 3,207,332 pieces of content. Based on these numbers, every week (on average):

- These entities created a total of 61,679 pieces of content across the platforms of analysis.

- This includes 4,037 posts on Facebook; 38,857 Tweets (of which 260 were extremist in nature); 46 YouTube videos; 18,291 posts on 4chan; and 448 messages on Telegram.

- These posts attracted an average of 1,033,759 interactions, including Retweets, comments, and likes.

- 1,748 of these posts contained a hateful racial slur, and 651 posts were explicitly hostile against an individual or group of people.

The comparative scale of this activity is difficult to determine, but if considered in the context of the total number of social media users in Canada,[14] the proportion of RWE activity remains small. In 2020, an estimated 25.19 million Canadians used Facebook, 6.45 million used Twitter, and 17.6 million used YouTube. Using these numbers, we estimate that there was:

- One RWE Facebook page or group active for every 235,420 Facebook users;

- One RWE Twitter account active for every 2,833 Canadian Twitter users;

- One RWE YouTube channel broadcasting for every 550,000 Canadian YouTube users.

Despite this, RWEs in Canada are able to generate a sizeable reaction from the public. Across our analysis of activity in 2020, content from RWEs on Facebook generated over 44 million reactions,[15] were Retweeted nearly 9 million times, and generated over 600,000 comments on YouTube. Additionally, on Telegram, where some of the most violent and concerning communities were analysed, content was viewed over 16 million times.

On Facebook, Twitter and 4chan, RWEs were more active in 2020 than in 2019. Building on analysis of the RWE online ecosystem in 2019, we charted increases in the amount of content produced by RWE communities on both 4chan (by 66.5%) and Facebook (by 8.2%) over the two years of the study. Additionally, although the number of RWE Twitter accounts analysed between 2019 and 2020 dropped by 63.5%, we found that RWE actors sent proportionally more Tweets. Active RWE Twitter accounts sent more than double the amount of extremist messages in 2020 than in 2019. Only on YouTube were we able to note a significant drop in the volume of output across the channels analysed.

Drivers of RWE activity online

COVID-19 had a significant impact on RWE activity in 2020. We hypothesise that the increase in activity across the platforms identified above was in part driven by the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and the resulting increase in the time that many people spent online. In addition to having potentially created more active RWE communities online, we also identified more specific effects of the virus on RWE discussion. The pandemic was the most widely discussed topic across the communities analysed — accounting for 38.8% of all messages that we were able to categorise by topic — with output often focusing on conspiracy theories and manifesting in anger against the government. Additionally, increases in activity on Facebook and YouTube from April 2020 appear to be partially linked to the Canadian government's response to the pandemic.

Canadian RWEs appear to be heavily influenced by US activity. Across our platforms of analysis, we found that Canadian RWEs mentioned the US more than Canada. Furthermore, we found that in 2020, Canadian RWE discussed Canadian politics only 3.1% more than US politics, with a particular focus on Donald Trump. This raises the concern that an emboldened and increasingly violent extreme right in the US could help to inspire similar activity in Canada, as Canadian RWEs look to their US counterparts for inspiration.

RWE discussion of Canadian politics focused on Justin Trudeau and the New Democratic Party (NDP). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was the most mentioned Canadian politician by Canadian RWEs in 2020, with discussion of him being

overwhelmingly negative. This speaks to the same trend identified in 2019, which found anti-Trudeau discussion, including conspiracy theories, to be one of the most prevalent topics of conversation. Interestingly, the Liberal Party of Canada was the sixth most mentioned Canadian political party, suggesting that RWE actors are more focused on Trudeau as an individual than on his party. Across our platforms of analysis, the top three most mentioned Canadian political parties were the NDP (2,903 mentions), the Conservative Party of Canada (2,308 mentions), and the Bloc Quebecois (937). Of these, the Bloc Quebecois were the only party to be discussed positively.

Concerning trends in activity

RWEs in Canada are drivers of disinformation. Across the platforms of analysis, we identified Canadian RWE to be key drivers of disinformation. This activity includes trolls on 4chan creating and disseminating a viral piece of disinformation around the US election which suggested that Canada was preparing to launch an invasion of the US should Donald Trump win the 2020 presidential election. Additionally, on YouTube and Gab, we found key topics of content to include the promotion of conspiracy theories around the COVID-19 pandemic, a trend which has been labelled a 'public health crisis'.[16] This demonstrates the hybridised nature of online harms, and suggests that policy solutions to extremism should be synchronised with those responding to disinformation and media manipulation.

We observed a small number of posts involving hateful and violent mobilisation across the channels analysed. To support this analysis, we built a natural language processing (NLP) architecture to identify hostile language, defined as 'abusive, aggressive, dehumanising, or violent language targeting an individual or group of individuals'. This highlighted a small but highly concerning set of 30,847 posts targeting minority communities and political opponents. Additionally, through qualitative analysis of content, we identified highly concerning support for violence in fringe RWE communities. This included a number of white supremacist channels on Telegram promoting the accelerationist ideology that helped inspire the 2019 Christchurch attack, and sharing guides on how to prepare for violence. This type of worrying and violent content was also produced by members of

incel forums discussing the murder and harming of women.

We found mobilisation by a designated terrorist organisation in our analysis. We identified two Telegram channels hosting supporters and members of the Canadian Proud Boys which at the time of writing were still active despite the group's designation as a terrorist entity in February 2021. Although terrorist designation in Canada does not criminalise group membership, such activity is nevertheless concerning and demonstrates the role that fringe platforms can have in incubating and amplifying terrorist organisations.

The impact of social media policy enforcement

The enforcement of social media policy impacts RWE activity online, but does not appear to have a lasting effect. We found that a significant proportion of the channels analysed in 2019 were no longer active in 2020. The percentages of entities that were no longer active were:

- 17% of the public Facebook groups;

- 52% of the private Facebook groups;

- 50% of the public Facebook pages;

- 63.5% of the Twitter accounts;

- 47% of the YouTube channels.

This suggests that policy enforcement by social media platforms is capable of having a significant impact on RWE ecosystems online. However, through our analysis, we were able to identify a number of new channels and pages which had sprung up to take the place of those which were removed. The result was that there was no discernible difference in the number of Facebook and YouTube channels analysed between 2019 and 2020. Only on Twitter were we able to identify a drop in the number of active RWE accounts between 2019 and 2020 where the number of active accounts decreased by 63.5%.

Policy implications and recommendations

On the basis of the findings outlined in this report, the authors have drawn out policy implications around three key thematic areas:

- Social media policy enforcement and regulation;

- The framing of policy around RWE at a national and international level;

- Proactive programming which can be used to push back against RWE online and offline.

Social media policy enforcement and regulation

Our findings detail several key dynamics relating to Canadian RWE mobilisation which have a bearing on social media policies:

- We found evidence which suggests that although platform-driven attempts to limit extremist use of social media through the enforcement of terms of service can impact on the presence of extremist content in the short term, this enforcement does not always have a sustained impact on the presence of extremist communities. In particular, our research suggests that Facebook's current efforts to police RWE use of its platform have not been sufficient at systematically degrading the ability of extremists to operate.

- The extreme right-wing in Canada mobilises on smaller 'alt-tech' platforms in addition to major social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. These alternative platforms include services that have been co-opted by extremist communities (for example, the messaging application Telegram, which has been seized by extremists as a tool for mobilisation); services designed specifically as refuges for hard-line voices (for example, Gab, which was created with limited terms of service to allow for more extreme discussion); and several services designed and built by RWEs for RWEs (such as Iron March and Fascist Forge). In particular, our analysis suggests that fringe platforms host more hateful and violent content than larger, more mainstream platforms, including direct organisation by designated terror groups.

- Our analysis demonstrated that Canadian RWE communities identified in this study engage in a range of harmful behaviours. This includes potentially illegal activity such as the incitement and glorification of violence and explicit hate speech. However, these are not the only harmful behaviours engaged in by RWE communities, and our analysis demonstrates that RWE activity is often hybridised with other forms of online harm. In particular, the communities studied in this report appear to act as hubs for disinformation and conspiracy theories, including content relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and the US 2020 presidential elections.

Given the widespread nature of harmful content emanating from RWE across a range of social media platforms, and the limited impact that self-regulation by social media platforms has had on this activity, it is becoming increasingly evident that government regulation of these platforms is necessary.

Recent regulatory efforts aimed at curbing online extremism have begun to be rolled out in a range of country contexts including France, Germany, Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). On 31 March 2021, Canada's Heritage Minister, Steven Guilbeault, announced legislation to be tabled around the regulation of harmful content in the Canadian context. This announcement detailed five types of dangerous content in the Canadian context which the legislation would focus on: child sexual exploitation; terrorism; violence; hate speech; and the non-consensual sharing of intimate content.[17] Minister Guilbeault announced that this bill would not address the issue of disinformation.

The proposed legislation would task platforms with removing relevant content within 24 hours, with takedown decisions based on guidelines established by a regulator tasked with implementing rules restricting the spread of such content. This would include the implementation of financial penalties where platforms fail to meet the guidelines.

Based on the specific trends of extremist mobilisation identified in our analysis and on the lessons learned from regulation introduced in other country contexts, we make the following recommendations about upcoming social media regulation to tackle extremism in the Canadian context:

- **Regulators should have a broad lens when it comes to the type of online platforms and services considered in scope.** Although we identified RWEs reaching wide audiences on larger social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, we also found concerning extremist mobilisation on a number of smaller platforms. In other contexts, such as the German NetzDG law governing hate speech, platforms have had to have a minimum number of users operating in the country before they are subject to regulation. There are also limits on the inclusion of messaging services (like Telegram), even where these enable largescale, many-to-many communication. Given the particularly concerning violent activity and hate speech identified on fringe platforms, it is essential that regulation around social media is constructed in a way that these platforms are included and can be compelled to take action against illegal content.

- **Platforms regulation should move beyond content-based approaches and start thinking about how platforms' systems and processes affect harmful activity and content online.** Content-based approaches to regulation, such as those proposed in Canada, have had limited impact in other contexts on the proliferation of harmful content online and also raise a number of broader issues, including the onus this places on platforms to determine what is legal and illegal, transparency over decision-making processes, and the need for clear guidelines from regulators which help limit 'overblocking' by platforms.[18]

In particular, a major problem with these approaches is that although they can help with the removal of specific pieces of harmful content, they do not attempt to address the systemic issues with platform design which might underpin the spread and visibility of harmful content. For example, in the analysis detailed in this report, researchers were able to use Facebook's recommendation algorithm to discover new pages and

groups promoting RWE, meaning that even though pages and groups which had been analysed in 2019 had been deleted/removed, we were able to quickly and easily identify new channels promoting similar content. The same snowballing method was also used on Twitter, YouTube, and Gab. Content-based approaches that focus on individual takedowns do not address the algorithmic amplification of extremist content, whereby platforms can proactively target and promote this content rather than simply hosting it on their services. To address these problems systemically, we recommend that regulation is designed in a way that requires transparency from online platforms, and can compel them to demonstrate that their policies, processes and systems are designed and implemented with respect to the potential negative outcomes that could occur in relation to online harms. This might include requirements for algorithmic auditing, or data access for researchers and regulators to assess the effects of platform systems on harmful content and outcomes.

Conceptualisation of RWE

Our findings detail two key dynamics relating to Canadian RWE which have broader implications for how the phenomenon is conceptualised and responded to, both nationally and internationally:

- Our analysis identified a number of loose online communities involved in the promotion of RWE, including the amplification of violent material, which were not affiliated with specific groups or movements. This point raises the possibility that specific group-based designation and proscription may not be fully effective in addressing the loose, largely online communities associated with contemporary RWE in Canada.

- The transnational dynamics of RWE were highly evident in our analysis. We found evidence of Canadian RWEs networking with other English language extreme right communities, as well as specifically with online communities associated with groups abroad, such as interplay on Telegram between Canadian and US Proud Boys channels. Additionally, we found that Canadian RWEs are motivated by international events, discussing the US more than they discuss Canada, and having nearly as great an interest in US politics as they do

in Canadian politics. These findings, combined with broader concerns around the growth of far-right extremism and terrorism globally, suggest the need for more multilateral collaboration on RWE.

In reflection of these key trends in RWE mobilisation, we make the following recommendations:

- **Greater international alignment between governments is desirable when defining and conceptualising RWE.** Currently there is no consensus at an international level around what constitutes RWE and around the severity of the threat posed by the phenomenon. The Government of Canada uses the framing of 'Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism' to incorporate this threat, which includes xenophobic violence, anti-authority violence, gender-driven violence and other grievance-driven and ideologically motivated violence.[19]

  However, this framework isn't used internationally. Other concepts such as 'Racially and Ethnically Motivated Terrorist/Violent Extremism' (REMT or REMVE) have also been introduced,[20] and some countries prefer the use of terms such as 'white supremacy' or 'far-right extremism'.

  Here it should be pointed out that countries still use differing definitions of terrorism, and accordingly it is recognised that identifying a universally agreed-upon definition for RWE will be challenging. However, it is nevertheless recommended that multilateral engagement on the phenomenon is pursued with the aim of building consensus around the nature of the threat posed by RWE. This can inform more strategic international responses to the threat.

- **Governments should aim to harmonise proscription and designations, but also recognise the limitations of this approach to tackling RWE.** Although a number of countries — including Canada, the US and the UK — have moved to proscribe right-wing terror groups in recent years, there is limited cross-over between the groups proscribed in these contexts, despite the often transnational nature of these organisations. Based on the example of Islamist extremism,

designation in multiple countries would likely have greater impact on disrupting mobilisation by these communities than designation in a single country, and so accordingly it is recommended that attempts to designate RWE groups should be coordinated. Beyond this, it is also recognised that designation might not be the most effective tool in limiting extreme right-wing mobilisation. RWE groups and organisations often have fluid membership bases and organisational structures, as well as shelf-lives. This means that by the time an organisation has been designated, it may no longer be functioning, as was the case of Feuerkrieg Division, which was proscribed in the UK after it had officially disbanded.[21] It also means that organisations with similar philosophies, cultures and membership bases can quickly pop up to replace a recently designated organisation. Accordingly, it is recommended that additional considerations, including key ideological, cultural and tactical tropes, are factored into designation conversations.

- **Additional cross-contextual analysis should be pursued by those studying RWE.** The analysis outlined in this report demonstrates the transnational nature of Canadian RWE and also provides some points of comparison with extremist activity in other contexts, including in the US. However, comprehensive analysis that compares the extreme right across geographies is limited, and building an evidence base around the flows of inspiration, engagement in propagandising, mobilisation, and cross-border membership of and affiliation to specific movements will be hugely important in the development and delivery of proportional responses. Governments should be proactive in supporting such research in both the online and offline domains.

Programmatic responses to RWE

Our analysis identified several key trends in extreme right-wing activity online which have implications for the delivery of programming seeking to respond to and prevent extreme right-wing activity:

- Violent and overtly hateful activity only constitutes a small minority of extreme right-wing activity online, with communities also sharing memes and discussing current events in a way which more broadly reflects an extremist world view. This broader discursive landscape provides a number of opportunities for narrative interventions online.

- RWE communities analysed in this report were key hubs for the dissemination of conspiracy theories and disinformation, particularly around COVID-19. This potentially represents a pathway for increased engagement with broader conspiracy theory communities online.

- Extreme right-wing activity appeared to increase in 2020, which we hypothesise was in part linked to the broader impact of COVID-19 lockdowns, highlighting how increased time indoors may have an impact on the radicalisation of individuals, particularly when combined with broader anxiety around the pandemic.

In reflection of these trends, we make the following recommendations for proactive work seeking to counter RWE:

- **Broader exploration of RWE conversation online by government analysts, academia and civil society should be used to identify discursive opportunities for engagement.** An analysis of non-hateful, non-violent content should be used to understand the narrative triggers deployed by the extreme right when radicalising new individuals. These insights should then be used to inform the creation of upstream counter-messaging and direct interventions strategies which may be effective at deterring interest in extremist movements by individuals who have not been fully radicalised. Engagement initiatives should also take place alongside educational programming and digital literacy designed to build resilience to extremist activity and other online harms such as disinformation. Such programming should be aimed at adults in addition to young people, as the former are often overlooked as a vulnerable population despite actively engaging in harmful activity online.

- **Greater analysis by government analysts, academia and think tanks should be conducted on the relationship between conspiracy theorist and extreme right-wing communities.** Our analysis highlights the use of conspiracy theories by the extreme right, but did not comprehensively map the overlap between conspiracy theorist and extremist communities. Given the mass proliferation of conspiracy theories globally following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that this overlap is better understood, as it potentially represents a pathway by which RWEs can swell their ranks. If it is found that conspiracy theorist groups are being radicalised by the extreme right, then this should be reflected in strategies designed to prevent radicalisation.

- **When lockdowns are eased, police and counter-extremism practitioners should anticipate potential surges in extremist activity.** Given the possibility that the pandemic has introduced new audiences to extreme right-wing ideology, it is possible that when lockdowns are lifted, this may correlate to rates of extreme right activity that are higher than the pre-lockdown level.

Scope of analysis

Definitions

This project explores RWE through the same lens employed by the OTU team and is designed to produce complementary findings. Accordingly, it adapts the definitional framework employed in their 2015 environmental scan,[22] where right wing extremism is understood to be:

> 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 people of colour, Jews, immigrants, the LGBTQ community and feminists.

This definition is broad, capturing a range of extremist subcultures and harmful activity, which is fitting for a study of a phenomenon as multifaceted as RWE.

As our study focuses on extremism it 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 subtle means, as well as through violent or explicit means.

This activity includes what the Government of Canada describes as 'ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE)',[23] which incorporates xenophobic violence, anti-authority violence, gender-driven violence, and other grievance driven violence. It also incorporates the activity of proscribed terrorist organisations. Additionally, beyond activity relating to national security, our definition of right wing extremism also encapsulates illegal activity like hate speech.[24]

Our study also covers legal activity which is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms but which nevertheless advocates a supremacist worldview which seeks to dehumanise outgroups.

The use of this broad definitional framework is justified through understanding that although harmful and threatening to a pluralistic, respectful and peaceful society, the ideology and attitudes which underpin extreme right-wing activity are perfectly legal to hold, and not all activities inspired by this ideology (such as propagandising) are necessarily violent or illegal. Furthermore, it is recognised that non-violent extremism can inspire violence, such as the role the 'Great Replacement' conspiracy theory had on influencing the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019 which left 51 people dead.

Recognising the breadth of this definition, our interim report provided a list of ideological subcategories which were used to divide groups, organisations and individuals operating in the RWE spectrum. This list of subcategories is used again in this report.

Figure 1 Subcategories of RWE

Subcategory	Description	Subcategory	Description
White supremacist	White supremacists believe in the superiority of whites over people of colour, and advocate that white people should be politically and socially dominant over people of colour. This can extend to a belief in the need for violence against, or even the genocide of, people of colour.	Manosphere	The manosphere is a loose collection of movements marked by their overt and extreme misogyny. Movements include 'incels', Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and men's rights activists (MRAs). In particular, our analysis of the manosphere in this report includes analysis of the 'incel' community. Although incels do not primarily focus on racially and culturally defined out-groups, there is notable overlap more broadly between the terminology and digital tactics deployed by incels and other right wing extremists. Additionally, misogynistic violence and extremism linked to incel ideology are common tropes in RWE mobilisation on platforms such as 4chan and Telegram. Reflecting on this, and given the recent history of misogynist violence in Canada, we accordingly included incels in our analysis.
Ethnonationalist	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.		
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.	Sovereigntist 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

Identifying Canadian entities

We used different methodologies when determining whether users, groups or pages were Canadian, all of which relied on publically accessible data, and which come with some caveats.

On 4chan we used country specific flags which were tied to a user's IP address to assess whether or not someone appeared to be posting from Canada. Here there is a possibility that Canadian provenance of a post can be spoofed by individuals using a Canadian proxy, but it is probable that most users are posting from within Canada. In the case of other platforms, we looked for accounts and channels which appeared to be created by groups and individuals which had been identified by project partners at OTU as right wing extremists in their offline scan. Additionally, through qualitative analysis we sought to identify users and channels which met our definition of right wing extremism which self-reported as being Canadian through biographies or channel descriptions, or which primarily posted about Canadian issues.

Here it remains possible that we identified users posting from other countries which where pretending to be Canadian right wing extremists, or Canadian right wing extremists who live outside the country. However, given challenges in determining account provenance from publically accessible information we were unable to assess whether this was the case in the accounts and channels studies here.

Platforms and channels analysed

Using a mix of methodologies, ISD's interim report detailed analysis of RWE communities operating across Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, 4chan, Gab, Iron March and Fascist Forge. Channels, groups, pages and accounts on these platforms were identified in collaboration with the OTU team, with researchers locating the online presence of Canadian RWE actors who had been identified through their offline analysis. Additionally, analysts used several manual and semi-automated techniques to identify additional channels, groups, pages and accounts which met our definition of RWE.

These platforms were selected to provide a broad overview of the ecosystem used by RWE in Canada. Through our analysis, we are able to gauge the role these platforms play for the broader RWE community: while private forums provided a platform for more egregious and violence-endorsing white supremacist communities, more mainstream social media platforms were primarily used to promote content which was hostile to the opponents of RWE groups, such as ethnic and religious minorities, women, and the left.

In continuation from our interim report, this study details activity across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and 4chan. Wherever possible we sought to study the same pages, groups, channels and accounts identified in 2019. Accordingly, we have been able to track shifts in activity on these platforms, including the impacts of takedowns made by social media platforms for breaches of terms of service, as well as instances where communities or individuals cease to be active. In addition to this, researchers have sought to identify additional pages, groups, channels and accounts so as to capture the scale and nature of RWE activity online in Canada for 2020, using the same identification methodologies that were used for our interim report.

As the forums Iron March and Fascist Forge are no longer functioning, neither are analysed in this report. Instead, our second year of study incorporates the encrypted messaging application Telegram, which has gained notoriety for its frequent use by violent white supremacist groups globally.[25] Derived from qualitative, ethnographic analysis, ISD analysts also provide overviews of Canadian forums associated with the 'incel' subculture and of the video streaming platform BitChute.

The overall volume of communities and content captured per platform in this study are outlined below. In turn, the ideological subcategories of communities active on platforms (where possible to determine) and comparable data for RWE social media between 2019 and 2020 are summarised. The identification methodology deployed to select and gather data from RWE channels, accounts, and users for each platform can be found in the subsequent **platform chapters**, with further detail provided in the **technical annex** at the end of the report.

Overview of communities analysed in this report

The following data provides an overview of the total number of pages, groups, channels, accounts, and messages analysed in this report. **In total, our analysis covers 2,468 different social media entities associated with Canadian RWE and draws on analysis of 3,207,332 pieces of individual content.** Although not purporting to represent a comprehensive overview of RWE online activity in Canada, these findings nevertheless demonstrate how the Canadian extreme right draws on an expansive online ecosystem, spanning multiple platforms and reaching hundreds of thousands of people.

Due to data access limitations — particularly in relation to individual account-level data — it is often not possible to de-duplicate the audience of these channels. As such, we recognise that individual users of social media platforms will most likely be members of multiple channels at the same time. Data access limitations also mean that it is not possible for researchers to be 100% certain that the audiences of these RWE channels are based in Canada. Accordingly, it is probable that these Canada-focused entities are broadcasting to an international community of RWEs, in addition to Canadians.

Breakdown of ideological subcategories

To better understand the nuances of RWE social media use, we coded the pages, groups, and channels identified into ideological subcategories as outlined in the Definitions section. Where social media channels acted as disseminators of proselytising material (as with YouTube or Twitter), this coding drew on qualitative analysis of the tone and nature of content produced by a channel. Where channels acted as community hubs (as with Telegram or Facebook groups), coding focused on qualitative analysis of the tone of conversation within a channel. **Further detail on this coding process is provided in the technical annex**.

Through the process of ideological subcategorisation, we found that — with the exception of Gab, which had a majority of white supremacist users, and Telegram, which had an equal number of ethnonationalist and white supremacist channels — the most common ideological subcategory of RWE operating across our platforms of analysis was ethnonationalist. On Facebook and Twitter, the second largest community were anti-Muslim activists, while YouTube had an equal number of anti-Muslim and sovereigntist/militia accounts.

These trends broadly reflect those documented in 2019, which revealed that ethnonationalist ideologies are the most commonly promoted form of RWE online in Canada.

Figure 2 Summary of volume of content analysed in this report

Platform	Number of entities studied	Total aggregate Audience	Content produced	Engagement with content
Facebook	36 groups	119,860 members	169,277 posts	7,079,014 interactions
	71 pages	894,062 followers	40,644 posts	37,168,758 interactions
Twitter	2,276 accounts	N/A	2,020,542 Tweets* (13,546 of which are extremist)	8,905,568 retweets
YouTube	32 channels	2,924,947 subscribers	2,388 videos	602,129 comments
4chan	1 board (/pol/)	N/A	951,177 posts	N/A
Telegram	17 channels	9,945 members	23,304 messages	16,787,288 views
Gab	29 individuals 3 groups	222,815 followers 35,682 members	N/A	N/A

This suggests that ethnonationalist groups are more effective at traversing social media platforms in a way which does not breach their terms of service. Indeed, this has been noted as a common strategy amongst ethnonationalist groups; perhaps most notably, Generation Identity in Europe, who have historically been careful to frame their ideology in euphemistic language.[27] Nonetheless, the ideology promoted by these groups has been effective in inspiring violence, such as the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack.[28] Accordingly, it is suggested that social media platforms pay greater attention to groups and individuals promoting veiled forms of RWE ideology.

An additional trend we documented in 2019, which points towards a higher proportion of white supremacist communities on more fringe platforms such as Gab or Telegram, also held true in 2020. These 'alt-tech' platforms often have minimal policies for limiting extremist mobilisation and have been observed to offer a safe haven to particularly egregious RWE communities in a number of national contexts, including the US, UK and Germany.[29] As platforms like Facebook and Twitter continue to adopt and enforce policies against RWE actors and as national and international policy debates continue to focus on regulation of social media companies, this finding demonstrates the importance of identifying solutions to the relatively unchecked extremist proliferation taking place on the fringes of the global social media ecosystem.

Figure 3 **Ideological breakdown of communities**

Platform	Ethnonationalist	Anti-Muslim	Sovereigntist and militia	White supremacist	Manosphere
Facebook pages	44	14	8	2	2
Facebook groups	16	9	9	1	1
Twitter	25	11	1	7	1
YouTube	14	8	8	2	0
Gab	10	3	8	11	0
Telegram	7	1	2	7	0
Total	**116**	**46**	**36**	**30**	**4**

The Impact of Takedowns and the COVID-19 Effect: Comparing Data From 2019 and 2020

When analysing extremist activity online, one of the key issue areas that emerges is how to gain an understanding of how extremist ecosystems develop and change over time. In recent years, social media companies have publicly committed to taking action against far-right extremism.[30] These have been predominantly policy-oriented, focusing on adopting and enforcing terms of service designed to limit harmful activity on their platforms. While an increasing number of platforms publicly report on the numbers of accounts or pieces of content they remove under these policies, such numbers remain largely meaningless when it comes to understanding the long-lasting impact on extremist ecosystems.

As a two-year study, our analysis is uniquely able to take steps in evidencing the longer term trajectory of online RWE in Canada. The data we gathered over 2019 and 2020 can both demonstrate the impact that policy enforcement by social media platforms has had on Canadian RWE mobilisation and also help us understand whether RWE activity is increasing or decreasing.

Impact of takedowns

Between 2019 and 2020, we observed a number of accounts close down across the platforms of analysis. In most instances, researchers were able to determine that this was the result of enforcement by social media platforms for breaching terms of service outlining hate speech, violent activity, or other harms; however, in some cases it appears to have been due to content producers ceasing activity.

Across all of the platforms analysed, policy enforcement by platforms through removing extremist accounts appears to have had a notable impact on the RWE communities which were active in 2019. However, this enforcement is not comprehensive and a large number of channels that remain in existence actively promote hostility against minority communities.

Additionally, whilst removal has been shown to limit extremist mobilisation, it becomes apparent that new communities quickly rise to fill the space left by old ones. Using similar identification methodologies to those deployed in 2019, ISD analysts found that the total ecosystem of RWEs operating on these platforms remained relatively consistent between 2019 and 2020

Figure 4 Impact of social media takedowns on social media channels analysed in 2019

Platform	Number of entities removed	Proportion of 2019 cohort of social media entities no longer active
Facebook (public groups)	19	65%
Facebook (private groups)	12	52%
Facebook (pages)	38	48%
Twitter accounts	4,037	63.5%
YouTube channels	15	47%

Figure 5 Overall comparison of cohorts of RWEs operating on mainstream platforms

Platform	Channels active in 2019	Channels active in 2020
Facebook pages	78	71
Facebook groups	29	36
Twitter	6,352	2,276
YouTube channels	32	32

on Facebook and YouTube, even if the constituent channels constituting these communities shifted.

This would suggest that policy enforcement by these platforms throughout 2020 was not sufficient to disincentivise RWE from using them. Although further analysis will be needed to see if this is trend continues, it would suggest that if platforms are to truly address and stymie extremist activity, they should increase their investment in this area.

Trends in activity

As well as revealing the impact of platform takedowns on the Canadian RWE ecosystem, comparing data from 2020 and 2019 reveals some interesting trends in the scale of activity of RWE communities.

It should be noted that the datasets presented in this study are not fully comparable with those gathered in 2019. This is because new accounts were added to the study as they were identified by analysts, while others were removed as social media platforms took punitive action against users breaching their terms of service. However, there are certain ways in which we were able to compare the data so as to better comprehend the scale of Canadian RWE activity in 2020. To do this, we compiled two sets of data. The first compares the total volume of content produced by the RWE communities in 2019 and 2020, furnishing an understanding of ecosystem-level trends. The second compares the activity of accounts which were active longitudinally across both 2019 and 2020.

Figure 6 Total volume of activity identified between 2019 and 2020

Platform	Total content produced in 2019	Total content produced in 2020
Facebook (pages and public groups)	194,366 posts	210,359 posts
Twitter	16,712 extremist Tweets	13,546 extremist Tweets
YouTube	4,095 videos	2,388 videos
4chan[31]	571,234 posts	951,177 posts

By comparing the total amount of content identified in 2019 and 2020, we are able to see that on Facebook and 4chan, the Canadian RWE ecosystem was more active overall in 2020. Additionally, although the number of extremist Tweets and the Twitter accounts responsible for sending them are smaller in 2020 than in 2019, looking at the proportion of Tweets sent per account illustrates a different trend. The 6,352 accounts engaged in sending extremist tweets in 2019 sent an average of 2.63 tweets per user. In 2020, the 2,276 accounts sent an average of 5.95 tweets per user, revealing that this smaller cohort of RWE accounts is in fact more active than their 2019 counterparts.

It is hypothesised that the overall increase in activity is, in part, linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding restrictions and lockdown measures, which according to Statistics Canada, saw 41% of Canadians report spending more time online.[32]

Figure 7 Comparison of content produced by channels which were active in both 2019 and 2020

Platform	Content produced in 2019	Content produced in 2020
Facebook (pages and public groups)	29,723	39,754
YouTube	3,434	1,549

When comparing the activity of channels which were active in both 2019 and 2020, we can observe some stark contrasts. For example, while the total amount of content produced by Facebook entities increased by 33.7% between the two years, the number of YouTube videos decreased by 54.9%. This discrepancy is notable, and may in part be linked to the rise of alternative video-hosting platforms such as BitChute and Odysee which, due to their lax content moderation policies, have become havens for RWE.[33]

Although not conclusive, these findings give credence to the idea that there has been a 'COVID effect' on extremism in Canada, whereby the pandemic has helped to fuel extremism online through impacting on individuals' browsing habits, providing a new source of material for a wide range of hateful conspiracy theories, and generating an atmosphere of increased anxiety[34] which extremists are able to manipulate.[35] This hypothesis is further compounded when we consider the significant role COVID-19 played in Canadian RWE messaging (outlined below), a trend which has been observed in additional ISD analysis across different geographies, including Australia, the US, and Germany.[36]

COVID-19 and Trump: Key topics of Conversation

To better understand the focal areas of Canadian RWE online, we used keyword annotation to classify speech across platforms based on key topics, analysing the content of posts on: Facebook pages and groups; messages sent on Canada-focused Telegram channels; comments made on Canadian YouTube channel videos; Tweets sent by members of our Canadian Twitter network; and posts made by Canadian users of 4chan's politically incorrect (/pol/) board.

These topics were drawn from issue areas identified as particularly salient to RWE conversation in our study of Canadian RWE social media activity in 2019, and were updated to include key events in 2020. In total, we searched for mentions of eight different issue areas:
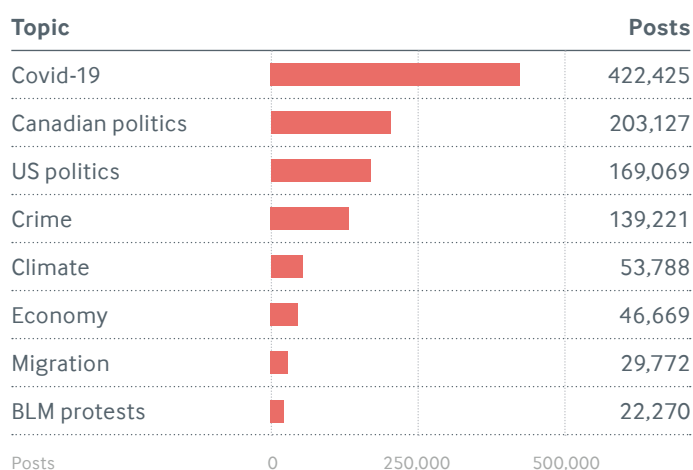
1. US politics
2. Canadian politics
3. COVID-19
4. The Black Lives Matter protests
5. Climate
6. Crime
7. Migration
8. Economy

Of the 3,830,788 messages made by Canadian RWE communities in 2020, we were able to code 1,086,341 as pertaining to one of these eight topics. Although accounting for only 28.4% of conversation, the total volume of messages classified includes a large number of 4chan posts, which are often visual in nature, as well as short Tweets and comments on YouTube with no discernible topic, and as such should not be considered insignificant.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, COVID-19 was the most discussed issue area, with 38.8% of the coded messages relating to the pandemic. Across all platforms analysed, this content includes the promotion of conspiracy theories around the pandemic, including anti-vaccine disinformation, speculation that the pandemic is part of a conspiracy by the Canadian government to implement totalitarian rule, and the scapegoating of the virus on minority — and particularly Asian — communities.

The second most widely discussed topic by Canadian RWE communities was Canadian politics, accounting for 18.7% of the messages. Discussion of Canadian politics was only marginally more than US politics, which was the third most discussed theme, with 15.6% of messages shared. This matches trends observed in our analysis of geographically focused conversation outlined below, which suggests that RWE communities in Canada have an international outlook, and are just as motivated by international politics as they are by Canadian politics.

Figure 8 Topics discussed by RWE online

Topic		Posts
Covid-19		422,425
Canadian politics		203,127
US politics		169,069
Crime		139,221
Climate		53,788
Economy		46,669
Migration		29,772
BLM protests		22,270
Posts	0 250,000 500,000	

Discussion across platforms reveals a slightly more diverse picture, with Canadian politics being discussed more commonly than US politics on Facebook and Twitter. Further differences in discussion are also apparent on Telegram — the platform hosting the largest white supremacist community of those studied — which saw the highest proportion of discussion about crime.

These findings highlight that Canadian RWEs appear to use different platforms to fill different needs, preferring to use Facebook to discuss domestic affairs, whilst using more internationally focused imageboards like 4chan to discuss international affairs. Furthermore, this suggests that monitoring and research looking at transnational ties between Canadian RWEs and their international counterparts may be better suited for platforms like Telegram and 4chan, whereas monitoring designed to look specifically at activity within the country may be better suited for Facebook.

Figure 9
Topics discussed by platform

Platform	4chan	Facebook	Telegram	Twitter	YouTube
Covid-19	37.2%	35.6%	45.7%	38.3%	44.7%
US Politics	35.4%	7.1%	9.4%	15.1%	6.8%
Canadian Politics	3.4%	31.2%	7.1%	20.6%	16.1%
BLM Protests	2.3%	1.2%	3.0%	1.8%	3.1%
Climate	3.41%	6.1%	2.7%	5.5%	3.7%
Crime	10.6%	10.4%	20.4%	11.6%	20.4%
Migration	3.4%	3.6%	8.0%	2.6%	1.7%
Economy	4.2%	4.7%	3.6%	4.5%	3.4%

Hate and Hostility Across Platforms

Our analysis of the key topics of discussion on each platform of analysis demonstrates how Canadian RWEs primarily focus their discussion on current events and political topics, as opposed to engaging in specifically extremist conversation. However, it is important to understand the point at which this conversation becomes high-risk — that is to say, when it strays into overt hate speech against minority communities, or calls for specific, aggressive action against individuals or groups.

To help shape our understanding of where, when, and how conversation becomes potentially high-risk, we performed two additional pieces of analysis. The first of these uses keyword classification to count the instances of specific slur terms associated with anti-minority hate speech across our platforms. The second employs an NLP technique to pinpoint instances of hostile language.

Use of hateful terminology

Our first layer of analysis used keyword classification to search for mentions of slur terms associated with hate speech targeting minority communities across: posts made on Facebook pages and groups; Tweets made by accounts in our network; comments on YouTube videos; messages sent in Telegram channels, and posts made by Canadian users of the /pol/ board on 4chan. This list of slur terms was compiled by analysts engaged in ethnographic research across Canadian RWE spaces to ensure relevance to the Canadian context.

A keyword-based approach can be a blunt tool for analysing hate speech, particularly when analysing conversation produced by the general population. This is due to an inability to identify, in large datasets, individuals within minority communities reclaiming potentially abusive terms, and neutral use of the terms in descriptive exercises by academics and other observers (e.g. 'They called this person X'). However, as the accounts, channels, and groups identified in this research had already been manually vetted for relevancy to RWE, it was hypothesised that likelihood of including potential false positives would be minimised. To add an extra layer of certainty, researchers also manually vetted samples of posts containing these keywords to ensure accuracy.

With the exception of 4chan, this process reveals that the overall volume of content containing explicit hateful slurs targeting minority communities across all of the platforms was relatively small. This speech appeared in a very small proportion of the total posts analysed in our dataset: in 9% of all 4chan posts; 0.2% of all Facebook posts; 1.5% of all Telegram posts; 0.08% of all Tweets; and 0.3% of all YouTube comments. This suggests that Telegram and 4chan play host to the most explicitly hateful RWE communities out of the platforms studied, but also highlights that explicit activity targeting minority communities with overt hatred only constitutes a small amount of the online activity of RWE communities. Moreover, this matches findings from our analysis of Canadian RWE activity in 2019, which found that overt extremist activity on Twitter and Facebook was relatively limited.

Figure 10 Numbers of posts containing anti-minority slurs in our dataset

Category	4chan	Facebook	Telegram	Twitter	YouTube
Asian community	7,141	58	7	97	23
Black community	36,304	54	195	467	113
Hispanic community	777	2	1	12	0
LGBTQ community	28,563	83	64	335	82
Jewish community	12,119	22	76	76	71
Indigenous community	958	130	9	630	104
Muslim community	575	135	3	139	114
Total number of posts containing slurs	**86,437**	**484**	**355**	**1,756**	**507**

In order to contextualise the use of hateful slurs across platforms, we also examined the volume of conversation mentioning minority communities in neutral terms across platforms. This revealed that, with the exception of 4chan — where slurs were more commonly used than neutral terms for minority communities — volumes of speech more broadly discussing minority communities were higher than the use of slurs (see Fig. 12). However, this still constituted a relatively small proportion of overall messages sent on the platforms analysed, accounting for: 5.5% of messages on 4chan; 9.3% of messages on Facebook, 4.2% of messages on Telegram; 3.1% of messages sent on Twitter; and 9.6% of comments on YouTube videos.

A qualitative analysis of these posts reveals that broader discussion of minority communities across RWE accounts and channels is often negative and derogatory in tone without straying into overt hate speech. This includes groups sharing news articles relating to apparent wrongdoings by members of minority communities and the use of veiled language and innuendo to criticise, and suggest the failure of, multiculturalism in Canada.

When the proportion of use of hateful, anti-minority slur terms is compared with the overall volume of posts mentioning minority communities on our platforms of analysis, we can also arrive at a potential measure of the role hateful language plays for RWE users on these platforms.

This process again suggests that 4chan and Telegram play host to more explicit and egregious communities than those on other platforms, and reinforces the findings gleaned from analysing the overall proportion of anti-minority slurs on the platforms.

Figure 11 Numbers of posts mentioning minority communities

Category	4chan	Facebook	Telegram	Twitter	YouTube
Asian community	9,115	5,322	272	16,746	5,919
Black community	6,069	2,131	187	12,678	6,606
Hispanic community	1,307	166	16	641	185
LGBTQ community	10,259	2,164	138	9,312	2,592
Jewish community	16,063	942	172	5,079	1,381
Indigenous community	4,878	3,662	107	11,799	3,204
Muslim community	4,962	5,379	101	6,767	2,248
Total number of posts mentioning minority communities	**52,653**	**19,766**	**993**	**63,022**	**22,135**

Figure 12 Proportion of hateful posts compared to overall mentions of minority communities

	4chan	Facebook	Telegram	Twitter	YouTube
Hateful posts compared to mentions of minority communities	164%	2.4%	35.7%	2.7%	3.2%

Detection of hostile language

In addition to examining the use of specific terminology associated with hate speech, we sought to broadly determine the proportion of potentially dangerous speech across the platforms analysed. Initially, we had intended to create an NLP architecture to detect specific calls to violence; however, we found that the volume of this speech was too small to provide enough data for us to train an accurate algorithm. Moreover, at our most successful attempt, we were only able to create a 'calls to violence' classifier which functioned at 57% accuracy. Due to the large margin for error with this classifier, we focused our work on the creation of a classifier for detecting 'hostile speech'.

Defining hostile speech

We used a working definition of hostile as: 'abusive, aggressive, dehumanising, or violent language targeting an individual or group of individuals'. Bowdlerised examples of the types of speech categorised under this definition are provided in Fig. 13 below.

Figure 13 Bowdlerised examples of hostile speech

Subcategory	Description
Abusive speech	F*** you, n*****s are the worst type of s***skins
	You are a motherf***ing traitor and a disgrace to Canada
Aggressive speech	We need to rise up and revolt against the New World Order compromised government RIGHT NOW
	You better watch your back because I am coming for you
Dehumanising speech	All Jews are subhuman rats
	You f***ing Muslims are all dogs*** on the sole of my shoe
Violent speech	I want to see you at the end of a rope
	All trans should be gassed

This definition was designed to include speech which specifically targets an individual or group of people, as opposed to speech including offensive language. Examples of speech classified as irrelevant include generalised use of swear words where a target could not be identified (e.g. 'f*** off' or 'f*** this s***') and criticism of specific phenomenon or policy (e.g. 'Trudeau's immigration policy is s***' or 'f*** the roads in my town').

Building the classifier

We built the hostility classifier using the following steps:

1. We compiled all Facebook posts, Tweets, YouTube comments, 4chan posts and Telegram messages into a unitary dataset.

2. We passed this data through a classifier containing keywords and emojis associated with hostile speech — as determined through qualitative analysis of extremist messages — and filtered for messages containing two or more mentions of hostility-associated terms.

3. Messages containing two or more hostile terms were then passed through a classifier designed to remove irrelevant messages.

4. We passed this data through a classifier trained to identify language which met our definition of hostility.

Through this process we were able to build an NLP architecture for automating the detection of hostile speech functioning at 77% accuracy. The results of this analysis are provided below.

Results of hostility classification

Our NLP algorithm identified **30,847 hostile messages** across the platforms of analysis. A majority (75%) of this content was sent by Canadian users on 4chan's / pol/ board, with the second largest amount (12%) sent on Twitter, and the third largest amount (10%) posted as comments on YouTube videos. Telegram accounted for a very small proportion of hostile speech, despite the fact that 41.1% of the Canadian Telegram channels analysed promoted white supremacist ideology, and that the platform itself hosts highly egregious content, including channels tied to designated terrorist organisations (see **platform chapter** below).[37] This is likely linked to the fact that users on Telegram often rely on visual content such as memes and videos to mobilise, which cannot be classified through NLP.

The fact that 4chan was the platform with the highest volume of hostile content is not surprising. The imageboard website has become widely recognised as a hub for extremist activity, and analysis suggests that hate speech has spiked on the platform in recent years.[38] This is likely linked to the normalisation of hateful discourse on the platform, which has resulted in the growth of a community where hostile speech targeting minority communities is considered standard, everyday activity. Nevertheless, this is still a cause for concern and suggests that in the Canadian context, 4chan acts as a hub for egregious mobilisation.

In order to contextualise this hostile activity, we compared the proportions of hostile speech to the overall volumes of content gathered from each platform.

Through this comparative analysis, we found that when the total volume of conversation is taken into consideration, the overall proportion of explicitly hostile content being shared on these platforms is minimal. Even on 4chan, which contained the overwhelming majority of hostile speech, it accounted for only 7% of all messages shared on the platform.

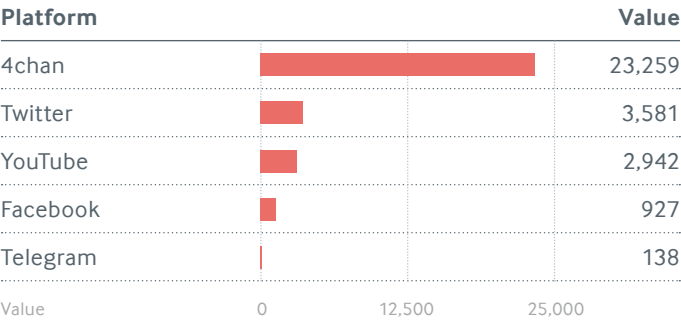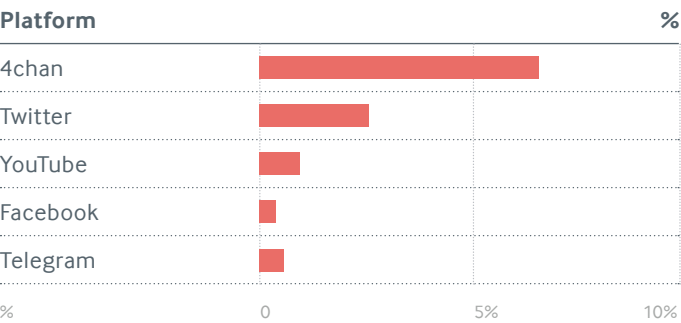**Figure 14** Breakdown of hostility by platform

Platform	Value
4chan	23,259
Twitter	3,581
YouTube	2,942
Facebook	927
Telegram	138

Figure 15 Percentage of hostile vs non-hostile messages

Platform	%
4chan	
Twitter	
YouTube	
Facebook	
Telegram	

This would suggest that although Canadian social media users involved with RWE communities do use social media to target their opponents, this conversation falls within a much larger body of discussion around other issue areas. This could also be a reflection of the nature of the communities from which we are able to gather and identify conversation at scale. On Facebook, for example, researchers were able to identify a range of hostile conversations taking place in comments underneath posts but were unable to access them through the public CrowdTangle Application Processing Interface (API). Separately, analysts have also identified how extremists are reportedly shifting towards private, closed chats on a range of different platforms[39] which, due to ethical considerations, were not covered in this analysis. Accordingly, it is likely that more concerning, hostile and violent discussions are taking place in the Canadian context — just not in spaces which are publicly accessible to analysts.

Geographic Breakdown: Focal Areas Of Discussion

One of the objectives of our second year of study was to more accurately understand the geographic spread of RWE activity in Canada; however, researchers' access to publicly available data that is able to reveal this is limited. Whilst Twitter provides some geotagged data to researchers, who can also note users' self-reported locations from their biographies, other platforms do not provide the same degree of granularity in user-level data. As such, although it is possible to qualitatively assess data sources as being primarily designed for a Canadian audience – either through affiliation with known extremist movements in Canada, or through a focus on Canadian social and political issues – determining which parts of Canada users are posting from remains challenging.

To navigate this issue, we instead sought to determine where Canadian RWEs focused their attention in 2020, by identifying at scale mentions of Canadian provinces, cities and towns in our data.

To achieve this, we used machine learning architecture to automatically identify Canadian place names in the data we gathered across platforms; a process known as geoparsing. This geoparsing technology provided two degrees of granularity. The first gives an overview of total mentions of Canadian provinces and territories, as well as places within these (e.g. all mentions of Calgary would be assigned to Alberta). The second degree identifies mentions of specific cities and towns within Canada.

Mentions of provinces and territories

In total, we were able to geoparse 73,943 messages out of a total of 3,830,788 messages to a province/territory level.
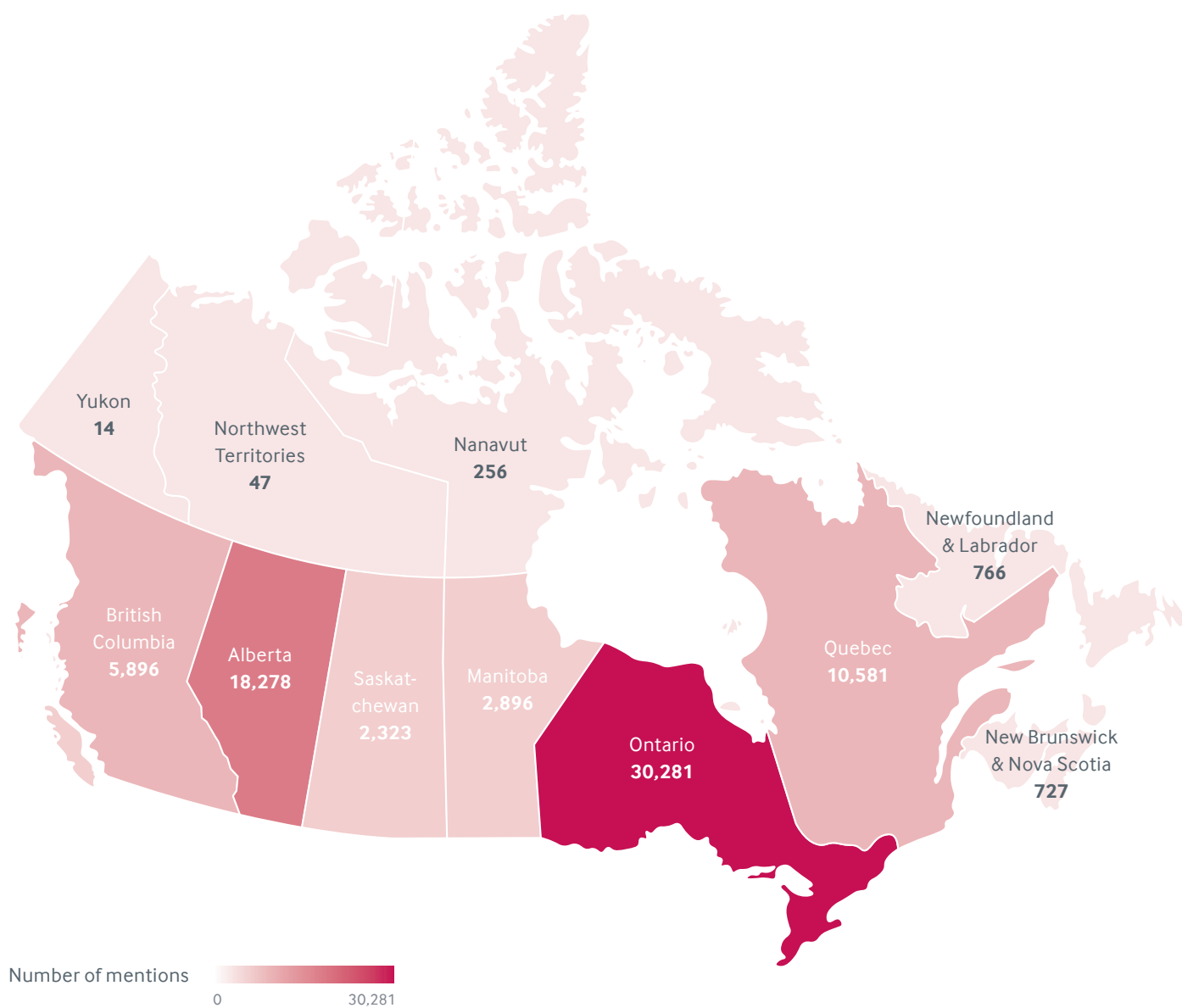
Through the geoparsing process, we found that mentions of places within specific provinces/territories broadly corresponded to their populations. For example, the province with the greatest number of mentions was Ontario – the Canadian province with the largest population. Accordingly, a province/territory's ranking based on population was broadly comparable to its ranking on a scale of most-to-least mentions. However, there were several exceptions to this pattern. The most notable was Alberta, which despite being the fourth most populous province was the second most

mentioned across our data. An analysis of conversation here revealed that this was in part due to a focus on the 'Wexit' movement in Alberta, and a relatedly high volume of discussion of Albertan independence. Similarly places in Nunavut, the least densely populated territory in Canada, were mentioned over five times more than those in the Northwest Territories, and over 18 times more than those in the Yukon. Mentions of Nunavut were in part linked to concerns around Chinese interests in mining and industry in the territory.

Figure 16 Mentions of provinces in Canada

Mentions	Population ranking	Population	Mentions
Ontario	1	14,689,075	30,281
Alberta	4	4,402,045	18,278
Quebec	2	8,556,650	10,501
British Columbia	3	5,131,575	5,896
Manitoba	5	1,377,004	2,896
Saskatchewan	6	1,179,154	2,323
Nova Scotia	7	975,898	1,681
Newfoundland and Labrador	9	523,631	766
New Brunswick	8	780,040	727
Prince Edward Island	10	158,629	277
Nunavut	13	38,726	256
Northwest Territories	11	45,119	47
Yukon	12	41,731	14

Figure 17 Heatmap of mentions per Province in Canada

Yukon
14

Northwest
Territories
47

Nanavut
256

Newfoundland
& Labrador
766

British
Columbia
5,896

Alberta
18,278

Saskat-
chewan
2,323

Manitoba
2,896

Quebec
10,581

Ontario
30,281

New Brunswick
& Nova Scotia
727

Number of mentions

0   30,281

Mentions of towns and cities

Beyond broader mentions of specific provinces/territories, we found a total of 38,179 mentions of Canadian towns and cities. These are made up of a total of 137 different cities named by the extremist channels we monitored. A list of the 20 most mentioned towns/cities in our data is provided below, which accounted for 96% of all posts mentioning a city in our dataset.

As with mentions of provinces/territories, much of RWE discussion focuses on major population centres. Here, Red Deer, Alberta is a visible outlier, being the eighth most mentioned city in our data, but the second least populated city in the top 20 most mentioned places. A closer analysis of these mentions reveal that this was due to a widely shared article from the hyper-partisan outlet, Rebel News, which suggested that members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army were training to be pilots at a decommissioned military base near the city. This article was used more broadly to promote the conspiracy that the Canadian government is actively working to infiltrate Canada with Chinese saboteurs.

Figure 18 Top 20 most mentioned towns and cities

Province	City	City population	Mentions in dataset
ON	Toronto	2,731,571	12,977
ON	Ottawa	934,243	5,431
BC	Vancouver	631,486	4,275
AB	Calgary	1,246,337	3,944
QC	Montreal	1,704,694	2,890
AB	Edmonton	981,280	2,234
MB	Winnipeg	749,534	993
AB	Red Deer	103,588	481
SK	Regina	228,928	431
ON	Mississauga	828,854	373
SK	Saskatoon	273,010	352
ON	Vaughan	323,281	266
QC	Quebec City	542,298	253
BC	Kelowna	132,084	195
ON	Geulph	135,474	193
ON	Etobicoke	365,143	190
ON	Thunder Bay	110,172	174
ON	London	404,699	166
ON	Sudbury	164,926	164
NB	Moncton	85,198	152

Figure 19 **Map of all places mentioned in data**

Number of mentions

0   13,000

Mentions   1   5,000   10,000   13,000
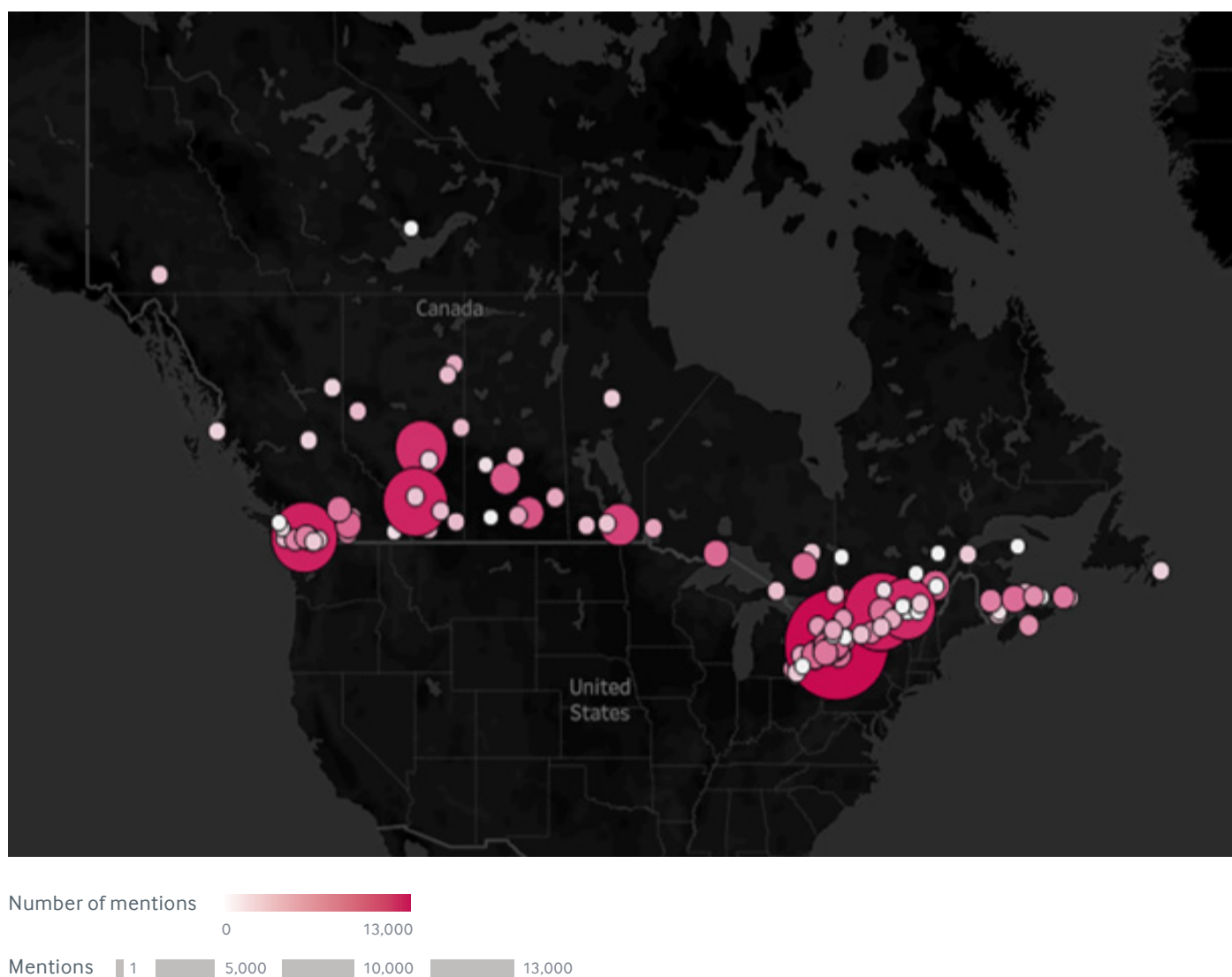
Mentions of foreign countries

In addition to examining which Canadian locations RWE communities most discussed in 2020, we sought to examine the geographic focal points of their conversation on an international scale, identifying 862,080 mentions of countries.

Notably, Canada was not the most mentioned country amongst Canadian RWE; rather, the US was the most discussed by the Canadian RWE. In total, the accounts monitored mentioned the US 286,101 times, nearly twice as many times as they mentioned Canada. In 2020, Canadian RWE communities frequently discuss US politics, including conspiracy theories and misinformation which arose in the lead-up to, and around, the US presidential election in November, as well as US current events outside of politics. More broadly, this indicates the influence that US politics and events has on RWE globally. This focus on the US matches trends observed by ISD in other contexts, such as New Zealand, where the US was the most commonly discussed country by New Zealander extremists. This trend is compounded when the key topics of online conversation among Canadian RWEs are considered, as they reveal a significant interest in US domestic affairs which at times outweighed discussion of Canadian issues and events.

Following Canada, the third most mentioned country is China. Discussion of China is commonly linked to concerns around Chinese influence on the Canadian economy, conspiracies that the Canadian government had been compromised by Chinese infiltration, and hostility against Chinese people living in Canada. Another of the most commonly mentioned countries is Israel, which was both the focus of hostile anti-Semitic conversation, as well as discussion painting Israel as an ally in anti-Muslim activity. In addition, a number of European countries, including the UK, France, and Germany, were widely discussed, often with a focus on their perceived degradation at the hands of Muslim migrants, and used as exemplars in calls to decrease migration to Canada.

Figure 20 Top ten most mentioned foreign countries in Canadian data

Country	Mentions of place
US	286,101
Canada	145,450
China	57,403
UK	55,829
Israel	21,193
France	18,852
Germany	18,669
Russia	18,352
Australia	16,305
Italy	12,321

Figure 21 Map of most mentioned countries in Canadian data

Number of mentions

0   285,000
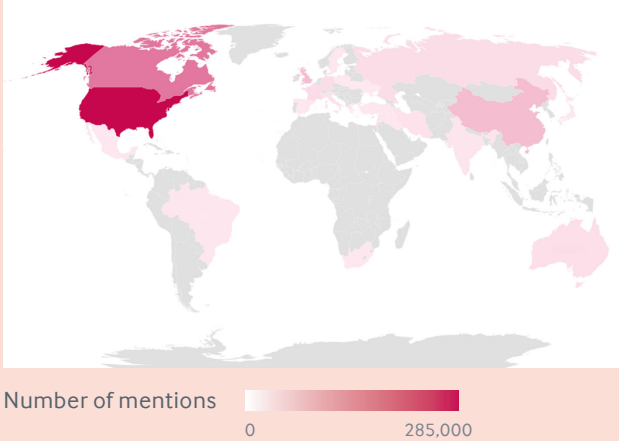
## Mentions of Canadian places by US extremists

ISD sought to contextualise our exploration of how members of the Canadian extreme right discuss their country, and other countries globally, through a comparative analysis of an international cohort of RWEs. To do this, we passed a dataset of posts produced by American RWEs in 2020 on 4chan, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter through the same geoparsing technology used for our Canadian data.

Interestingly, Canada was the third most mentioned country in the conversation of US RWE following the US and China. This would suggest that there is a reciprocal interest in Canadian domestic affairs across the border. An examination of this discussion reveals that it was in part driven by opposition to the comparatively liberal nature of Canadian politics, specifically targeting hostility towards Justin Trudeau. US discussion of Canada also includes conspiracy theories around the US election, suggesting that China was planning an invasion of the US across the northern border with the support of the Canadian government.

Figure 22 Top ten most mentioned countries in US data

Country	Mentions of place
US	810,006
China	159,145
Canada	62,560
UK	58,098
Russia	43,876
Iran	23,935
Israel	23,593
Australia	21,873
Germany	21,459
France	18,390

Figure 23 Map of most mentioned countries in US data

Number of mentions

0   810,000
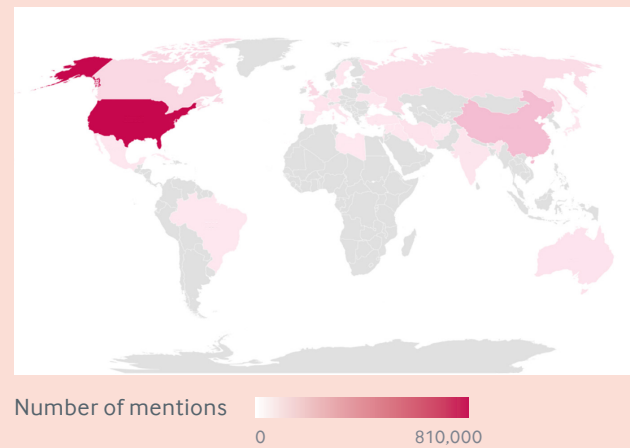
Platform overviews

The following sections provide more detailed analysis of RWE activity on specific platforms, highlighting key trends and narratives.

4chan

We selected 4chan's 'politically incorrect' (/pol/) board for analysis, due to recognition of the platform's prominence in recent years as a key hub for contemporary RWE culture.[40] The platform serves as a distribution centre for extreme right-wing material, and has acted as an incubator for a range of conspiracy theories, extremist disinformation, and meme content that is often subsequently disseminated across social media. The site is used to issue threats against minority groups,[41] preserve and archive video content of previous attacks carried out by right-wing terrorists,[42] and celebrate violence long after it has occurred.[43]

Data gathering and geolocation

In our analysis of Canadian RWE activity in 2019, ISD used a dataset which had been generated by Papasavva et al. in their study of 4chan activity between 2016 and 2019.[44] However, this dataset did not extend into 2020. Accordingly, ISD's tech partners at the Centre for Analysis of Social Media (CASM) developed infrastructure to gather data directly from the platform. Due to development time for this system and the lack of a content archive on 4chan, we were not able to gather the entirety of posts sent on the platform in 2020. Thus, our final dataset includes content from /pol/ produced between 30 July and 11 November 2020.

4chan's /pol/ board automatically labels posts with the flag of the country where a user's internet protocol (IP) address originates, allowing researchers to identify potential Canadian users.[45] It is important to note that the flag, or a user's location, can be altered through the use of a virtual private network (VPN) or through the manual selection of a variety of flags not tied to any country, such as a swastika, meaning that it is possible for users to pose as Canadians, or for Canadians to conceal their identity. With this caveat in mind, this functionality nevertheless makes the platform a useful source for country-specific monitoring.

Volume of activity

Filtering the data by posts made from a Canadian IP address, we identified 951,177 posts made between 30 July and 11 November 2020; an average of 9,145 per day. Canadian posts account for 4.2% of the total 22,338,783 posts made during this period in 2020.

In comparison, Canadian users made 571,234 posts in the same time period in 2019, meaning that Canadian 4chan users were 66.5% more active in 2020 than in 2019. Due to limits in data access, we cannot know if this means that the number of Canadian users of the platform increased between the two years, or if regular users were more active. However, one explanation for this increase could be due to the aforementioned increase in internet usage during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.[46] It could also be in part explained by the fact that this period spans the 2020 US presidential election, which our results show was the most significant driver of conversation on the platform in the time period studied.

Figure 24 **4chan usage by Canadian users, 30 July to 11 November 2020***

(*Technical issues limited data capture on 10 – 18 August and 10 September)
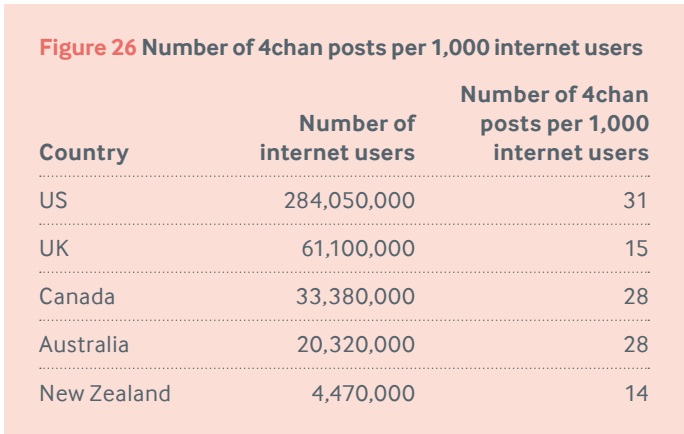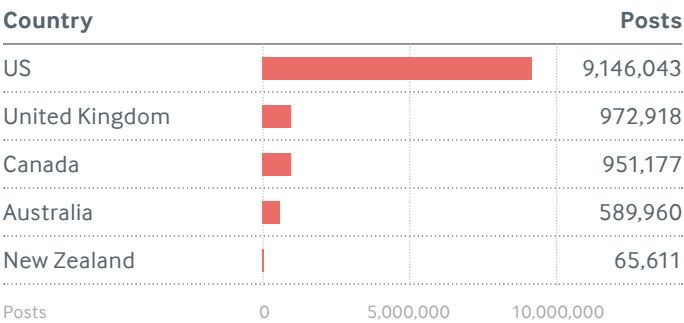
Comparison to other countries

To better contextualise Canadian activity on 4chan, we compared the volume of posts made in our time period to those flagged to IP addresses from the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand.

In total, Canadian users were less active than US and British 4chan users, who posted 8,824,165 and 940,852 times respectively, but more active than users from Australia and New Zealand, who posted 572,320 and 63,574 times. However, when the number of internet users in each of these countries is considered, we can see that per capita, Canadians make more posts on 4chan than people in the UK, and a comparable number to those in Australia.

Figure 25 Comparison of 4chan posts by country

Country		Posts
US		9,146,043
United Kingdom		972,918
Canada		951,177
Australia		589,960
New Zealand		65,611
Posts	0 5,000,000 10,000,000	

Figure 26 Number of 4chan posts per 1,000 internet users

Country	Number of internet users	Number of 4chan posts per 1,000 internet users
US	284,050,000	31
UK	61,100,000	15
Canada	33,380,000	28
Australia	20,320,000	28
New Zealand	4,470,000	14

Case study
Proud Boys support

To understand how Canadian 4chan users potentially discuss and engage with known extremist organisations, ISD searched for mentions of 117 extremist groups and activists, including neo-Nazi author James Mason, Al Qaeda, and the KKK. In the period analysed, we identified 2,395 posts from Canadian users that included 2,531 mentions of extremist groups and activists.

We found that the Proud Boys was the second most mentioned (364 times) extremist group, after ISIS (480). This was in part driven by discussion of extremist groups on 30 September, with 128 messages generated by chatter about the Proud Boys, coinciding with comments from Trump about the group during a televised debate with Joe Biden.[51] In particular, Canadian 4chan users rejected the 'white supremacist' description of the Proud Boys and defended the group's actions during protests in the US throughout 2020.

Although occurring in relatively small volumes, this demonstrates how Canadians posting on 4chan in 2020 used the platform to express support for what is now a designated terrorist organisation, reinforcing the idea that the platform is a hub for potentially high-risk extreme right activity.

Case study
Trudeau 'military intervention'
disinformation seeded on 4chan

During the course of our analysis, ISD uncovered a disinformation campaign that was seeded on 4chan.[47] This exploited a quirk with the URL structure of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's website (CBC) to spread claims about Justin Trudeau, Canada and the US, and sought to increase tensions between the neighbours and encourage military conflict.

On 4 November, a self-identified Canadian 4chan user posted a screenshot of a supposed CBC article that included the headline 'Trudeau promises military intervention if Trump does not leave office'. In their post, the 4chan user included an alleged quote from Trudeau in the article that claimed the prime minister had said 'Canadians will not stand idly by as fascism takes root south of the border. Our intelligence is indicating that Trump is refusing to leave office'. The post also featured a URL for the supposed CBC article, with the URL including the words 'Trudeau-promises-military-intervention-if-Trump'.

Figure 27 L-R: Fake 'military intervention'
CBC article and real CBC article
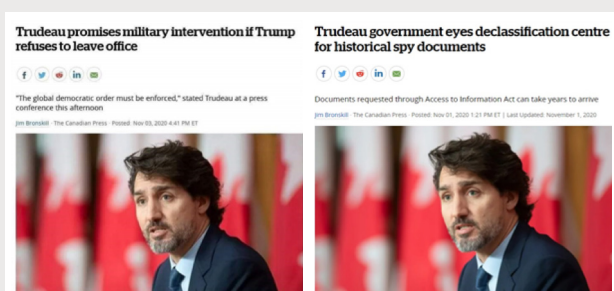
The article was not real. The screenshot was likely based on a 1 November CBC article that used the same image of Trudeau as seen in the forgery and listed the same journalist, Jim Bronskill.[48] The forger likely changed the headline, caption and opening details using the 'inspect element' feature on Google Chrome, before taking a screenshot. The forger also uncovered a quirk with the CBC's URL structure on its site that allows anyone to use any text in the URL, providing the unique code for the specific webpage remains the same. For example, clicking the URL www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ISD-4chan-research-1.5785571 opens the same CBC article that was likely used by the forger. URLs for news reports often feature some words from the headline, meaning the forger used this quirk to give the fake URL a veneer of credibility.

In the original 4chan thread, users encouraged others to disseminate the disinformation. 'Bump [promote] this, literal fake news,' wrote one user. As part of our wider 4chan analysis, ISD also tracked discussions about Canadian politics among non-Canadian users on the site. The greatest spike in conversations about Canada from non-Canadian users came on 4 November, relating to the conversation around this claim.

The fake article was shared at least 441 times and generated 5,164 interactions on Facebook, according to social media analysis tool CrowdTangle, including in 20 RWE Canadian Facebook groups identified by ISD. Additionally, it was promoted by the US, pro-Trump influencer and failed GOP candidate DeAnna Lorraine, who used the fake headline to direct anger and hostility towards Trudeau. The fake article was also the subject of at least two fact-checks by AFP[49] and Check Your Fact.[50] As part of AFP's fact-checking efforts, a spokesperson for Trudeau was required to confirm that the story was baseless, showing how this disinformation reached the highest office in the land.
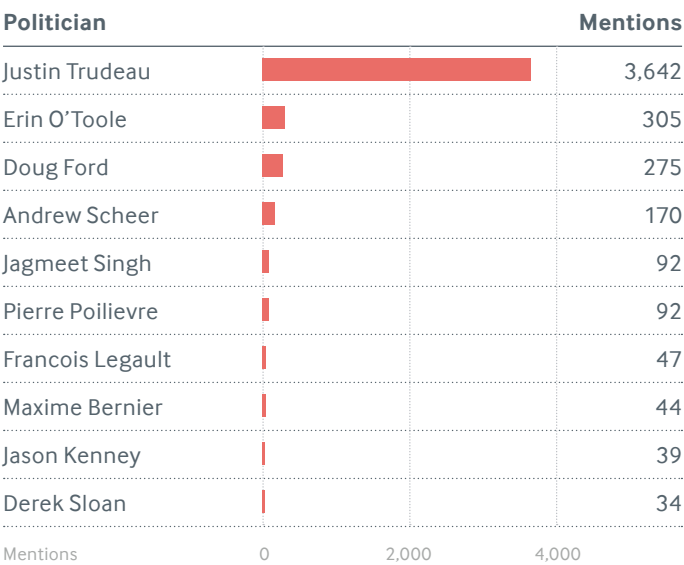
This highlights how Canadian users of /pol/ sought to exacerbate political tensions between two neighbouring nations at the time of a high-stakes political event in one country, and demonstrates the impact that relatively low-effort trolling campaigns can have. The spread of this fake article and doctored article screenshot highlights the hybrid threats of disinformation and extremism and demonstrates how Canadian users posting on RWE forums can shape conversations on larger, more influential social platforms.

Conversation around domestic politics

ISD monitored 4chan for chatter discussions related to domestic politics, and in particular, posts that signal aims or objectives among RWEs to mobilise or organise politically. In the observed period, there were 5,748 posts and comments that included 6,559 mentions of Canadian politicians or parties. In comparison, Canadian 4chan users posted about international politicians in 59,487 posts, 41,659 of which discussed Donald Trump, indicating that Canadian 4chan users are ten times more interested in international — and especially US — politics than in domestic affairs.

ISD examined the level of conversation about leading Canadian politician parties and politicians among Canadian 4chan users and found that, unsurprisingly, Justin Trudeau was the most mentioned politician (3,642 times) and, was mentioned over ten times more than the next most frequently mentioned politicians, Erin O'Toole (305) and Doug Ford (275). The tone of this conversation was overwhelmingly negative, and in opposition to the prime minister's liberal policies, which were seen as diametrically opposed to an extreme right worldview.

Figure 28 Chart showing the Canadian politicians most mentioned by Canadian 4chan users

Politician	Mentions
Justin Trudeau	3,642
Erin O'Toole	305
Doug Ford	275
Andrew Scheer	170
Jagmeet Singh	92
Pierre Poilievre	92
Francois Legault	47
Maxime Bernier	44
Jason Kenney	39
Derek Sloan	34

Mentions	0	2,000	4,000

Facebook

In 2019, ISD identified a total of 107 Canadian RWE Facebook pages and public groups that produced a total of 194,366 posts throughout the year. We found that 51 of the entities from our 2019 report were still active in 2020 (13 public groups; 38 pages). The Facebook entities which were no longer active in 2020 appear to have been removed from the platform; whether this was organic, with the page/group operators choosing to cease operation, or implemented forcibly by Facebook itself, remains unclear. However, given the extremist nature of all of these pages, it is likely that they were removed from the platform for breaches of its terms of service.

Out of the 2019 pages and groups that were no longer active in 2020, a large proportion were associated with anti-government activity, with 11 associated with the III%ers militia movement, and three others with broader anti-government agitation. It is likely that these were removed following Facebook's broader clampdown on anti-government RWE groups in the context of the US 2020 presidential elections.

2020 overview

We found a total of 107 Canadian RWE entities active on Facebook in 2020. This includes 13 public groups and 38 pages from our 2019 report. In addition to these, ISD researchers identified a further 32 Canadian RWE pages and 23 public groups which were incorporated into our study. These additional channels were identified through two methods:

- Searching the CrowdTangle tool, which allows access to public pages and groups, for the names of known extremist groups identified in collaboration with the OTU team, and through additional ISD research;

- Use of a 'snowball' technique, where researchers used an avatar Facebook account to follow known Canadian RWE pages and groups, and then used Facebook's recommendation algorithm to discover new groups which were either liked or followed by the original pages.

In both methods, researchers then manually vetted pages and groups, through qualitatively assessing the tone of content shared on them, to ensure they met our definition of RWE.

These pages and groups produced a total of 210,359 posts throughout 2020. While the pages in our data outnumber the public groups by 35, they were less active, accounting for 40,644 posts in 2020; whilst RWE public groups were responsible for 169,277 posts. The top three most active RWE groups were responsible for producing 42% of the total posts created by public groups in 2020, while the top three most active pages were responsible for producing 38% of the total posts. This suggests that while the Canadian RWE ecosystem on Facebook includes a handful of very active entities, it is not dominated by one or two hyperactive groups and pages.

Figure 29 Key stats: Facebook 2020

Total entities	107
Number of pages	71
Number of public groups	36
Total number of posts	210,359
Total members/ followers	1,013,922

Figure 30 Facebook posts per month

Legend: — Groups — Pages
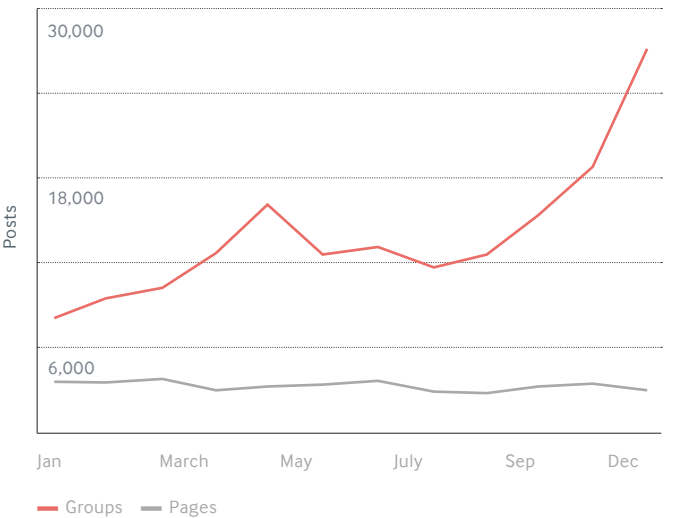
Post output for pages was consistent throughout the year, remaining between 3,657 and 3,108 posts per month. In contrast, the volume of posts created by the public groups in our analysis reveals a significant peak in posting in May and a steady increase in output from September to December. The most active month for Facebook pages was July, with 3,657 posts, while public groups were most active in December, with 27,155 posts.

The spike in activity in May matched the activity spikes that researchers observed on other platforms and was linked to the Canadian government's response to the pandemic during April,[52] as well as to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests which began on 26 May 2020 in the US and 30 May 2020 in Canada. Similarly, the steady increase in output from September to December corresponds with the lead-up to the US presidential election in November 2020, and was linked to this, as

well as to the resurgence of COVID-19 cases in Canada and the subsequent tightening of lockdown restrictions in the lead-up to the holiday season.

Interactions and engagement

In order to gain an understanding of the most popular content, ISD researchers analysed posts which had received the most interactions in 2020. Facebook interactions include the number of shares, comments, and likes a post receives, as well as user reactions using emojis. In total, Facebook posts made by Canadian RWE pages and groups in 2020 received 40,677,352 interactions.

Figure 32 Facebook pages: top ten most interacted with posts

Inter-actions	Content	Inter-actions	Content
146,785	Anti-Government: image with the caption 'ASK THIS QUESTION. Why am I paying TAXES on my wages? Then paying sales TAXES to spend my money. Then paying income TAXES on money they already TAXED and paying property TAXES after I already payed sales TAXES on said property. And you wonder why politicians on a public servant salary go into office with humble means and ending up millionaires.'	75,760	Celebrating Canada — Canadian Pacific Railway's Christmas Train.
		63,045	Anti-Pipeline Blockade: video making fun of protesters failing to stop a train during the blockade of Canadian National rail lines.
		56,590	Anti-Lockdown: video of a man getting arrested/physically restrained 'for playing hockey'.
543,732	Humour: a video of cars sliding on a snowy road during Canadian winter.	56,114	Anti-Pipeline Blockade: video of a man physically removing railway blockades. Caption reading: 'The protesters who set up the illegal blockade face no punishment, while Canadians who are just trying to get to work get arrested for taking it down. Canada is becoming a laughingstock. Pass this on if you stand with the law-abiding workers, not the illegal protesters!'
141,702	Celebrating Canada: images of Canadian nature, grizzly bears, and mountains.		
95,894	Canadian Forces Veterans and anti-Omar Khadr: video of a Canadian veteran who fought in Afghanistan speaking out against government financial support of Omar Khadr and lack of funding for Canadian veterans.		
		55,317	Celebrating Canada: support to put Canadian Terry Fox on the new $5 bill.
88,496	Anti-Trudeau: Indian media alleging the Government of Canada is corrupt after they didn't make it clear who got COVID-19 relief funding.	54,267	COVID-19 - Government Response: survey on how Premier Doug Ford has handled COVID-19 in Ontario.

We identified the ten most interacted with posts for both pages and public groups, allowing us to gain insight into the posts that prompted members of RWE Facebook entities to engage with the content. At first glance, four of the ten most interacted with posts on Facebook pages do not appear to be relevant to RWE ideology and instead contain generic content celebrating Canada. However, here it is important to note that not every post made by RWE entities explicitly promotes extremist ideology. Whilst not directly related to RWE themes, these posts include topics like Canadian identity and stereotypes which speak to conceptions of nationalism and national pride.

Two of the most interacted with posts made by Facebook pages negatively discuss the anti-pipeline blockades, claiming that 'Canada is becoming a laughingstock' because of them. The third most interacted with post contains a video clip of a Canadian forces veteran speaking out against the Government of Canada's provision of financial support for Omar Khadr (whom he labels a terrorist) and the lack of funding provided to Canadian veterans.

In groups, the most interacted with post is anti-government in nature, speaking out against taxation and suggesting that politicians become millionaires using the funds taken from citizens. The second and third most interacted with posts are conspiratorial in nature, discussing the secret agendas of globalists, and doctors advocating for lockdown measures in response to COVID-19. Four of the most interacted with posts made by groups are in opposition to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Anti-Muslim content was the subject of the tenth most interacted with post, with 2,975 interactions. The large discrepancy between the number of interactions with the first and tenth posts is of note: the most interacted with post was in opposition to the political mainstream, while the tenth most interacted with post was made in opposition to Muslims. Coupled with the fact that the rest of the most interacted with posts between Canadian RWE groups on Facebook comprised of content that was critical of or opposed Trudeau, the government, mainstream media and green energy suggests that anti-establishment focused content was of greater interest and importance to extreme right-wing communities than content targeting the Muslim community.

Figure 32 Facebook groups: top ten most interacted with posts

Inter-actions	Content
146,785	Anti-Government: image with the caption 'ASK THIS QUESTION. Why am I paying TAXES on my wages? Then paying sales TAXES to spend my money. Then paying income TAXES on money they already TAXED and paying property TAXES after I already payed sales TAXES on said property. And you wonder why politicians on a public servant salary go into office with humble means and ending up millionaires.'
71,670	Anti-Globalist/Conspiracy: link to article: 'Are globalists using coronavirus crisis as battering ram to destroy, remake world order?'
22,525	Anti-Mainstream Media/Conspiracy: link to article: 'Literally Thousands of Doctors and Scientists Have Come Out Against Fauci's Lockdowns Including a Nobel Prize-Winning Biophysicist. The Media Just Doesn't Want You to Know.'
6,832	Anti-Government: image with the caption 'Barrette killed the health network ... today the hypocrite is playing heroes ...'
5,674	Anti-Trudeau: post reading 'TONIGHT ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES ... WHY ISN'T JUSTIN TRUDEAU IN PRISON?'
5,436	Anti-Green-Energy: image with the caption 'DON'T MIND US, WE'RE JUST BURNING HUNDREDS OF GALLONS OF JET FUEL TO DE-ICE THIS CLEAN ENERGY WIND TURBINE.'
5,035	Anti-Trudeau: image with the caption 'I don't always 'talk moistly' But when I do it's usually after I have a drink box, water, sorta thing'.
4,381	Anti-Trudeau/Anti-Immigration: link to article 'Trudeau says Canada will take refugees banned by U.S.'
3,055	Anti-Trudeau: image with the caption 'TRUDEAU ISN'T TRYING TO PROTECT CANADIANS FROM GUNS. TRUDEAU IS AFRAID WE WILL TAKE OUR COUNTRY BACK.'
2,975	Anti-Muslim: link to Fox News article 'Venice mayor: Anyone who shouts 'Allahu Akbar' will be shot.'

Twitter

Identification methodology

In 2019, ISD identified 75 Twitter accounts belonging to Canadian RWE which were used as seeds to build out a network of Canadian RWE Twitter users. To do this, we completed the following steps:

1. **Collect All Friends and Followers**: We collected the friends and followers of each of our original 75 accounts.

2. **Identify Highly Connected Accounts**: This list of friends and followers was then filtered down to include only those accounts following three or more of our seed users.

3. **Identify Canadian Users**: These highly connected accounts were then run through a geolocation tool to identify those most likely to be located in Canada.

4. **Identify RWE-Relevant Users**: The Tweets produced by the list of Canadian accounts were run through a classifier used to identify topics of discussion relevant to RWE. Only Canadian accounts that sent a RWE-relevant tweet were included in the final network.

To build a comparable map of RWE on Twitter for 2020, ISD researchers replicated this process. We first went to the list of seed accounts from 2019, observing that 16 of the original accounts identified were no longer active. From the remaining 59 accounts, we extrapolated a network of 1,247,758 Twitter users who were following our original accounts. We then filtered this network for individuals who followed three or more accounts, producing a list of 224,792 Twitter accounts. To ensure that this network was relevant to Canada, we then used a geolocation tool which took into account any users who were geotagged as posting from Canada as well as users who self-identified in their Twitter bios as Canadian. This process left us with a network of 32,982 Canadian Twitter users who were networked with known Canadian RWE Twitter users.

Figure 33 Overview of Twitter between 2019 and 2020

	2019	2020
Seed accounts	75	59
Users following seed accounts	1,669,720	1,247,758
Users following three or more seed accounts	32,000	224,792
Users geolocated to Canada	30,640	32,982
Canadian users engaging in RWE conversation	6,352	2,276
Total Tweets sent by RWE Canadian users	1,363,417	2,020,542
Total Tweets relevant to RWE	16,712	13,546

As we recognise that some of these users may be journalists or researchers investigating RWE in Canada, we then used NLP to detect users who had made posts expressing support for RWE ideology and talking points. This NLP architecture was the same that was deployed in our interim report, and it is summarised in the **technical annex** below.

This produced a set of 13,456 Tweets which expressed direct support for RWE. We then used this set of Tweets to filter the larger cohort of Canadian Twitter users who were following three or more RWE accounts to identify a network of 2,276 Canadian Twitter users who actively engaged in RWE conversation in 2020.

In general, Canadian RWE Twitter users were more active in 2020, producing 657,125 more Tweets than in 2019. Interestingly, less of the content produced in 2020 was relevant to RWE than was the case in the previous year. In 2019, 1.22% of the total Tweets sent by RWE Canadian Twitter users were relevant to RWE, whereas in 2020, 0.67% of Tweets were found to be RWE-relevant. However, the number of Canadian RWE Twitter users was smaller in 2020, meaning that proportionally they sent nearly double the amount of RWE posts than in 2019.

Volume over time

The volume of RWE Tweets increased steadily throughout 2020, starting at 660 in January and reaching a high of 1,780 in October. Interestingly, the volume of RWE messages decreased significantly between October and December, declining by 865 posts.

Figure 34 **Volume of Twitter activity over time**

October was the month with the most RWE Tweets sent (1,780). On our other platforms of analysis, this spike in volume was due in part to discussion of the US election. However, when analysing the RWE Tweets sent in October, the bulk of Canadian RWE conversation was not relevant to US politics. Discussion in October was focused around anti-Trudeau, anti-government, anti-Muslim, and anti-globalist themes.

Anti-Trudeau content was not specific and was framed as general opposition to his policies and spending. One Tweet alleged that Trudeau and the Liberal Party are responsible for creating division within Canada and alienating Western Canada, and specifically Alberta. In addition to Trudeau, Canadian RWE Tweets expressed concern about the perceived intrusion of 'globalism and unelected foreign entities', which are seen as destroying the traditional fabric of Canadian culture and society.

Anti-Muslim content touched on events around the world and included anti-Pakistan content and support for French President Emmanuel Macron's description of Islam being 'a religion that is in crisis', with the Twitter user commenting 'actually there is no difference between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism'. Another Tweet argued that Canadian mosques are getting funding from and harbouring members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

November was the second most productive month, with 1,636 RWE Tweets produced. Similarly to October, the majority of Tweets did not discuss the US election, but continued on the themes of anti-globalism, anti-Liberal, and anti-Muslim sentiments.

Community clusters and network visualisation

To better understand the community dynamics behind Canadian RWE Twitter activity, we produced a network visualisation of these accounts based on follower relationships.

We then used an unsupervised NLP algorithm to examine the bios of these Twitter accounts to identify different subsets of Canadian RWE Twitter users based on how they self-identify. Here, Twitter bios were passed through an algorithm which identified sets of terms which commonly appeared together in individual bios. These were then qualitatively analysed to test whether they correlated with a particular form of self-identification. Groups of Twitter users who used common language to describe themselves were then assigned to a particular community.

This helped us to identify ten different subsets of Canadian RWE Twitter users who present themselves using common language, outlined below. Individual accounts associated with these communities were then overlaid on the Twitter map to determine the ways these different communities are networked.

Fig. 36 shows the network map of Twitter accounts with node colours coded in line with the colours and descriptions found in Fig. 35. This visualisation helps shed light on the way Canadian RWE Twitter users are connected to one another; it consists of an extremely dense network surrounded by a set of smaller clusters. Interestingly, these clusters do not consist of a majority of one or two node colours, meaning that they do not correspond to sets of accounts that self-identify in the same manner.

This would suggest that Canadian RWE Twitter users tend to form a broader, highly interconnected network which surrounds a few key accounts, rather than cluster into specific communities with specific interests, suggesting relative homogeneity in Canadian RWE activity on Twitter.

Figure 35 Cluster colours and descriptions

Colour & cluster description	% of network	Colour & cluster description	% of network
Null – no account bio	15.02%	Canadian patriots	8.35%
Alberta focussed	10.19%	Self-identified conservatives	8.30%
pro-Trump/ anti-Trudeau	9.44%	Quebecois users	7.85%
Christian identity	9.13%	Interested in Canadian politics	7.34%
Male family roles	9.10%	Interested in Canadian politics	6.76%
Libertarian	8.53%		

Figure 36 Twitter network: bio cluster
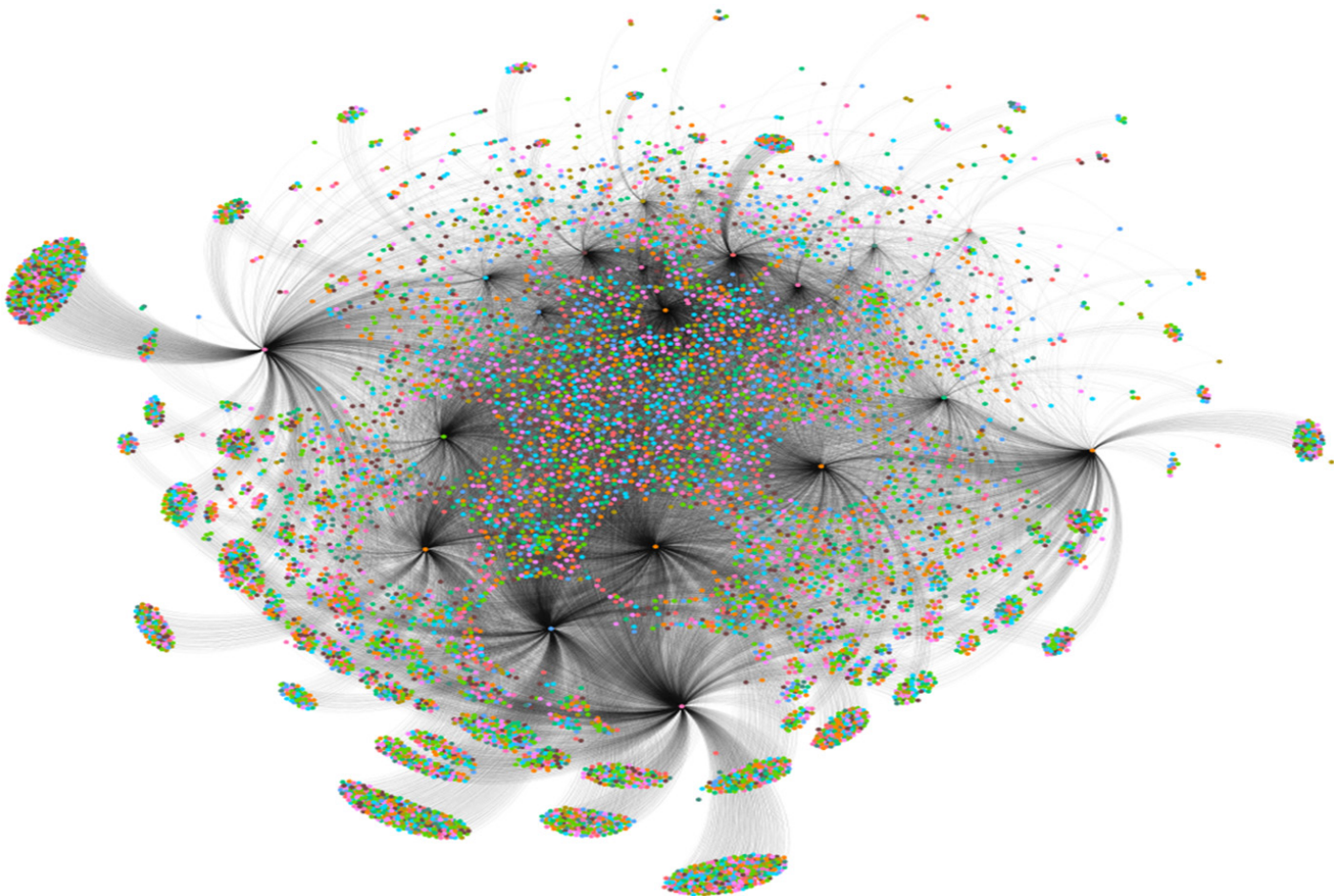
YouTube

Comparison with 2019

Of the 32 channels ISD analysed in 2019, 16 were still actively producing content in 2020. The creators of these 16 active channels produced a total of 1,554 videos throughout 2020. There was significant variation in the rates of activity between channels: whilst five of the channels produced less than ten videos over the year, the top three most active channels produced 501 videos (32% of all content), 307 videos (23.8% of all content) and 207 videos (13.3% of all content) respectively. This suggests that a large percentage of the Canadian RWE content on YouTube continues to be created by a small number of active channels.

Anti-Muslim actors were the most prevalent actors among the 16 channels still active followed by ethnonationalists, and only one sovereigntist channel was still active in 2020. The three white supremacist channels of analysis from 2019 had either been removed (one channel) from YouTube or were not active throughout 2020 (two channels).

11 of the 32 channels were inactive and did not produce any content in 2020, whilst three had been removed by YouTube for various policy infractions and the remaining two channels could not be found on YouTube. The platform has not provided any information as to why — if they were removed for violating terms and services — nor could ISD researchers find any additional information about why these channels no longer exist.

Overview of Canadian YouTube channel activity

Together, the 32 Canadian RWE YouTube channels in our analysis produced a combined total of 2,388 videos in 2020. There was significant variation in the rates of activity between channels, and the most active channel produced 501 videos in 2020 (21% of all content), whilst the least productive channel produced only one video. The top three most active channels collectively produced 1,087 videos throughout the year, which accounted for 45% of all the content produced. Our channels had a combined subscriber count of 2,924,947.

Figure 37 Volume of YouTube videos over time

There were no extreme spikes in activity throughout 2020, which can most likely be attributed to the fact that a number of the channels observed followed a steady episode format, whereby they would upload a similar number of episodes per month. The amount of content produced did gradually increase over the course of the year, with the highest levels of output occurring in December (269 videos), November (257 videos) and July (234 videos).

A jump in activity was observed between April and July. Analysis of the video titles and descriptions produced during these months suggested that this increase in content production was stimulated by the Canadian governments' response to the pandemic during April,[53, 54, 55] as well as BLM protests which began on 26 May 2020 in the US and on 30 May 2020 in Toronto. Content produced in response to the BLM protests largely focused on police inadequacy as well as alleged Antifa-perpetrated violence at protests.

While the increase in activity between September and December corresponded with the lead-up to the US presidential election in November 2020, analysis of video titles and descriptions did not highlight this as a particularly salient driver of content production. Our analysis suggested that the increase is content was more likely linked to Justin Trudeau announcing[56] a second wave of the pandemic in Canada, a resurgence of COVID-19 cases in Canada,[57] and the tightening of COVID-19-related restrictions,[58] as there was a noticeable ramp-up in anti-Trudeau, anti-lockdown and COVID-19 restriction-related content during these months.

Content analysis

In order to better understand which topics of conversation were most pertinent to Canadian RWE YouTube channels, we coded a random 10% sample of the total videos produced in 2020. This content coding was done based on each video's title and description, gathered using YouTube's API. If we were unable to determine the video's subject from this information, researchers would additionally watch and qualitatively analyse the video's content. As videos can cover a wide range of topics, researchers coded multiple themes per video. As such, figures should be understood as representative of how frequently a theme was discussed within the sample.

COVID-19

The most discussed theme in our content sample was COVID-19: 24% of the video content in our sample was about various pandemic-related topics. The most frequent narratives were focused on COVID-19 in Canada, as opposed to the effect it was having elsewhere. These included: opposition to government-imposed COVID-19 restrictions, disparagement of the Liberal governments' response to the pandemic, and conspiracy theories around the pandemic. There was also a notable focus on the economic impact of the pandemic and rising unemployment numbers in Canada.

The full list of COVID-19 related themes are as follows:

- General
- Anti-mask – including violence against anti-maskers
- Anti-contact tracing
- Anti-government response
- Anti-lockdown
- Anti-repatriation
- Australia lockdown/ government response
- Border closures/ crossing
- China
- Conspiracy/ hoax – including 5g conspiracies
- Cures
- Economic impact
- Government response – general discussion
- Lockdown – general discussion
- Mortality rate
- Vaccination(s)
- Anti-healthcare workers
- Education/ school shutdowns – including religious school shutdowns

Foreign affairs were of significantly less interest to Canadian RWE actors broadcasting on YouTube than domestic affairs. While we would expect the US presidential election in November 2020 to have been a topic of interest, discussion of it made up only 2.5% of our content sample. This could be attributed to the fact that sovereigntist channels were the most active on YouTube throughout 2020. Marked by their rejection of court and state authority, individuals aligned with sovereigntist ideology tend to be more concerned with domestic – rather than international – political and social affairs. Given that Canadian politics and politicians was the second most recurrent theme (accounting for 7.2% of content), it is likely that the US presidential election and US affairs writ large (2.2% of content) were less frequently discussed because they are not topics of especial interest to sovereigntists.

Anti-establishment

The high recurrence of anti-Trudeau sentiment (6.9% of content) reinforces our findings from 2019, where the most discussed theme in the videos analysed was hostile to the prime minister. Related content produced in 2020 was highly critical of the prime minister across topics. These ranged from domestic political affairs, such as the WE Charity scandal,[59] to Canadian foreign relations, where content was dominated by discussion of China – specifically Chinese influence or presence in Canada. Connected to the theme of anti-Trudeau sentiment were topics related to general opposition to the establishment: anti-Liberal government (nine mentions), anti-left-wing politics (six mentions) and anti-mainstream media (16 mentions). Often tied to anti-Trudeau and anti-left sentiments is the theme of anti-immigration. Interestingly, however, while anti-immigration discussion – and within this anti-Muslim discussion – was the third most prevalent theme in the video content analysed in 2019, it accounted for only 1.8% of our content sample in 2020.

Comment cluster analysis

To better understand the general sentiments of audiences watching RWE videos and to understand which elements of video content viewers were reacting the most to, we analysed video comments. The 2,388 videos produced by Canadian RWE YouTube channels generated 602,129 comments.

Figure 38 YouTube comments per month

We took a random 10% sample of these comments and ran them through an unsupervised NLP algorithm which automatically identifies 'clusters' of words that commonly appear together in comment text. These were then qualitatively analysed to determine topics of discussion. We chose to have the sample of YouTube comments divided into ten clusters. As the results of each clustering job are slightly different, this exercise was run ten times using the random 10% sample. Clusters of terms which could not be reconciled with a specific topic of conversation were not included in analysis, leaving us with a total of 87 groupings of comments.

COVID-19

Viewers' reactions to video content predominantly focused on COVID-19: 43.7% of discussion revolved around various issues related to the pandemic. Viewers most commonly spoke about vaccines and their opposition to lockdown restrictions as well as mask-wearing guidance. Another prevalent topic within COVID-19-related comment clusters was the impact of the pandemic on small businesses and the economy. COVID-19 conspiracy theories were the focus of 7.9% of COVID-19-related comment clusters.

Law enforcement — specifically the police — was the second most mentioned topic within comments, making up 12 of the 87 clusters (13.7%). This correlates to the video content, where protests were the third most discussed theme, and suggests that police involvement in trying to control protests incited a greater reaction from viewers than the protests themselves. Related to this was anti-establishment sentiment, which was the third most common topic, comprising eight of the clusters (9.2%). Again, this corresponds with the video content, where content which was anti-establishment in nature was widespread, and suggests that such content plays an important role in galvanising RWE activity on YouTube. Viewers voiced opposition to Trudeau, the government and mainstream media, as well as expressing notions of perceived government infringement on civil liberties. Overall, these themes imply a broader disillusionment with politics in general, and are indicative of the discord between RWE communities and the current political system.

Finally, discussion of China made up 6.9% of discussion, revolving around Canadian foreign relations with China, suspicion of Chinese influence over domestic Canadian politics, and anti-CCP and anti-communist sentiment.

BitChute

Two of the three white supremacist channels of analysis from 2019 were active throughout 2020 on BitChute, an alternative video-hosting platform that was created in 2017 with the purpose of providing a less stringently moderated alternative to mainstream platforms such as YouTube. Accordingly, two of the five RWE actors that were de-platformed by YouTube migrated to BitChute, where they actively produced content throughout 2020. Describing themselves as 'a service that [users] can use to flourish and express their ideas freely', BitChute's scarce content moderation and skeletal terms of service has led to it becoming a well-known hub of extremist and terrorist material,[60] and it plays host to a span of far-right groups and individuals. Of the six far-right groups designated as banned terrorist groups by Canada, the Proud Boys are the only group to currently use BitChute. They frequently posted content to their channel throughout 2020.

Telegram

For our study of Canadian RWE activity in 2020, we opted to include the encrypted messaging application Telegram. Telegram was incorporated into our analysis due to the increasing importance it plays in contemporary white supremacist organising, including the overt promotion of violent content.

Methodology and channel identification

ISD has collated a list of over 400 Telegram channels involved in the promotion of extreme right-wing ideology. However, although these all use English, few are expressly affiliated with activity in a specific geography, instead acting as hubs for transnational white supremacist organisation.

As our analysis is specifically designed to track RWE activity in Canada, we opted to analyse a smaller cohort of channels which were expressly affiliated with discussion of Canadian politics or with Canadian groups. Due to the transnational and dynamic nature of RWE and the structure of Telegram, it is likely that there are Canadians active in other RWE-focused channels which aren't analysed here. To identify Canada-specific channels, we used the following three approaches:

1. Identifying Canadian-focused channels in ISD's in-house list of extreme right Telegram channels;

2. Using Telegram's search function to manually search for Telegram channels containing Canadian keywords in their names. These channels were then subject to manual review to ensure they met our definition of RWE;

3. Searching previously identified Canadian channels for content shared from additional Canada-focused channels.

Through this process, we identified 17 Telegram channels which were specifically focused on Canadian groups or discussion of Canadian affairs.

Ideology

We qualitatively analysed the content shared in these channels in order to categorise them according to our framework of sub-ideologies of RWE. Through this process, we identified seven channels hosting white supremacist communities, seven hosting ethnonationalist communities, two hosting sovereigntist communities, and one hosting an anti-Muslim community.

Two of the channels identified were affiliated with the Canadian Proud Boys, who were designated as a terrorist group in Canada in February 2021; two channels were associated with Canadian influencers, Faith Goldy and Stefan Molyneux, and one channel was associated with the Identitarian movement in Canada.

Figure 39 Breakdown of Telegram channels by ideology

Ideology		Value
White supremacist		7
Ethnonationalist		7
Sovereigntist		2
Counter-Jihadist		1
Value	0 5 100	
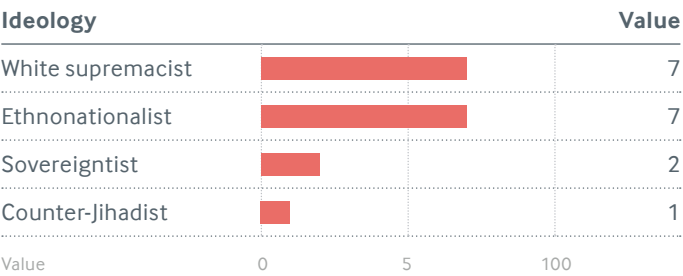
Volume over time and content production

Using Telegram's API, ISD researchers scraped the channels of analysis, collecting all messages sent in 2020. We found that Canadian RWE Telegram channels produced a total of 23,304 throughout the year. In total 4,013 of these messages, accounting for 17% of all messages sent, contained no text at all and only contained image and video content. Additionally, a qualitative analysis of these channels reveals that image and video plays an important role in activity on the platform, with many messages containing only short text (e.g. 'BASED'). With these caveats in mind, it is recognised that a text-based analysis will only reveal a partial picture of activity on the platform, and accordingly this has been supplemented below with qualitative analysis of image-based content on these platforms.

The users of the most active channel in our data produced 8,427 messages; over 3,000 more than the second most active at 5,278. Together, the three most active Canadian RWE Telegram channels account for 71% (16,445) of the total messages sent in 2020. This suggests that Canadian RWE activity on the platform is concentrated in a set of highly active channels. However, Canadian RWE may also be active outside of our channels of analysis, in private Telegram channels, small groups, and one-to-one conversations. Despite this, our 17 channels – and in particular, the most active of these – can be considered easily identifiable hubs of Canadian RWE activity.

Figure 40 Canadian Telegram messages per month

The volume of messages sent by Canadian channels in 2020 was consistent throughout the year, never dipping below 1,420. June was the month with the highest volume of messages (2,716), followed by May with 2,504, and March with 2,233. Messages sent in June were not in response to a single, specific event, but were generally centred around discussion of the anti-racism BLM protests that began after the death of George Floyd on 25 May 2020. This includes messages highlighting instances of alleged Antifa violence and looting during protests in Canada and the US, as well as support for 'Whiteout Wednesday' – a social media campaign designed in opposition to 'Blackout Tuesday'.

Content analysis

To better understand the topics of conversation on Telegram, we searched the messages gathered for keywords associated with specific topics.

Politics

This message-based approach revealed relatively sparse discussion of Canadian politics in these channels. Only 23 of the 23,304 messages sent in 2020 mention Canadian political parties, and only 207 mention Canadian politicians, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accounting for 67% of these mentions. In comparison to this there were 386 mentions of politicians internationally, with Donald Trump being mentioned 250 times – 111 times more than Trudeau.

Geographic focus

Canadian channels mentioned foreign countries 1,815 times throughout 2020. Again, conversation about the US was the most prevalent, with 370 messages mentioning Canada's neighbour to the south. The second most mentioned country was China with 303, followed by the UK with 155. Mentions of China can be divided into two main themes: discussion related to COVID-19 and discussion of China's influence and actions on the global stage. Messages from the latter theme include commentary on China's role in past conflicts, its current economic and social influence in the West, and speculation about the country's potential role in future conflicts.

Extremist groups

Only 175 of the 20,203 messages in our data contain keywords associated with known extremists/extremist groups. The most mentioned extremist/extremist group by Canadian channels in 2020 was the Proud Boys, with 59 messages. ISIS was the second most mentioned extremist group with 23 messages, followed by the Nationalist Front with 16 messages.

Qualitative analysis of content

Given the relatively limited insights which can be gleaned through a message-based analysis of content on Telegram, analysts supplemented this with a qualitative analysis of the image-based content shared on the platform. This revealed that in the channels analysed, videos and memes which contain explicit racism are common and widely shared.

This not only included content which mocked minority communities, but material which celebrated the deaths of minorities, and material which promoted racist conspiracy theories, like 'white genocide', which have been influential in inspiring extreme right terror attacks in recent years. Additionally, several of the channels analysed contained large volumes of content containing neo-Nazi imagery, such as the 'black sun' or sonnenrad.

Perhaps of even more concern, one channel in particular hosted a range of content associated with accelerationism — the idea that societal collapse should be hastened through violence to allow a white ethnostate to be built. This was inspirational in the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack. This included memes promoting the need to prepare for societal collapse, but also instructional content on survivalism, guerrilla tactics including surveillance and ambushes, guides on resisting interrogation, and designs for 3D printed firearms.

Importantly, this demonstrates that although it hosts relatively small numbers of Canadian RWEs, Telegram is used by communities who are not only promoting ideologies which have been influential in extreme right terrorism but who are actively preparing for violent activity.

Network

The Telegram messaging app allows users to easily share messages from one channel to another. Cross-posted messages are common and feature in the content posted by our 17 Canadian Telegram channels in 2020. We found that 27% (6,390) of the 23,304 messages sent by Canadian Telegram channels were forwarded from 622 unique channels. Using Telegram's API, researchers collected the channel ID for each of the Telegram channels that our Canadian entities had forwarded messages from.

We analysed the top ten identifiable channels with the highest number of messages forwarded by Canadian channels. The channel which had the most messages forwarded by our 17 Canadian Telegram channels belongs to Vincent James, the founder of the alternative right-wing media site, the Red Elephants. James' channel accounts for 350 of the 6,390 forwarded messages in our data. Messages from the channel were shared by five of the 17 Canadian channels of analysis. Importantly, the channel with the fourth most messages forwarded by our network is the official channel for the US Proud Boys.

This highlights how Canadian users of RWE channels on Telegram are connected into a broader international English language extremist ecosystem, and how the platform acts as a hub for transnational coalition-building for extremist communities. Given the internationalist outlook of Canadian RWEs, and broader concerns around the rise of the extreme right globally, it is suggested that this dynamic is worthy of additional analysis.

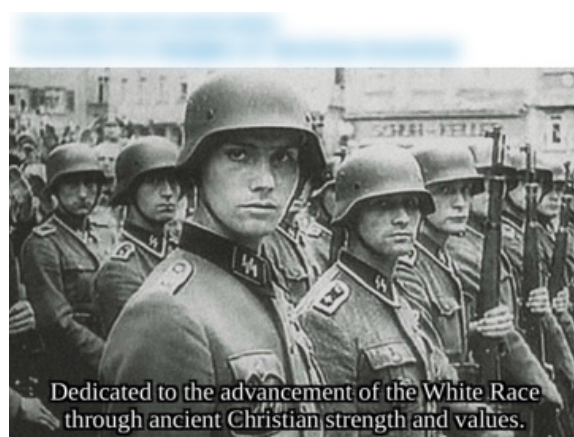**Figure 41** Examples of neo-Nazi content shared in Canadian Telegram groups

Dedicated to the advancement of the White Race through ancient Christian strength and values.

Figure 42 Examples of accelerationist and instructional material shared on Telegram

YouTube
Urban Guerrilla Tactics - The Check Route
This video describes an old spy craft tactic for counter-surveillance. I believe it is still useful. I used this strategy to great effect when I acted as a b...
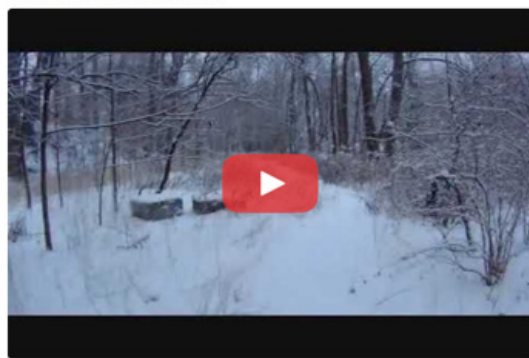
👁 93 03:31

Ask-Me-No-Questions-NO LIES.pdf
11.2 MB

There may come a time in any wignat's life when it's useful to know how to resist interrogation techniques. This book goes over many of the commonly used interrogation techniques, and countermeasures against them.

👁 102 15:20

FMDA-G17-vg17-Update.zip
49.7 MB

Glock 17 3D-printed frame.
#zip #guns #det_disp #homemade #3D #glock
t.me/alearedactaest
t.me/SlovakSiege2

FreeMansG19.zip
5.4 MB

Glock 19 3D-printed frame.
#zip #guns #det_disp #homemade #3D #glock
t.me/alearedactaest
t.me/SlovakSiege2

MenendezMagV1.1.zip
17.9 MB

3D-printed Glock magazine.
#zip #guns #det_disp #homemade #3D #glock #magazine
t.me/alearedactaest
t.me/SlovakSiege2

ExtendezMagv1.1.zip
12.7 MB

3D-printed Glock extended magazine.
#zip #guns #det_disp #homemade #3D #glock #magazine
t.me/alearedactaest
t.me/SlovakSiege2

RACE ⚡ FIRST
What should you do while waiting for THE COLLAPSE?

Work and earn income

Find a White spouse

Settle on a homestead

Network and have fun

Bring more Whites into the world

Be materially and spiritually prepared

HD: [...]

👁 50 03:40

Spring has sprung so its time to start gardening and and stockpiling food for shortages. It's almost guaranteed the communist faggot running maple syrup land will try and control all food and take us for a ride this coming winter.
DON'T BE CAUGHT IN THAT SITUATION.
We will create some content on how we start, organize, plant, harvest and a how you can start in town homesteading to avoid being a slave to traitors and a limp wristed faggot communists.

👁 86 edited 15:42

Gab

Due to limitations in accessing Gab's API, ISD researchers were unable to gather and analyse the content produced by Canadian Gab users in the same way as we were with Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Telegram and 4chan. While we are unable to provide numbers for total posts produced in 2020 or a statistical breakdown of post themes, researchers analysed a number of active Canadian Gab accounts and their ideological affiliations, as well as conducting a qualitative analysis of their post content.

Account identification and analysis

In 2019, ISD analysed 42 Canadian RWE entities active on Gab. We noted that Gab was not a significant source of mobilisation for Canadian RWE; however, the content produced by Canadian users was more egregious than that posted on more mainstream platforms of analysis. 21 of the 42 accounts analysed in 2019 were not active in 2020. Nine accounts were simply inactive throughout the year, while one had become private and could not be viewed. 11 Gab accounts were not able to be located, and it is unclear whether these were deleted by the platform or ceased operating due to organic reasons.

In addition to the 20 seed accounts still active in 2020, ISD identified nine additional Canadian Gab accounts and three discussion groups focused on Canadian politics. These have a combined total of 258,497 followers/members.

In line with our findings from 2019, Gab appears to be a platform for Canadian RWE users to express more extreme ideas. 34.4% of the entities active on Gab were found to be aligned with white supremacist ideology, while 31.3% were ethnonationalist.
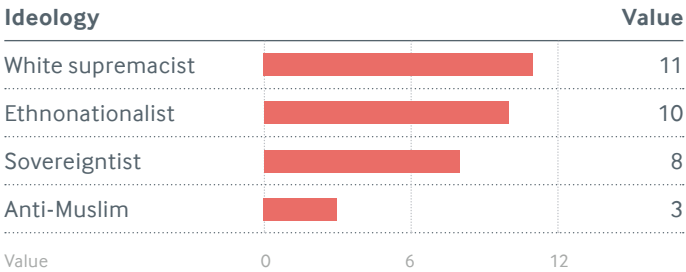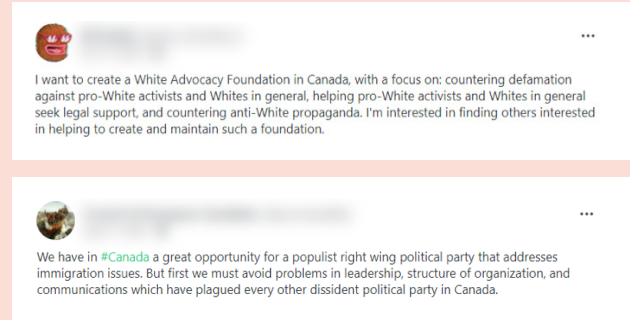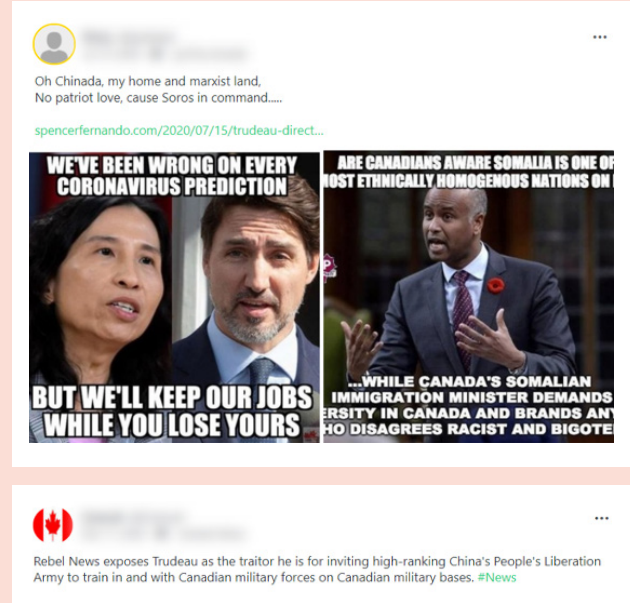
Figure 43 Gab accounts by ideology

Ideology	Value
White supremacist	11
Ethnonationalist	10
Sovereigntist	8
Anti-Muslim	3

Figure 44 Examples of Gab content

I want to create a White Advocacy Foundation in Canada, with a focus on: countering defamation against pro-White activists and Whites in general, helping pro-White activists and Whites in general seek legal support, and countering anti-White propaganda. I'm interested in finding others interested in helping to create and maintain such a foundation.

We have in #Canada a great opportunity for a populist right wing political party that addresses immigration issues. But first we must avoid problems in leadership, structure of organization, and communications which have plagued every other dissident political party in Canada.

Figure 45 Anti-government content on Gab

Oh Chinada, my home and marxist land,
No patriot love, cause Soros in command......

spencerfernando.com/2020/07/15/trudeau-direct...

Rebel News exposes Trudeau as the traitor he is for inviting high-ranking China's People's Liberation Army to train in and with Canadian military forces on Canadian military bases. #News

As we were unable to collect the Canadian RWE posts from Gab, ISD researchers monitored the platform and manually gathered posts of interest from Canadian entities. Through our qualitative analysis of Canadian RWE Gab accounts, we found discussion relevant to RWE mobilisation. One post by a known white supremacist professed a desire to set up a 'White Advocacy Foundation' to act as a support system for 'helping pro-White activists and Whites in general seek legal support …' (Fig. 45). Another post by the account for the Council of European Canadians argues that there is 'a great opportunity for a populist right-wing political party that addresses immigration issues …' (Fig. 45).

In addition, ISD noted a large amount of anti-Liberal and anti-Trudeau content. One such post from December 2020 brands Trudeau as a 'traitor … for inviting high-ranking China's People's Liberation Army to train in and with Canadian military forces on Canadian military bases' (Fig. 46). Another post from 15 July 2020 contains a selection of memes about Canadian politician Ahmed Hussen and Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam with the caption 'Oh Chinada, my home and Marxist land …' (Fig. 46).

Opposition to Socialism and Communism was another common theme amongst Gab users. This anti-Socialist content was sometimes violent. For example, one post to the group Canada News shared an image of a woman carrying a machine gun with a quote attributed to Larry Lambert reading: 'The problem with socialism is that you can vote your way into it but you need to shoot your way out of it' (Fig. 47).

The most prevalent theme identified in the Canadian RWE content posted to Gab in 2020 was conspiracy theorist content, including material around the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, both of the posts shared in Fig. 46 above contain elements of conspiracy. The first suggests that the Government of Canada, through Justin Trudeau, is secretly in league with the Chinese government and military. The second post also mentions China's alleged activity in Canada, before stating that 'Soros [is] in command …'. This is a nod to a popular RWE conspiracy theory that understands liberal philanthropist George Soros to be in control of various elements of world politics. This Soros conspiracy is connected to the Great Replacement and White Genocide conspiracy theories which Soros is seen as facilitating.

During our analysis, ISD researchers noted a number of Canadian Gab accounts newly created in 2021. Following the steps taken by mainstream social media platforms in the final months of 2020, cracking down on terms and conditions regarding hate speech and the sharing of conspiracy content, it is possible that Gab may see a spike in Canadian RWE activity. As one Canadian user said in a post from September 2020, 'Oh boy Gab, I hope you have a lot of server space. You're going to need it …' (Fig. 49). This marks Gab as a platform for further analysis.
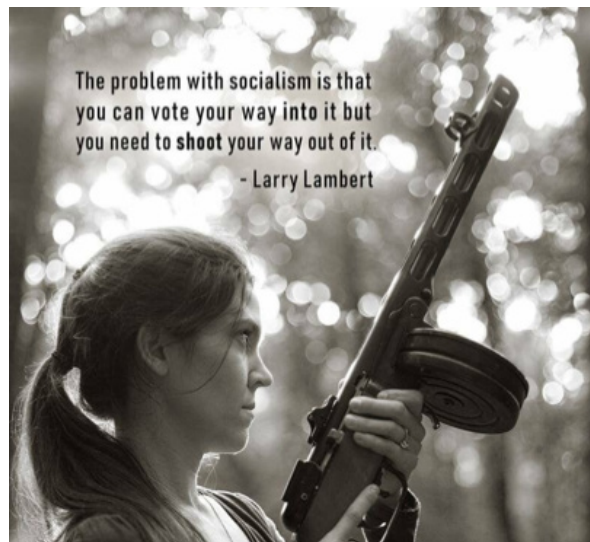
Figure 46 Anti-Socialist content on Gab

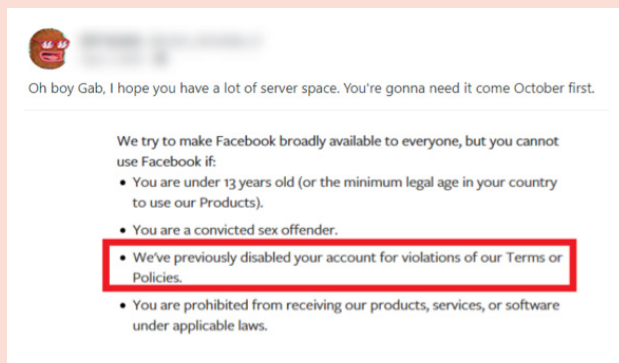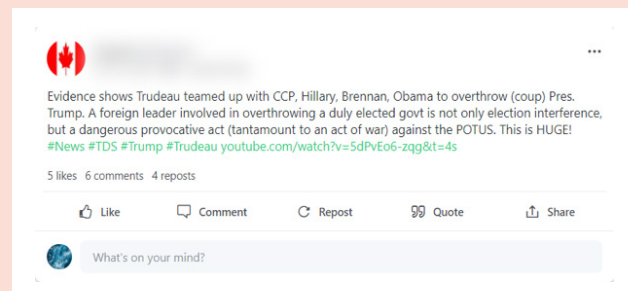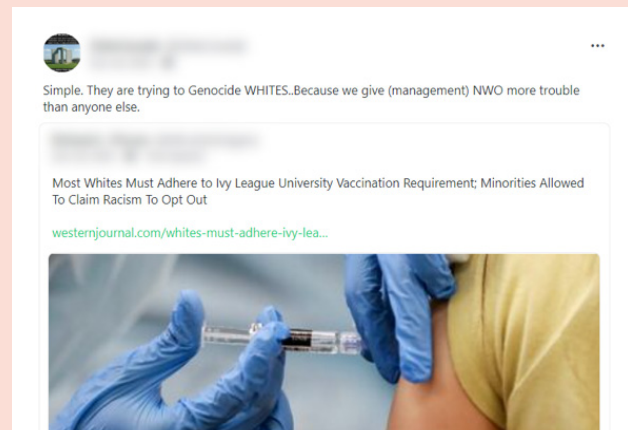**Figure 48** Content relating to new users on the platform

Figure 47 Examples of conspiracy content posted to Gab

Incel forums

Across the social platforms analysed, we identified a small number of communities associated with the 'manosphere' – a network of groups motivated by their extremist misogyny. In recent years, violent incidents in Canada have been linked to the so-called 'incel movement', an online subculture of men who define themselves by their inability to find romantic or sexual partners, and which is marked by their extreme hatred for women. This includes the 2018 Toronto, vehicle-ramming attack, committed by Alek Minassian, who posted on Facebook before the attack that 'the Incel Rebellion' had begun. Minassian has since been found guilty of 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder.[61] Other instances of violence motivated by incel ideology include the February 2020 stabbing and tragic death of a female spa worker in Toronto. The 17-year-old offender has been charged with terrorist activity, alongside one count each of first-degree and attempted murder.[62]

Although they do not primarily focus on racially and culturally defined out-groups, there is notable overlap more broadly between the terminology and digital tactics deployed by incels and those used by other right wing extremist communities. Additionally, misogynistic violence and discussion linked to incel ideology are common tropes in RWE mobilisation on platforms such as 4chan and Telegram. Reflecting on this, and given the recent history of misogynist violence in Canada, ISD researchers sought to expand upon the small number of 'manosphere'-linked communities identified on the main platforms studied here. To do this, analysts ethnographically explored Reddit, as well as three forums specifically designed for use by incels.[63]

Canadian users

This exploration revealed less than 50 users who specifically self-identified as Canadian, meaning that a comprehensive country-specific analysis of incel mobilisation in Canada was not achievable. However, it is likely that a number of Canadians are using these platforms but do not publicly promote their nationality.

A qualitative analysis of content shared by self-identified Canadian users provides an insight into the motivation of these communities. In one discussion thread, a user described his experience of going to the mall with two friends and outlines 'ERfuel' and 'Blackpills' that came from the experience. 'ERfuel' is a reference to Isla Vista killer Elliot Rodger, who is a hero within the incel movement, whilst 'Blackpills' refers to commonly held self-deprecating beliefs in incel communities, such as the idea of 'biological determinism' which suggests that men who are short or ugly will never find a romantic partner.

This user describes how seeing women shopping made him want to kill them, stating that 'Women are WHORES, period'. The users replying to the thread talk often about avoiding going outside unless absolutely necessary, with one user saying 'malls and public places like parks and beaches can utterly destroy me'. Users also shared deeply misogynistic memes depicting the average Canadian woman as perceived by incels. These memes suggest that women having sexual agency is legitimate grounds for attacking them.

This suggests that although we were unable to identify a large number of Canadian users on these platforms, where present these groups express visceral misogynistic ideology and support for mass violence inspired by this ideology.

Glorifying Alek Minassian

Beyond exploring self-identifying Canadian users on these platforms, we also sought to explore the influence which violence committed by Canadian incels had on the wider English-speaking community.

A search across the incel forums analysed found that one of the most common themes discussed during 2020 was the crimes of Alek Minassian and his trial. Minassian was often glorified in these discussions and is seen as a hero within the incel movement. At times this discussion overlapped with other RWE ideology, comparing Minassian with RWE terrorists.

In a similar way to how Minassian is often glorified within the movement, Canadian mass-murderer Marc Lépine, who killed 14 women in 1989, was also often discussed. In a thread on one forum, a user asks why Lépine isn't seen as the 'ultimate saint' in the incel community. One user replies, saying he is their 'favourite' while another says Lépine is 'underrated'.

This suggests that violence committed by Canadian incels also has the broader effect of inspiring extremist violence globally. This is similar to the way in which white supremacist terrorists are often lionised as 'saints' internationally.
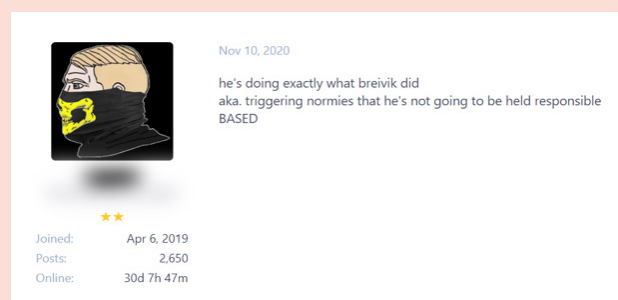
Figure 49 Content glorifying Minassian on an incel forum

Nov 10, 2020

he's doing exactly what breivik did
aka. triggering normies that he's not going to be held responsible
BASED

★★
Joined: Apr 6, 2019
Posts: 2,650
Online: 30d 7h 47m

Figure 50 Content glorifying Lépine on an incel forum

Jan 7, 2021

He's one my favorites since he only killed foid

●●●●●
Joined: Dec 5, 2019
Posts: 45,054
Online: 216d 20h 20m

Jan 7, 2021

Good point, he's extremely underrated.

Conclusion

RWEs in Canada draw on a multifaceted and complex online ecosystem to broadcast their ideology to the public, reach adherents, and plan activity. In this diverse spectrum of digital platforms, each fills a different role. On major hubs of communication, such as Facebook and YouTube, RWE groups are able to reach and engage large audiences globally. Anonymous imageboards such as 4chan provide a venue for trolls to create viral content. In the shadows of this online ecosystem, such as on Telegram and Incel forums, smaller communities of dedicated adherents engage in more egregious behaviour.

This online activity spans a spectrum of severity. This includes the innocuous, such as the sharing of non-extremist memes which reinforce in-group identity; the harmful but legal, such as the seeding and amplification of disinformation campaigns; the potentially illegal, such as the overt harassment of minority groups; and the highly dangerous, such as the promotion and planning of violent activity. However, an effective response to the issue will require careful consideration of each of these dynamics.

An analysis of the activity of this community over 2020 reveals a number of key trends which have important ramifications when considering potential responses to them. Firstly, as has also been evidenced by offline mobilisation, RWEs in Canada are internationalist in nature. In their online communications strategy, they discuss Canada's neighbour to the south more than they do their own country, and US politics in similar volumes to Canadian. In light of a global growth in RWE, this suggests that purely domestic solutions to the problem may be ineffective unless synchronised with approaches adopted in other countries.

The major role which COVID-19 played in RWE messaging reveals a second key dynamic — the hybridisation of disinformation and extremism online. The pandemic proved the dominant driver of conversation across the platforms analysed, and across these platforms conspiracy theories and disinformation relating to COVID-19 abounded. This reinforces the necessity of analysing online harms in a holistic fashion rather than siloing responses.

Our results also suggested that the increased screen-time which many engaged in as a result of the pandemic may have had an impact on the levels of activity across Canadian RWE communities. With an uncertain future and additional lockdowns likely, the importance of building effective policy responses to such activity becomes more apparent.

However, our analysis suggests that the responses of social media platforms are not currently sufficient. Over two years, our analysis has demonstrated the resilience of RWE online in Canada, suggesting that at the moment it represents a small but perennial presence in online life. Whilst policy enforcement on Twitter has helped limit the size of RWE communities, this has proven less effective on Facebook, where replacement communities have sprung up to replace those which have been removed.

In light of a global surge in violence and mobilisation by the extreme right, addressing these issues in a comprehensive and cohesive fashion is essential.

Technical annex

i. 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, characterised 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 people of colour, Jews, immigrants, homosexuals and feminists.

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 tenets 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 people of colour, and advocate that white peoples should be dominant over people of colour. This can extend to a belief in the need for violence against, or even the genocide of, people of colour. 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

Counter-jihadists

The counter-jihad movement is a loose network of groups and individuals who share the fear that their native cultures are threatened by an Islamic takeover. Counter-jihadists are marked by their opposition to Islam as an ideology, and Muslims as a people. While individual supporters of counter-jihadist groups and ideologues may hold explicitly racist views, counter-jihad groups often attempt to mark themselves as 'non-racist', and publically reject anti-Semitism. For the purpose of this project, if a counter-jihadist 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.

ii. Geoparsing technology

Geoparsing is the process of identifying place names within text and resolving them to their corresponding geographical entities. Since the project is centred around Canada yet there is also interest in references to other countries, we utilise two approaches to do this: (1) a **global approach** to geoparsing that identified places and resolved them to country granularity, and (2) a **Canadian-centric geoparser**, which identifies and resolves place names to **three** different granularities: **country** (Level 0), **province/territory** (Level 1), and **municipality** (Level 2).

Example Input:

'*Ontario follows a general trend already seen across England and Germany; Next stop Vancouver?*'.

Example Output:

In the above example, there are mentions of one Canadian **municipality** ('Vancouver'), two Canadian **provinces/territories** ('Ontario' and 'British Columbia') and three **countries** ('Canada', 'England', and 'Germany').

Global geoparsing

For the global approach to geoparsing we employed **CLIFF**, a system built to identify place entities using **Stanford NER**, and linked each entity to their most likely geographic region using the **GeoNames database** and series of heuristics (https://github.com/mediacloud/cliff-annotator)

Canadian-centric geoparsing

While **CLIFF** is generally seen to be fairly accurate, the approach is not tailored to any specific country and thus we also designed a **Canadian-centric geoparser**. For this, we **constructed a gazetteer** of 4,529 unique **high-precision entries**. This gazetteer was constructed by first compiling a list of 566 Canadian places, and then manually labelling each place as deemed either unambiguous (e.g. 'Calgary') or ambiguous (e.g. 'Essex'). Unambiguous entries are left as-is when matching within text, whereas ambiguous entries are transformed into unambiguous variants by passing them through a set of patterns. Such patterns include e.g. '<place>, <territory>', which for the ambiguous place 'Essex' results in the unambiguous gazetteer entry e.g. ' Essex, Ontario'.

If any of the gazetteer entries are matched within a post's text, e.g. 'Driving through **Vancouver**', then the post is annotated with the corresponding municipality

(in this case, 'Vancouver' itself), the province/territory (in this case 'British Columbia'), and the country (i.e. 'Canada'). For entries that are already provinces/territories e.g. 'Ontario', no municipality is annotated.

Both the global (country-level) geoparser and the gazetteer-matching process are applied to each post in the dataset, ultimately annotating each post with a list of countries, Canadian provinces/territories, and Canadian municipalities.

iii. Twitter RWE relevancy classifier

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 2020.

2. An initial review revealed that a large amount of this conversation was irrelevant to RWE (e.g. 'I feel like chicken for dinner'). 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.

Examples of Tweets classified as RWE

Category of tweet	Example[65]
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-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-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'

Category of tweet	Example[65]
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-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!'
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.'

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63. In order to prevent from drawing attention and directing traffic to incel forums, we have not named them in the public version of the report. Please contact the authors for more information.

64. [i] Perry and Scrivens, Right-wing Extremism in Canada, 5. This definition draws on frameworks established by Jamin (2013), Perlinger (2002) and Lauder (2002), which identify a number of core tenants of RWE ideology: 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.

65. [ii] All examples of tweets provided here have been bowdlerised to avoid identification of individual users.

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to extremism
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