

Mapping a Social Media Ecosystem: Outlinking on Gab & Twitter Amongst the Australian Far-right Milieu

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ABSTRACT

Attention to the internet and the online spaces in which violent extremists interact and spread content has increased over the past decades. More recently, that attention has shifted from understanding how groups like the self-proclaimed Islamic State use the internet to spread propaganda to understanding the broader internet environment and, specifically, far-right violent extremist activities within it. This focus on how far right violent extremist—including far-right racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists (REMVEs) within them—create, use, and exploit the online networks in which they exist to promote their hateful ideology and reach has largely focused on North America and Europe. However, in recent years, examinations of those online dynamics elsewhere, including in Australia, is increasing.

Far right movements have been active in Australia for decades. While these movements are not necessarily extremist nor violent, understanding how violent far right extremists and REMVEs interact within or seek to exploit these broader communities is important in further understanding the tactics, reach, and impact of REMVEs in Australia. This is particularly important in the online space access to broader networks of individuals and ideas is increasingly expanding.

Adding to a steadily expanding body of knowledge examining online activities and networks of both broader far right as well as violent extremist far right populations in Australia, this paper presents a data-driven examination of the online ecosystems in which identified Australian far-right violent extremists exist and interact,¹ as mapped by user generated uniform resource locators (URL), or ‘links’, to internet locations gathered from two online social platforms—Twitter and Gab. This link-based analysis has been used in previous studies of online extremism to map the platforms and content shared in online spaces and provide further detail on the online ecosystems in which extremists interact.

Data incorporating the links was automatically collected from Twitter and Gab posts from users existing within the online milieu in which those identified far right extremists were connected. The data was collected over three discrete one-month periods spanning 2019, the year in which an Australian far right violent extremist carried out the Christchurch attack. Networks of links expanding out from the Twitter and Gab accounts were mapped in two ways to explore the extent and nature of the online ecosystems in which these identified far right Australian violent extremists are connected, including:

- To map the extent and nature of these ecosystems (e.g., the extent to which other online platforms are used and connected to one another), the project mapped where the most highly engaged links connect out to (i.e., website domain names), and

1 These online ecosystems include networks and online spaces, as well as additional ecosystem characteristics as expanded upon in a previous study by the authors. See: Jade Hutchinson, Julian Droogan, Lise Waldek, and Brian Ballsun-Stanton, *Violent Extremist & REMVE Online Ecosystems: Ecological Characteristics for Future Research & Conceptualization* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://resolvenet.org/research/violent-extremist-remve-online-ecosystems-ecological-characteristics-future-research>.

- To explore the nature of content being spread within those ecosystems, what sorts of content is found at the end of the most highly engaged links. The most highly engaged hashtags from across this time are also presented for additional thematic analysis.

The mapping of links illustrated the interconnectedness of a social media ecosystem consisting of multiple platforms that were identified as having different purposes and functions. Importantly, no links to explicitly violent or illegal activity were identified among the top-most highly engaged sites. The paper discusses the implications of the findings in light of this for future policy, practice, and research focused on understanding the online ecosystems in which identified REMVE actors are connected and the types of thematic content shared and additional implications in light of the types of non-violent content shared within them.

INTRODUCTION

Australia faces a growing challenge from far-right racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE), with social media platforms playing a key role in how these movements cohere and disseminate their ideology. Australian intelligence have repeatedly warned of the role the internet plays in the process of radicalizing to far-right violent extremism,² while academics have identified a dynamic set of far-right extremist groups and movements existing both off- and online.³

To be sure, far-right REMVE has been active in Australia for decades, characterized essentially as ethnocentric in nature, influenced by wider international trends,⁴ and exhibiting a diverse and dynamic series of violent themes.⁵ Among some of those themes and major mobilizing narratives are a commitment to white nationalist cultural or racial superiority, as well as anti-Islamic, anti-Asian, and antisemitic chauvinism.⁶ While sharing a central commitment to the undermining of Australian liberal democracy, the narratives these actors use to support and reach this goal have strategically shifted in relation to wider national and global events, most recently the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ These issues are not unique to far-right REMVE, but rather shared across various segments of the broader Australian far right. What makes them unique to REMVE actors, however, is the belief in and support for violent illegal means by which to address them. Understanding the broader ecosystems and networks in which Australian REMVE actors and narratives may spread, therefore, requires understanding the broader online milieu and online spaces in which REMVE actors exist.

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- 2 Mike Burgess, *ASIO Annual Report 2019-20* (Canberra: Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2020), <https://www.asio.gov.au/sites/default/files/ASIO%20Annual%20Report%202019-20.pdf>.
 - 3 Geoff Dean, Peter Bell, and Zarina Vakhitova, "Right-Wing Extremism in Australia: The Rise of the New Radical Right," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2016): 121–42; William Allchorn, *Australian Radical Right Narratives and Counter-Narratives in an Age of Terrorism* (Hedayah and Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right, 2021).
 - 4 Kristy Campion, "A 'Lunatic Fringe'?: The Persistence of Right Wing Extremism in Australia," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 2 (2019), https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/29338723/A_Lunatic_Fringe_POT.pdf; Kristy Campion, "Australian Right Wing Extremist Ideology: Exploring Narratives of Nostalgia and Nemesis," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (2019): 208–26.
 - 5 Mario Peucker, Debra Smith, and Muhammad Iqbal, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Far-Right Movements in Victoria* (Melbourne: Victoria University, 2018), <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/42464/>; Jade Hutchinson, "The New-Far-Right Movement in Australia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33, no. 7 (2021): 1424–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1629909>.
 - 6 Peucker, Smith, and Iqbal, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Far-Right Movements in Victoria*; Pamela Nilan, "Far-Right Contestation in Australia: Soldiers of Odin and True Blue Crew," in *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia*, eds. Mario Peucker and Debra Smith (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 101–25; Brian Ballsun-Stanton, Lise Waldek, and Julian Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales*, Technical Report for Department of Communities and Justice, NSW, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program (Sydney: Macquarie University Department of Security Studies, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.4071472>.
 - 7 Cécile Guerin, Mario Peucker, Thomas J. Fisher, and Jacob Davey, *A Snapshot of Far-right Activity on Gab in Australia* (Burwood: Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, Deakin University, 2021), https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/A-Snapshot-of-Far-Right-Activity-on-Gab-in-Australia_final.pdf; Lise Waldek, Julian Droogan, and Brian Ballsun-Stanton, *Online Far right Extremist and Conspiratorial Narratives During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Sydney: Macquarie University, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5732611>.

This report explores these facets among the broader online milieu in which Australian REMVE actors are present. The project analyzed user generated links⁸ found in Australian-aligned Twitter and Gab accounts existing within the far-right milieu across distinct periods in 2019. Our data collection began with a series of accounts on each platform that belonged to individuals identified as being far-right REMVE. We used a snowballing method to expand from these seed individuals to obtain a larger sample of socially connected ‘far-right milieu’ accounts. The sample allowed for an investigation of the broader far-right ecology within which REMVE actors operate online, with implications for understanding their online activities, the content they are privy to, and their connectivity online. We did this through first mapping and then following and thematically analyzing the most highly engaged links. This provided a snapshot of the types of websites most engaged with, and the most popular types of content linked out to, by a broader online network of Australian far-right milieu actors

It must be reiterated that that in no way does this report suggest that individuals within this broader far right milieu are violent extremist, extremist, or associated or aligned with violent extremist actors. Instead, the report recognizes this milieu of actors to exist in an online networked space in which known far-right REMVE actors also exist.

STUDY RATIONALE & SCOPE

The research design drew on the work of Macdonald, et.al,⁹ and their study of Islamic State (IS) aligned links in relation to the wider jihadist online ecosystem. The authors were able to map part of an operating online jihadist network by following the movement of a piece of jihadist propaganda out from Twitter through links to a broad range of other types of platforms. In this paper we have attempted to conduct a similar design for an Australian far-right milieu population using automated computational analysis to harvest and identify thousands of links and the domains that they link out to. This empirical and quantitative approach has been coupled with the qualitative analysis of samples from the most engaged links to build a qualitative picture of the types of content and themes linked to over time in online spaces and networks and assists in probing the extent to which REMVE actors may seek to exploit broader online networks to spread violent content and ideas.

8 We adopt the term ‘link’, short for hyperlink, to refer to uniform resource identifiers (URI, also URL) added by users to their content as part of their message. Our analysis extracted all links in messages, including service-generated hyperlinks. We aggregated the host-name component of a URI (the ‘mq.edu.au’ inside ‘https://mq.edu.au/library’) by month, while also extracting the highest-engagement full-links for deeper analysis. Other papers within this space have used the terminology ‘outlinks’ to refer to URIs. However, this terminology focuses on links that lead outward to external websites. In our analysis intra-service links (i.e., from one Twitter account to another) were also considered.

9 Stuart Macdonald, Daniel Grinnell, Anina Kinzel, and Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, “Daesh, Twitter and the Social Media Ecosystem: A Study of Outlinks Contained in Tweets Mentioning Rumiayah,” *The RUSI Journal* 164, no. 4 (2019): 60–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1644775>.

However, this research departs from the earlier IS-focused work in significant ways. First, where Macdonald et al.¹⁰ followed links associated with the distribution of a piece of jihadist propaganda (the e-zine *Rumiyah*), we examined all extant links emanating from posts made by accounts that were identified as being within the Australian far-right milieu populations. Instead of mapping the movement of a single piece of content, we were able to explore the wider linking ecology created by a diverse online network of far-right milieu accounts. These accounts represent a social network of linked actors able to communicate with each other over various platforms and media and provide insight into the types of online environments in which REMVEs are connected.

Further, rather than focusing on a single platform, we conducted a cross-platform examination that included accounts from both Twitter and Gab. The platforms chosen spanned both a mainstream social media platform (Twitter) and an ‘alt-tech’ alternative platform used largely by far-right extremist groups and individuals (Gab). Although we were able to identify links between Twitter and Gab accounts, the networks of links emanating from the two samples remained largely distinct. This allowed us to compare linking habits and content across both platforms and begin to map a wider cross-platform network ecology of websites highly engaged by far-right milieu users. In this, we follow and build upon emerging research looking at the far-right on cross-platform networks,¹¹ and add to this research both empirically and conceptually. This research also adds to what we know about the far-right in Australia through examining the wider social network (or ‘milieu’) that far-right violent extremists inhabit, its online culture as revealed through linking habits, and how it responded to world events during a discrete window of time. Finally, this research also builds on our previous conceptual paper on ecological concepts used in studies of violent extremism and REMVE online, helping to identify the bounds and clarify what is considered a “network” in terms of far-right milieu online ecosystems in Australia, even in cross-platform environments.¹²

In an era of near-ubiquitous social media usage in Australia, few people confine themselves to only one platform. Far-right extremists and REMVEs are no exception, using an interconnected network of social media and other internet platforms to articulate and spread their ideology, to link up with the like-minded, and to respond to the pressures of online moderation and deplatforming. A growing set of studies have examined Australian REMVE and broader far-right’s use of a single platform. For instance, research has examined the far right’s strategic adoption of narratives and interplay with the far-left on

10 Ibid.

11 Savvas Zannettou, Tristan Caulfield, Emiliano De Cristofaro, Nicolas Kourtellis, Ilias Leontiadis, Michael Sirivianos, Gianluca Stringhini, and Jeremy Blackburn, “The Web Centipede: Understanding How Web Communities Influence Each Other through the Lens of Mainstream and Alternative News Sources,” in *IMC ’17 Proceedings of the 2017 Internet Measurement Conference* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2017), 405–17, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1705.06947>; Jakob Guhl, Julia Ebner, and Jan Rau, *The Online Ecosystem of the German Far-Right* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020), <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ISD-The-Online-Ecosystem-of-the-German-Far-Right-English-Draft-11.pdf>; Stephane J. Baele, Lewys Brace, and Travis G. Coan, “Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem: An Analytical Framework and Research Agenda,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1862895>.

12 Jade Hutchinson, Julian Droogan, Lise Waldek, and Brian Ballsun-Stanton, *Violent Extremist & REMVE Online Ecosystems: Ecological Characteristics for Future Research & Conceptualization* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://resolvenet.org/research/violent-extremist-remve-online-ecosystems-ecological-characteristics-future-research>.

Facebook,¹³ and supporter's response to offline events on Twitter.¹⁴ The far-right and far-right extremists have been shown to spread COVID-19 disinformation on more niche sites such as Gab and Telegram,¹⁵ or express varying levels of in-group solidarity on the neo-Nazi message board Stormfront.¹⁶ However, fewer researchers have adopted a cross-platform perspective to map and explore the wider online ecology the far-right, not to mention far-right REMVE actors, inhabit and use to enhance their in-group identity and spread information.¹⁷ This study adds to the emerging cross-platform research through considering two platforms, Twitter and Gab, examining connections with a much wider international network of internet sites, news sites, and social media platforms. Through providing an examination of the online ecology at a discrete point in time, it provides a more holistic picture of the online networks to which far-right REMVEs are connected, the types of platforms and content shared in those networks, and how this relates to wider events and trends.

The research focused on three one-month time periods spanning 2019: January, April, and September. Rather than conducting a single examination of a year's worth of data we decided to look at three discrete one-month segments over the course of that year to better identify changes across the collection period. The volume of big-data collected and analyzed meant that each three one-month segment still provided many thousands of links and sites linked out to, and thus rich detail into the nature of an Australian far-right milieu ecosystem. Dividing the sample into three one-month windows allowed an exploration of dynamic processes across the networks, and their relationship to wider on- and offline events. Examining the spread of material across the social media ecosystem during three specific time periods also facilitated explorations into the dynamic transfer of content, narratives, and beliefs, especially in the context of changing current events. This examination of a dynamic Australian far-right milieu cross-platform ecosystem over time and in relation to wider events had not yet been attempted and provides new context for other single platform, smaller, and more temporally restricted examinations.¹⁸

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- 13 Peucker, Debra Smith, and Muhammad Iqbal, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Far-Right Movements in Victoria*; Cécile Guerin, Jacob Davey, Mario Peucker, and Thomas J. Fisher, *The Interplay Between Australia's Political Fringes on the Right and Left: Online Messaging on Facebook* (Burwood: Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Cities, Deakin University, 2020), https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Interplay-Between-Australia_final-1.pdf.
 - 14 Emma F. Thomas, Nathan Leggett, David Kernot, Lewis Mitchell, Saranzaya Magsarjav, and Nathan Weber, "Reclaim the Beach: How Offline Events Shape Online Interactions and Networks Amongst Those Who Support and Oppose Right-Wing Protest," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2034222>.
 - 15 Guerin, Peucker, Fisher, and Davey, *A Snapshot of Far-right Activity on Gab in Australia*; Waldek, Droogan, and Ballsun-Stanton, *Online Far right Extremist and Conspiratorial Narratives During the COVID-19 Pandemic*.
 - 16 Ana-Maria Bliuc, John M. Betts, Nicholas Faulkner, Matteo Vergani, Rui Jie Chow, Muhammad Iqbal, and David Best, "The Effects of Local Socio-Political Events on Group Cohesion in Online Far-Right Communities," *PloS One* 15, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230302>; Ana-Maria Bliuc, John Betts, Matteo Vergani, Muhammad Iqbal, and Kevin Dunn, "Collective Identity Changes in Far-Right Online Communities: The Role of Offline Intergroup Conflict," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 8 (2019): 1770–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819831779>.
 - 17 Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales*; Waldek, Droogan, and Ballsun-Stanton, *Online Far right Extremist and Conspiratorial Narratives During the COVID-19 Pandemic*.
 - 18 For example: Guerin, Davey, Peucker, and Fisher, *The Interplay Between Australia's Political Fringes on the Right and Left*; Cécile Guerin, Mario Peucker, Thomas J. Fisher, and Jacob Davey, *A Snapshot of Far-right Activity on Gab in Australia* (Burwood: Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, Deakin University, 2021), https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/A-Snapshot-of-Far-Right-Activity-on-Gab-in-Australia_final.pdf.

This study drew on automated computational methods to collect and analyze very large volume data samples. In total, 9,124 tweets (Twitter) and 393,430 toots (Gab) were analyzed, resulting in a sample of 1,103 links from Twitter, and 148,621 links from Gab.¹⁹ These links were explored in two ways. We first examined the 25 most highly engaged hostnames contained in the links. In keeping with the emerging literature,²⁰ we found a prevalence of links out to social media platforms and alternative conservative news sites, mostly derived from the United States (US). US sites dominated both samples, particularly Gab, with fewer topmost engaged links to specifically Australian content or content about Australian issues. In addition to this countermedia news ecology, we identified social media platforms as being the second most highly linked to category. These included both mainstream platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, as well as alternative platforms where far-right extremist content is prevalent, such as Gab and Bitchute.

It should be noted that we did not identify any links to obviously illegal or explicitly violent materials from among the top 25 most engaged sites linked out to. However, the topmost engaged sites constitute only a minor fraction of the total number of links collected in our samples, and it is likely that links to more extreme and explicit material exist, but were not within the top 25 most engaged destinations. We also identified many links to material that had been removed, which could suggest that some material may have subsequently been the target of moderation or removed voluntarily by posters.

We then performed a qualitative examination of the types of content to which the topmost engaged links led. This was determined by the most highly engaged hostnames and by the most highly engaged discrete links. ‘Engagement’ refers to those hostnames and discrete links that received the highest frequency of interaction as measured by number of likes, replies, retweets and so on. We followed and thematically analyzed 96 distinct links from the Twitter, and 457 distinct links from the Gab samples, based upon hostname, as well as the top 10 links by engagement for each of the three months. We found that a significant proportion of the links led to content focused on US news, particularly politics. Stories about then President Trump, the supposed excesses of the US political left, immigration, the environment, and far-right international politics were all present in high numbers. This is not to say that any of this content or the individuals that the content is about were necessarily extremist or outside of the mainstream. Indeed, many of these topics were part of popular discussion around the world at the time. The Gab sample was dominated by US-focused content, while in comparison to Gab, the Twitter sample included a higher proportion of Australian focused content and themes.

19 There is a significant difference in content-count between the Twitter and Gab data. This was due to differences in the collection method used across platforms. For Gab, we were able to use their API to gather user content compatible with our snowball methodology (described below). The snowball identification of accounts was not well supported in 2019 by Twitter’s Historical Powertrack bulk data service. Limitations on the number of specific accounts searchable with this service combined with limitations on geolocating our results to accounts located in New South Wales, Australia, produced the reduced number of tweets in our sample.

20 Guhl, Ebner, and Rau, *The Online Ecosystem of the German Far-Right*; Stuart Macdonald, Kamil Yilmaz, Chamin Herath, J. M. Berger, and Maura Conway, *The European Far-Right Online: An Exploratory Twitter Outlink Analysis of German & French Far-Right Online Ecosystems* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37805/remve2022.3>.

Finally, we examined the top ten hashtags from account information, and the top ten from all posts, from across the three time periods on Twitter and Gab. Again, we saw the focus on US politics reflected in this sample, and on Gab the increasing presence of references to QAnon.²¹

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS: LINKS PLATFORMS, & GLOBAL EVENTS

Understanding user generated links

Far-right extremist communities have been early and sustained adopters of online digital media.²² This includes both the forums and chatrooms that dominated earlier internet architecture, as well as the more recent user-generated and networked digital communications platforms characteristic of social media.

Digital technologies offer significant opportunities to build and maintain national and transnational networks, including those made up of far-right extremist and REMVE individuals reliant on a mix of mainstream and alternative social media platforms, media sites, and other forums. Ecosystem-like online networks based around hateful narratives have been shown to coalesce and exist across national borders, and span diverse digital platforms and cultures.²³ These digital networks are partly built from vast numbers of hyperlinks ('links'), that collectively provide a widespread and transnational organizational and social basis for distributed far-right communities.²⁴ Other studies on online outlinking, however, have shown that, at least in terms of far right online ecosystems, networks appear to be largely contained within their own national borders.²⁵

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- 21 For more on QAnon, see: James Suber and Jacob Ware, "Examining Extremism: QAnon," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-qanon>.
 - 22 Maura Conway, Ryan Scrivens, and Logan Macnair, "Right-Wing Extremists' Persistent Online Presence: History and Contemporary Trends," *ICCT Policy Brief* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.19165/2019.3.12>; Ryan Scrivens and Maura Conway, "The Roles of 'Old' and 'New' Media Tools and Technologies in the Facilitation of Violent Extremism and Terrorism," in *The Human Factor of Cybercrime*, eds. Rutger Leukfeldt and Thomas J. Holt (Routledge, 2019), 286–309.
 - 23 N. F. Johnson, R. Leahy, N. Johnson Restrepo, N. Velasquez, M. Zheng, P. Manrique, P. Devkota, and S. Wuchty, "Hidden Resilience and Adaptive Dynamics of the Global Online Hate Ecology," *Nature* 573, no. 7773 (2019): 261–65, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1494-7>.
 - 24 Joan Donovan, Becca Lewis, and Brian Friedberg, "Parallel Ports: Sociotechnical Change from the Alt-Right to Alt-Tech," in *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US*, eds. Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), 49–66, <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/12374>.
 - 25 Stuart Macdonald, Kamil Yilmaz, Chamin Herath, J.M. Berger, Suraj Lakhani, Lella Nouri, and Maura Conway, *The European Far-Right Online: An Exploratory Twitter Outlink Analysis of German & French Far-Right Online Ecosystems* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://resolvenet.org/research/european-far-right-online-exploratory-twitter-outlink-analysis-german-french-far-right>.

Direct site-to-site links are a visible and essential part of any transnational network, allowing sites to link with one another and create broader informational networks that transcend borders.²⁶ In addition to knitting together networks of sites into a holistic ecosystem, links from social media pages serve a distinct social function that is both intentional and communicative.²⁷ Networks of links emerge from a set of strategic choices made by individuals, and as such the resulting hyperlink networks reflect social and cultural communities.²⁸ Indeed, an online ecosystem can be conceptualized as a dynamic network of linked entities that mirror,²⁹ but also create and sustain, a social movement.

Twitter versus Gab

The data in this study draws from two distinct social media platforms – Twitter and Gab. Both platforms have been used by far-right as well as REMVE populations in Australia and elsewhere.³⁰ Twitter is a mainstream social media platform that has moderated and removed violent and extremist content and users. Gab, in contrast, is an alternative platform created to serve as an environment that promotes free speech with minimal attempts to moderate or remove content and users. Both platforms facilitate the connection of people, the circulation of news and information, and the exposure of users to specific worldviews. Including both Twitter and Gab data samples in the paper, therefore, provides useful contrast into understandings of how far-right milieu and violent extremist communities interacting within them use and interact within an online ecosystem.

Twitter is a micro-blogging social media networking site. It functions as a virtual megaphone, enabling users to broadcast opinions about trending and engaging content. Twitter is conceived in the public as a place where people go to talk about real world events and politics. The enduring prevalence of political commentary is reflected in the data sample examined in this paper. Twitter has proactively sought to moderate and remove far-right extremist key words and users. However, our research demonstrated ongoing interaction between Twitter and the alternative media environment that provided opportunities for continuing dissemination and validation of far-right narratives and thus community building and

26 Han Woo Park, "Hyperlink Network Analysis: A New Method for the Study of Social Structure on the Web," *Connections* 25, no. 1 (2003): 49–61, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.78.8835>.

27 Annett Heft, Curd Knüpfer, Susanne Reinhardt, and Eva Mayerhöffer, "Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right? Hyperlink Networking among Right-Wing Digital News Sites in Europe and the United States," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 26, no. 2 (2021): 484–504, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1940161220963670>.

28 Juliette De Maeyer, "Towards a Hyperlinked Society: A Critical Review of Link Studies," *New Media & Society* 15, no. 5 (2013): 737–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461444812462851>; Heft, Knüpfer, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer, "Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?"

29 Baele, Brace, and Coan, "Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem."

30 Zannettou, Caulfield, De Cristofaro, Kourtellis, Leontiadis, Sirivianos, Stringhini, and Blackburn, "The Web Centipede"; Donovan, Lewis, and Friedberg, "Parallel Ports"; Yuchen Zhou, Mark Dredze, David A. Broniatowski, and William D. Adler, "Elites and Foreign Actors among the Alt-Right: The Gab Social Media Platform," *First Monday* 24, no. 9 (2019), <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewFile/10062/8072>; Caterina Froio and Bharath Ganesh, "The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter," *European Societies* 21, no. 4 (2019): 513–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494295>; Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, "Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales."

mobilization.³¹ Moderation practices on Twitter can be circumvented by users, as is discussed later in this paper. Research continues to point to the use of Twitter to disseminate ideology and foster social relationships associated with far-right and extremist communities.³² The broader Australian far-right have been shown, for example, to use Twitter to reinforce a collective in-group identity in the face of opposing far-left activists.³³

Gab is a niche social media site known for hosting far-right and conspiratorial extremists banned from more mainstream platforms such as Twitter or Facebook.³⁴ The platform was constructed by Andrew Torba in 2016 with the expressed intention to champion “free speech, individual liberty and the free flow of information online.”³⁵ In 2018, the perpetrator of an antisemitic attack in Pittsburg used Gab to promote his violence immediately before massacring 11 at the Tree of Life synagogue.³⁶ Since then, the site has continued as a place where far-right extremist ideology and narratives can flourish, particularly given the decreasing spaces available on mainstream social media platforms due to moderation and de-platforming.³⁷

After migrating to a fork of the open-source microblogging social network platform Mastodon in June 2019, Gab now resembles Twitter in its user interface.³⁸ The site’s combination of community-building architecture and the presence of extremist narratives, it has been suggested, facilitates an ideal recruitment, identity building, and organizing site for extremist communities.³⁹ The use of Gab by active far-right extremist communities as a place to socialize and connect with the likeminded—i.e., through shar-

- 31 Matthew C. Benigni, Kenneth Joseph, and Kathleen M. Carley, “Online Extremism and the Communities That Sustain It: Detecting the ISIS Supporting Community on Twitter,” *PLoS One* 12, no. 12 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181405>; Julia Ebner, *Going Dark* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).
- 32 Manuela Caianni and Linda Parenti, *European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet* (Routledge, 2013); Froio and Ganesh, “The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter”; Baele, Brace, and Coan, “Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem.”
- 33 Thomas, Leggett, Kernot, Mitchell, Magsarjav, and Weber, “Reclaim the Beach.”
- 34 Bobby Allyn, “Social Media Site Gab Is Surging, Even As Critics Blame It For Capitol Violence,” *NPR*, January 17, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/17/957512634/social-media-site-gab-is-surging-even-as-critics-blame-it-for-capitol-violence>; Heather J. Williams, Alexandra T. Evans, Jamie Ryan, Erik E. Mueller, and Bryce Downing, *The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream* (RAND Corporation, 2021), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA1400/PEA1458-1/RAND_PEA1458-1.pdf.
- 35 Greta Jasser, Jordan McSwiney, Ed Pertwee, and Savvas Zannettou, “‘Welcome to #GabFam’: Far-Right Virtual Community on Gab,” *New Media & Society* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F14614448211024546>.
- 36 Erica Guthrie, “Gab: Its History and Influence in the Tree of Life Shooting,” *The Pitt News*, October 29, 2018, <https://pittnews.com/article/137102/news/gab-its-history-and-influence-in-the-tree-of-life-shooting/>.
- 37 Donovan, Lewis, and Friedberg, “Parallel Ports”; Williams, Evans, Ryan, Mueller, and Downing, *The Online Extremist Ecosystem*; John D. Gallacher, Marc W. Heerdink, Miles Hewstone, “Online Engagement Between Opposing Political Protest Groups via Social Media is Linked to Physical Violence of Offline Encounters,” *Social Media + Society* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F2056305120984445>; A 2021 data-breach that revealed Gab investors included prominent neo-Nazis and antisemitic QAnon propagandists, see: Jason Wilson, “Gab: Hack Gives Unprecedented Look into Platform Used by Far Right,” *The Guardian*, March 11, 2021, <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/11/gab-hack-neo-nazis-qanon-conspiracy-theories>.
- 38 Robertson, Adi, “How the Biggest Decentralized Social Network is Dealing with its Nazi Problem,” *The Verge*, 2019, www.theverge.com/2019/7/12/20691957/mastodon-decentralized-social-network-gab-migration-fediverse-app-blocking.
- 39 Lucas Lima, Julio C. S. Reis, Philippe Melo, Fabricio Murai, Leandro Araujo, Pantelis Vikatos, and Fabricio Benevenuto, “Inside the Right-Leaning Echo Chambers: Characterizing Gab, an Unmoderated Social System,” in *2018 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM)* (Barcelona: IEEE, 2018), 515–22, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ASO->

ing and commenting on entertaining memes and stories that reinforce in-group status.⁴⁰ A previous study of Gab's use by the Australian far-right showed the site's population grew significantly during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic as it became a hub for antisemitic COVID-19 disinformation.⁴¹ While other research has focused on the types of Australian far-right content hosted on Gab,⁴² the current study focuses on the wider social media ecosystem that Australian-aligned Gab users inhabit, and the sorts of material that they commonly talk about, share, and link out to.

The link analysis points to key differences in the far-right milieu of Twitter and Gab users and how they engaged with the broader online ecosystem in 2019. These differences may reflect, in part, the distinctive communities and moderation strategies. Linked content from Twitter was more diverse in terms of perspectives and worldviews, making it more likely that users in our curated sample will have encountered opposing content and communities. This is in-line with Twitter's characterization as a platform that can encourage argument between groups at different ends of an ideological spectrum. However, there is some evidence to suggest these types of meetings can result in an entrenching of values and beliefs and a further polarization between communities.⁴³ In contrast, the linked content from the Gab data sample revealed a more homogenous body of referenced content, reducing the likely exposure of users to alternative or counter perspectives. In this sense, it can be said that Gab operates as a relatively self-contained echo chamber where users' beliefs and narratives can be strengthened and reinforced. The activities across the two platforms suggest that Twitter is likely to represent more of a 'gateway' environment where users are exposed to differing perspectives. Psychologically, however, this experience of communal shouting across partisan lines may encourage individuals to reinforce their commitment to the original ideological position and become, over time, more extreme (but not necessarily violent). In contrast, Gab, it could be said, supports a more inward-looking community for users seeking validation and community support for pre-existing far-right and extremist narratives.

Like most social media platforms, Twitter and Gab consist of different online architectures, provide differing affordances for their users, and attract somewhat different populations. Our two samples are therefore not perfectly comparable in any scientific sense. Indeed, in the absence of being able to track individuals across accounts (due to limitations imposed by ethical considerations), this lack of perfect comparability is a challenge for much cross-platform or ecosystem-oriented examinations of online networks. That said, neither Twitter nor Gab populations exist in complete separation from the other, as the substantial number of links found from Gab out to Twitter accounts demonstrates. Our analysis of two very different samples provides a starting point for further research by illuminating similarities and differences in otherwise differing, yet connected, platforms.⁴⁴ Examining these two populations in light of

[NAM.2018.8508809](#); Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, "Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales"; Jasser, McSwiney, Pertwee, and Zannettou, "'Welcome to #GabFam!'"

40 Ebner, *Going Dark*.

41 Guerin, Peucker, Fisher, and Davey, *A Snapshot of Far-right Activity on Gab in Australia*.

42 Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-wing Extremists in New South Wales*; Guerin, Peucker, Fisher, and Davey, *A Snapshot of Far-right Activity on Gab in Australia*.

43 Jonathan Bright, Marchal Nahema, Ganesh Bharath, and Stevan Rudinac, "Echo Chambers Exist! (But They're Full of Opposing Views)", *ArXiv*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2001.11461>.

44 Hutchinson, et.al., *Violent Extremist & REMVE Online Ecosystems*.

differences in the relative levels of platform moderation, for example, provides insight into whether the platforms are being used similarly or differently, including through variations in content hosted.

The 2019 data collection period

This project selected three one-month slices of social media data taken from a larger set covering the full calendar year of 2019. These were the months of January, April, and September. The three discrete time periods were used to facilitate the possible identification of temporal shifts within an online ecosystem. To contextualize the content appearing within these periods, this section provides an overview of the significant current affairs that occurred during this period, and that were discussed on social media.

2019 was a year dominated by civilian protests across the world.⁴⁵ These ranged from protests in Hong Kong sparked by the Chinese extradition bill, ongoing protests in Sudan following the overthrow of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, and Iranians protesting the end of fuel subsidies.⁴⁶ Other significant protests occurred in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Bolivia, Chile, India, Nicaragua, and Russia. The only protest that generated significant content in the analyzed data samples, however, were the French protests that continued to grow throughout January 2019. These protests saw the genesis of the yellow-vest symbol that, while initially associated with the French protest movement, quickly went viral and became associated with broader anti-government debates and movements.⁴⁷ The mixing of global and local events through viral imagery is reflected in the prominence of the hashtags referencing the yellow vest and Sydney/Australia in the Twitter January 2019 data-sample.

2019 also saw another significant global protest movement over calls for action to address climate change. September 2019, for example, saw thousands of young Australian's walk out classrooms across the country in support of global rallies being held on Climate change inspired by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg.⁴⁸ These protests were framed by the conservative side of Australian politics as being associated with 'anarchists'.⁴⁹ An environmentalist concern was reflected in the high number of links we saw out to environmentalist themes – both broadly 'positive' (i.e., links to survivalist sites offering support on how to survive ecological disasters) to more 'negative' depictions of Greta Thunberg or debate about deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon under President Bolsonaro.

There were several terrorist attacks perpetrated by far-right violent extremist actors during 2019. The deadliest and most consequential attack occurred on March 19th when Australian man Brendon Tarrant

45 Fiona Gargulio, "2019: A Year of Protest," *IPI Global Observatory*, December 20, 2019, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/12/a-year-of-protest/>.

46 Robin Wright, "The Story of 2019: Protests in Every Corner of the Globe," *The New Yorker*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-story-of-2019-protests-in-every-corner-of-the-globe>.

47 Peter Wilkin, "Fear of a Yellow Planet: The Gilets Jaunes and the End of the Modern World-System," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 26, no. 1 (2020): 70–102. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2020.902>.

48 "Global Climate Strike Sees 'Hundreds of Thousands' of Australians Rally Across the Country," *ABC News*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-20/school-strike-for-climate-draws-thousands-to-australian-rallies/11531612>.

49 Paul Karp, "Scott Morrison Threatens Crackdown on Protesters Who Would 'Deny Liberty'," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2019, <https://amp.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/01/scott-morrison-threatens-crackdown-on-secondary-boycotts-of-mining-companies>.

perpetrated mass shootings during Friday prayers in two places of Islamic worship in Christchurch, New Zealand. Tarrant published his manifesto online prior to the attack and then live-streamed the first shooting on Facebook.⁵⁰ Subsequent attacks inspired by Tarrant and his manifesto also involved an online component as well as the production and digital dissemination of a right-wing extremist inspired manifesto.⁵¹ One surprising aspect of this research was the notable absence of hyperlinked content associated with any of these attacks in the most engaged data. However, we did identify links that were no longer active and unretrievable through digital archival tools. These findings may reflect the novel legislation passed by the Australian government in April 2019 in the aftermath of the Christchurch attack.⁵² This legislation targets internet, hosting, and content services who fail to remove ‘abhorrent violent material’.

More widely, 2019 saw many shifts in global dynamics. From election cycles and impeachment proceedings, to dynamics surrounding asylum seekers and refugees in Europe, and the resignation of UK leaders in the aftermath of Brexit.

The most highly engaged domains and themes reviewed in this report were rarely Australia-focused. This is despite political elections in Australia occurring in 2019 at both a state and federal level. In March, the Liberal-National coalition won the New South Wales state election.⁵³ Then in May, Scott Morrison’s Liberal-National coalition government was narrowly re-elected to Federal parliament.⁵⁴ The lead-up to the federal election was reflected in the prevalence of hashtags referencing Australian politics in the April data sample.

The diversity of world events across 2019 is not reflected in the content spreading across the networks examined in this study. Some world events, such as the YellowVestAustralia protests, the migration of refugees in Europe, or the actions of the Brazilian President in the Amazon, do generate engagement and reporting. However, not even the 2019 Australian federal election could crowd out an overwhelming focus on US cultural and political events seen in our samples. Again, this may suggest an interest in US culture and political events writ large, rather than one unique to the Australian far right milieu alone.

50 Nick Perry and Mark Baker, “New Zealand Mosque Shooter Broadcast Slaughter on Facebook,” *AP News*, March 16 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/shootings-ap-top-news-international-news-arrests-immigration-ce9e1d267af149dab40e3e5391254530>.

51 Examples of these attacks include the Poway Synagogue shooting in California in April 2019, the El Paso Walmart shooting in August 2019, and the Halle synagogue attack in Germany in October 2019.

52 This refers to the Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material) Bill 2019. See: <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22legislation%2Fbillhome%2Fs1201%22>. For more information on the Bill, see: https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook46p/Cybersafety.

53 Paige Cockburn, “NSW Election Delivers Liberal Win, Gladys Berejiklian Becomes First Elected Female Premier,” *ABC News*, March 24, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-23/nsw-election-results-see-coalition-return/10929808?nw=0&r=HtmlFragment>.

54 Lucy Sweeny, Henry Belot, Peter March and Dean Bilton, “Election Results 2019: Scott Morrison’s Coalition Wins, Bill Shorten to Stand Down in Wake of Defeat for Labor,” *ABC News*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-17/live-coverage-election-results-2019-scott-morrison-bill-shorten/11118632>.

METHOD: DEFINITIONS, DATA, & ANALYSIS

Definitions: Far Right versus REMVE

Data from both platforms were gathered using an automated snowballing technique that cascaded out from a select set of REMVE user accounts. We began by identifying a selection of Australian violent extremist ‘seed’ accounts from both platforms. These were identified through consultations with subject matter experts, anti-racist NGOs, Australian law enforcement, and former Australian far-right extremists. The snowballing technique allowed us to identify accounts that interacted with these REMVE accounts – i.e., through liking, sharing, commenting on posts or other forms of direct interaction. In this way, we were able to cascade out from an initial core of several dozen REMVE to a wider network of many thousands of users in their milieu. The resulting Gab and Twitter datasets represent social networks of individuals who had engaged with accounts and/or content specifically associated with REMVE actors.

We have adopted the terms ‘REMVE’ and ‘far-right milieu’ when referring to our snowballed data samples on both platforms. This is because we were unable to label all users in our datasets as specifically being REMVE, although our sample began with and was generated out from identified REMVE user accounts.

We follow Cas Mudde’s understanding of the ‘far-right’ to refer to a distinct and extreme subset of the right-wing political movement that advocates nativist and authoritarian impulses.⁵⁵ The term ‘far-right’ remains a broad and contested definition, however, that includes many disparate political groups, movements, and individuals, including those that support democratic norms and institutions, and those who reject them through violent and illegal means.⁵⁶

Our use of the terms ‘far-right’ and ‘far-right milieu’, therefore, does not refer to, or make any assertions about, illegal or violent activity among our sample. Indeed, there was a distinct lack of links leading out to explicitly violent or illegal content from among the most highly engaged destinations we surveyed. Thus, this paper distinguishes between ‘far-right’ and ‘REMVE’ in the same manner as Macdonald et al.:⁵⁷

- **Far right:** “...situated on the ‘right-wing’ of the global political spectrum and sharing ‘a core ideology of nationalism, xenophobia, welfare chauvinism, and law and order’ (Mudde 1995). We use this term broadly to identify groups, ideologies, content, and individuals falling within that ideological spectrum.”⁵⁸

55 Cas Mudde, “Right-Wing Extremism Analysed: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideologies of Three Alleged Right-wing Extremist Parties (NPD, NDP, CP’86),” *European Journal of Political Research* 27, no. 2 (1995): 203-24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1995.tb00636.x>.

56 *Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism* (United Nations Security Council: Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2020). <https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/news/2020/apr/un-cted-trend-alert-right-wing-extremism-4-20.pdf>.

57 Macdonald, Yilmaz, Herath, Berger, and Conway, *The European Far-Right Online*, 7.

58 Ibid.

- **Far right violent extremist or far-right REMVE:** “...a more specific, fringe subset of the far right, comprised of far-right individuals, groups, movements, or content that explicitly legitimate, promote, or support violence.”⁵⁹

Seeing that our data samples are made up a social network of users who interact with Australian REMVE accounts, it is reasonable to assume that some of these users may have connected to this network due to reasons other than ideological conformity. For this reason, we curated our snowballed sample to remove any accounts that were clearly from journalists or other obvious observers. However, we acknowledge that our data likely includes some users not ideologically aligned with the far-right. As such, we use the term ‘far-right milieu’ for our snowballed data sample.

As already noted, we do not claim that the accounts sampled belong to ‘violent extremists’. This is partly because of the inherent problems with identifying violent and criminal individuals from their social media accounts alone. However, by looking at the wider social and technical ecosystem that sustain those few individuals who go on to commit acts of illegality and violence, this research maps the broader online context within which those who perform violent or terroristic acts can be situated.

The utility in performing link mapping and analysis of a network of far-right milieu accounts is that it allows researchers and policymakers to understand the wider social context, or online milieu, within which REMVE violent actors can emerge or interact. Far-right ideologies and extremism exist online as a set of broad social movements that may sustain specific fringe REMVE groups and individual violent actors. However, this does not negate the potential that actors within this milieu may also present a challenge to liberal democratic norms despite whether the individuals involved are explicitly violent or not. Consequently, it is useful for academics and policy makers to better understand this wider cross-platform online movement and network through methods such as link analysis.

In summary:

- Our original set of social media accounts used to generate the snowballed data sample were taken from identified far-right extremists engaged in REMVE.
- Our snowballed data sample expands beyond these REMVE individuals to include a larger collection of individuals who exist as part of broader social networks. We label this sample ‘far-right milieu’ to distinguish it from a fringe subset of more extreme REMVE individuals.
- Finally, we adopt the cautious label ‘far-right milieu’ when describing our snowballed samples as a whole. This is because of the high likelihood that, despite our efforts at cleaning and curating our data to remove non-far-right observers, or ‘lurkers’, a small number of non-ideologically aligned individuals likely remain in the sample.

59 Ibid.

Data

The Twitter data sample reflects conversations from 3,321 accounts that had engaged with an initial sample of 27 Australian users identified by the research team as REMVE and as having engaged in illegal activities spanning a 12-month period. After cleaning, the data-sample generated a total of 37,442 tweets (inclusive of replies, retweets, and quote tweets) from the 3,321 users. This included all tweets to and from the 27 accounts, in addition to retweets and quoted tweets. We focused on conversations to and from the 27 users of interest and not full public tweet histories for the duration from 3,321 accounts.

For the mapping we sampled three one-months slices of the data that included all tweets from the months of January, April, and September. This resulted in the identification of 9,124 tweets containing 1,103 distinct links. See Table 1.

Table 1. Twitter: Total accounts, Tweets, links, and hostnames

Twitter Data				
	Accounts	Tweets	Links	Hostnames linked to
January	515	2,877	311	100
April	612	3,279	368	119
September	652	2,968	424	129
Total		9,124	1,103	

The Gab data sample reflects collected interactions from an initial set of 254 Gab REMVE users. The snowballing technique resulted in the collection of conversations and reposts between c.a. 40,000 accounts over the same 12-month period. The bulk of these were posted in 2019. The final dataset includes 1,357,91 ‘toots’ (the preferred Gab terminology for posts) taken from 23,836 accounts.

For the link mapping we sampled three one-months slices of the data that included all toots from the months of January, April, and September. This resulted in the identification of 393,430 toots containing 148,621 distinct links. See Table 2.

Table 2. Gab: Total accounts, Toots, links, and hostnames

Gab Data				
	Accounts	Toots	Links	Hostnames linked to
January	6,706	109,785	47,659	3,013
April	6,743	126,076	51,971	3,251
September	7,025	157,569	48,991	3,539
Total		393,430	148,621	

All collected data was aggregated and de-identified to ensure the full anonymity of the individuals online. This anonymization was undertaken to ensure compliance with the requirements of human research ethics. For this reason, it was not possible to track discrete accounts or individuals across time periods or across platforms.

There are few national borders on the internet, and this makes it challenging to geolocate social media accounts and users to specific regions or countries. We used several techniques to ensure that our sample retained an Australian focus. These included manually removing any clearly non-Australian accounts, as well as un-reciprocated follows (for instance out to political figures). Our Twitter data was purchased using the Historical Powertrack service. This allowed us to filter the data to users who were positively identified through geo-location as being from the Australian state of New South Wales. Despite this, the term ‘Australian-aligned’ is used in this report in recognition that although we are confident that our dataset is largely made up of Australian users, we accept that it will inevitably include some accounts from differing regions.

Analysis

We analyzed the data in two stages. In the first stage we identified and examined the most engaged hostnames found in Gab and Twitter for one-month time periods over January, April, and September. The results are presented in Appendices 1 and 2. The 25 most common hostnames for each of these six time periods for each platform were identified using two measures: the number of distinct links leading to that hostname; and the total engagement figures associated with that hostname. We prioritized engagement over count when identifying which hostnames were most important.

In this paper we wanted to understand the dynamic nature of how content is used in an online environment. Taking the ‘count’ measure associated with any given link only tells us how many times the link appears in a post in our database. The ‘count’ therefore is insufficient when seeking to think about how many people actually viewed the link. To explore this behavior, we adopted a proxy measure we called engagement because social media platforms do not publish view counts (or ‘impressions’). Engagement in this report has been calculated as the frequency of interactions, likes/upvotes, and reposts associated with a given social media post within the network.⁶⁰ There are limitations to using this proxy measure. Some links ranked highly despite only having been posted once within the sample. This ranking occurred because these very highly engaged links had already generated significant interaction across the whole platform before being tweeted or tooted once inside our curated sample communities.

After ascertaining and listing the most engaged hostnames, we then followed a sample from the most highly engaged from each of the one-month periods and performed a qualitative analysis of the content found at the other end of the link.

The second stage used qualitative examination involved a thematic analysis. Content found at the end of each link was thematically coded using a grounded theory approach used previously in research on Islamist e-zines Inspire and Dabiq.⁶¹ This method consisted of an iterative analytic process designed to facilitate the identification of unexpected themes.⁶² The first step in this process was the manual following of all selected links and their initial coding according to main themes identified. Since this process was inherently subjective and necessitated a level of interpretation by the researchers, a combination of two coding frameworks were employed to enhance analytical rigor.⁶³ First, a collection of likely themes was identified from previous work done by the project team on online far-right extremism in Australia.⁶⁴ These expected themes included well-known far-right extremist narratives such as ‘anti-immigration’, ‘anti-left’, ‘anti-Islam’, ‘anti-Semitism’, ‘white nationalism’, and ‘white supremacy’. Not all these themes ended up being identified in the sample.

When the content found at the end of a link did not match any pre-established theme, however, an inductive grounded theory framework was used to draw additional codes from the available data. In this way, themes were generated from within the dataset itself rather the solely from our own pre-established theoretical viewpoint. One significant addition that came out of this iterative approach was to divide the content into ‘news’ versus ‘non-news’, with most of the content from both Twitter and Gab

60 Lise Waldek, “The Fission of the Forbidden: The Popularity of Video Content in an Online Right-Wing Extremist Environment,” *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 5, no. 1 (2021): 51–67.

61 Julian Droogan and Shane Peattie, “Mapping the Thematic Landscape of Dabiq Magazine,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 6 (2017): 591–620, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2017.1303443>; Julian Droogan and Shane Peattie, “Reading Jihad: Mapping the Shifting Themes of Inspire Magazine,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, no. 4 (2018): 684–717, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1211527>.

62 Jennifer Attride-Stirling, “Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Research* 1, no. 3 (2001): 385–405, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F146879410100100307>.

63 Rosaline S. Barbour, “Checklists for Improving Rigour in Qualitative Research: A Case of the Tail Wagging the Dog?” *BMJ* 322 (2001): 1115, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.322.7294.1115>.

64 Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales*.

links leading to some forms of news sites (either established or alternative in nature). In addition, a series of additional themes were identified across both news and non-news sources. For example, prominent themes associated with environmentalism, sexual violence, economics, and social media were added to the framework (See Tables 3 and 4).

One challenge was distinguishing between closely related themes.⁶⁵ Following the first cycle of coding, the results were repeatedly examined for salient, common, or significant themes. Thematic lists were scrutinized for repeated topics and keywords.⁶⁶ At the same time, similar themes were grouped together and combined into wider themes that were sufficiently specific to be discrete, while broad enough to encapsulate a set of related ideas. This refinement allowed for the reduction of many similar and overlapping themes into a manageable set of key issues represented in the links.⁶⁷

This method allowed us to identify much greater granularity of thematic content for our Gab sample, due to its larger size and high number of links out to news stories. This allowed us to provide a more in-depth thematic analysis of the Gab content than was possible with the Twitter content.

For Twitter, many of the most engaged hostnames were represented by only one instance of an extremely highly engaged link.⁶⁸ In total, over the three one-month periods we followed and analyzed 96 distinct links from Twitter. The results are presented in Table 3.

For Gab, each of the top engaged hostnames had a large number of distinct links leading to it. In this case, we followed and qualitatively analyzed the top ten most highly engaged links from each of the top ten hostnames from this list. This was done for each of the three collection periods. In some cases, however, there were multiple most engaged links occupying tenth place, meaning that we followed more than the expected 100 links for each month. In total, rather than following and analyzing 300 links across three months, we followed 457. The results are presented in Table 4.

To catch any highly engaged links that led to hostnames not appearing in the top 25, we also followed and analyzed the ten most highly engaged links overall (rather than by hostname) for each of the three month-long periods for each platform. The results, including short descriptions of the content, are presented in Appendices 3 and 4.

65 For example, ‘US news - border security’ versus ‘US news - anti-immigration’.

66 Gery W. Ryan and H. Russell Bernard, “Techniques to Identify Themes,” *Field Methods* 15, no. 1 (2003): 85–109, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1525822X02239569>.

67 For this method, see: Attride-Stirling, “Thematic Networks.”

68 For example, the two most engaged Twitter links for January were to kamalaharris.org and TheBestMenCanBe.org. The method used for identifying ‘highly engaged’ resulted in some nuances in the data. On Twitter, for example, two of the most highly engaged hostnames were represented by only one instance of a link. The two tweets are examples of already highly engaged links on the platform that have then been retweeted by a user in our data sample. The pre-existing high engagement of these links may well represent the well-funded marketing campaigns behind Kamala Harris’ election campaign and Gillette’s product placement.

In some cases, the links were broken or led to sites that no longer existed, or to accounts that had been closed or suspended. This may have been due to either platform moderation efforts, deletion by an original author, or to processes of degradation. When the links were no longer viable, we adopted two methods to reconstruct their content. Where possible we used archival data and The Wayback Machine⁶⁹ to view now removed content. Second, we examined the wording of the URL and, in the case of links to deleted Twitter accounts, the posts in response to the now-removed original tweet. We were able, in some cases, to reconstruct the topic and themes related to most of the links.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION: LINKING TO WHERE?

The links found in the 9,124 Twitter posts contained a total of 100 different hostnames in January, 119 in April, and 129 in September. Tables 9, 10, and 11 in Appendix 1 illustrate the 25 most common hostnames found across the Twitter dataset for each of the three months, ordered by total engagement.

The links in the 393,430 Gab posts contained a total of 3,013 different hostnames in January, 3,251 in April, and 3,539 in September. Tables 12, 13, and 14 in Appendix 2 illustrates the 25 most common hostnames found across the Gab dataset for each of the three months, ordered by total engagement.

A coherent media ecosystem

Despite significant numerical variance in the total number of hostnames present across the Twitter and Gab data, likely due to the differing sample sizes, there is broad consistency in types of hostnames found across both datasets across time. Excluding some variation in the Twitter data (discussed below), the majority of hostnames are of two types: 1. news related sites, and 2. social media platforms.

This is consistent with the broader literature pointing to far-right extremist online ecosystems consisting of a spectrum of digital platforms encompassing social media, alternative media, and other forums related to commercialization and monetization.⁷⁰ Our data reveals a network existing through 2019 that consists of sites that are predominantly news related, but also publishing houses, e-stores, and blogs, as well as social media and other interactive and user-generated spaces.

This blend of news and social media sites provides opportunities for information seeking and sociality. It suggests an internet infrastructure that has emerged to sustain a social movement based on information gathering and sharing online, and in the absence of viable options to collectivize offline or in public.⁷¹ A blending of social media networks and news disseminating sites (as seen in our data) also points to an

69 The Wayback Machine is a digital archive of the World Wide Web founded by the Internet Archive in 1996. The site allows users to access captured archival images of how websites looked in the past. Not all sites have been archived.

70 Baele, Brace, and Coan, "Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem."

71 Donovan, Lewis, and Friedberg, "Parallel Ports"; Baele, Brace, and Coan, "Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem."

online far-right movement that is socially engaged and highly propagandistic across a range of social media platforms and alternative media spaces.

The most engaged Twitter hostnames are more diverse than those found on Gab. While still including a clear majority of news and social media sites, Twitter also includes political websites, URL shorteners, and online commerce. URL shorteners such as bit.ly, j.mp, and trib.al were particularly present in the Twitter sample. These may be used to compact long and complicated URL web addresses to allow them to fit within the Twitter 280-character limit. More nefariously, URL shorteners can also be used to disguise underlying web addresses when posting illegitimate content, or in some cases to track the rate and location of future clicks. However, our study was not able to identify what these URL shortens were used for by the individuals in our sample. One of the most highly engaged hostnames from the Gab sample was a site that can be used to bypass local censorship and circumvents internet service provider filters, granting users the ability to view content that is otherwise prohibited,⁷² and that is popular among online extremist communities.⁷³

It is noteworthy that the two most highly engaged links for Twitter in January were kamalaharris.org and TheBestMenCanBe.org. Both were related to international topical news events and were part of well-funded online campaigns which may have driven engagement higher. Both reflect a single issue rising to very high importance for a relatively short time: Kamala Harris' January 21 presidential campaign announcement; and the January 14 release of a Gillette advertisement that was seen by the far-right as feeding into anti-masculinity and radical feminist narratives.⁷⁴ This is in contrast to previous research that has identified domestic Australian news and public debates as the primary themes of focus.⁷⁵

Social media platforms

Links to other social media platforms featured within the 25 most engaged hostnames from both Twitter and Gab, although at differing rates (compare Appendices 1 and 2). On Twitter, we saw links back to Twitter accounts, and to a lesser degree to YouTube and Facebook. In contrast, highly engaged links from Gab led to mainstream platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, as well as to more bespoke 'fringe' or 'alt-tech' platforms, such as back to Gab and to Bitchute.⁷⁶ This is broadly consistent with research into far-right

72 (Hoffman 2020)

73 (La Morgia et al. 2021)

74 Michael Baggs, "Gillette Faces Backlash and Boycott over '#MeToo Advert'," *BBC*, January 15, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-46874617>.

75 Peucker, Smith, and Iqbal, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Far-Right Movements in Victoria*; Lella Nouri and Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, "Investigating Reclaim Australia and Britain First's Use of Social Media: Developing a New Model of Imagined Political Communities Online," *Journal for Deradicalization* 18 (2019): 1–37, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/183>.

76 Elevated posting of Twitter links on Gab is due to a common mode of interaction in which Twitter posts were reposted onto Gab via automated means. This strategy may be adopted by individuals wanting a superficial presence on the Gab without significantly investing their time and attention onto the platform.

extremism online in the UK showing YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook as the most popular mainstream sites used, and Gab and Telegram being the most popular alt-tech sites.⁷⁷

The inclusion of mainstream and alt-tech sites in the Gab sample is noteworthy. Links lead to highly engaged mainstream platforms used to recruit and disseminate propaganda widely, as well as to alt-tech spaces where extremist narratives dominate. As previous research suggests, alt-tech sites, such as Bitchute⁷⁸, that are built and maintained to function as nodes in the transnational online far-right can be useful for more in-depth indoctrination and identity building.⁷⁹

These networks of links indicate the existence of a complex far-right social network that crisscross mainstream social media platforms, legacy media sites, and the plethora of countermedia social media platforms, media sites, and websites. Gab users frequently linked to mainstream social media sites such as Twitter and YouTube as well as linking to content posted on legacy media sites. Interestingly, we saw less evidence of Twitter users linking to Gab and other parts of the countermedia environment, although this may reflect Twitter's moderation policy or that relatively few people who use Gab and automatically repost content to Twitter.

The presence of highly-engaged links from Gab to mainstream sites such as Twitter and YouTube, but not the other way around from Twitter to Gab, suggests a flow of links from far-right alt-tech spaces out to more mainstream sites.⁸⁰ A Gab user, for instance, may attempt to boost the credibility of their links by linking to a mainstream Twitter or YouTube account that is 'up the chain' and thus more highly esteemed.⁸¹ If successful, this linking can result in the appropriation of non-extreme content hosted on mainstream platforms through a migration of users from an alt-tech far-right dominated platform and, in particular, the addition of their extremist commentary. This suggests that there is a value placed on linking from Gab to more mainstream sites. This may be due to the practice of commenting on issues of cultural relevance current in the discourse of mainstreamed social media and news platforms. It also may have the effect of 'colonizing' comments sections with far-right extremist commentary and trolling, spreading of extremist narratives and propaganda, and possibly recruiting people to far-right extremist ideology ('red pilling').

The platform Gab has been described as facilitating social networks characterized by the existence of a far-right echo-chamber.⁸² However, the flow of highly engaged links from Gab into mainstream digital

77 Frank Andrews and Ambrose Pym, "The Websites Sustaining Britain's Far-Right Influencers," *Bellingcat*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2021/02/24/the-websites-sustaining-britains-far-right-influencers/>.

78 Bitchute is a far-growing UK-based video sharing site. Started in 2017, the site has been heavily used by REMVE populations to spread hateful and extremist material.

79 Donovan, Lewis, and Friedberg, "Parallel Ports"; Baele, Brace, and Coan, "Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem."

80 Zannettou, Caulfield, De Cristofaro, Kourtellis, Leontiadis, Sirivianos, Stringhini, and Blackburn, "The Web Centipede."

81 Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, "Data And Society: Media Manipulation And Disinformation Online," *Data & Society* (2017), https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/DataAndSociety_MediaManipulationAndDisinformationOnline.pdf; Charlie Warzel, "What Happens on Facebook?" *Galaxy Brain*, August 19, 2021, <https://warzel.substack.com/p/what-happens-on-facebook>.

82 Zannettou, Caulfield, De Cristofaro, Kourtellis, Leontiadis, Sirivianos, Stringhini, and Blackburn, "The Web Centipede."

spaces indicates the importance of understanding networked behaviors across platforms. The flow of non-extreme and extreme content and discussion across the network incorporates all aspects of the digital environment. The high engagement of the Gillette advertisement is a good example. This online advertising campaign was accused of being overly ‘woke’ by right wing and men’s rights commentators⁸³ and linked to by far-right communities to reinforce and promote their narratives.⁸⁴ In this way, mainstream content is linked to, commented on, and appropriated to spark debates (both on mainstream and niche platforms) that serves to disseminate narratives as well as helping to reaffirming the beliefs of the in-group already within the network. The connectivity seen in the link analysis between mainstream and countermedia has potential ramifications for moderation strategies, especially when these are focused specifically on the removal of violent extremist or hateful content.

News related sites

Sites related to news distribution accounted for more than 50% of the most engaged hostnames for both samples and across all months. These included both mainstream, traditional, or legacy news outlets (i.e., theatlantic.com, theguardian.com, dailymail.co.uk), as well as an extensive constellation of alternative outlets purporting to distribute right-wing news as a corrective to mainstream narratives (i.e., thegatewaypundit.com, Breitbart.com, infowars.com). On Gab, these news related sites were almost entirely non-Australia, while Australian sites made up a higher, yet still minor, proportion of the Twitter sample. On Gab, the two Australian sites identified were skynews.com, a mainstream conservative news outlet; and theaustralianvanguard.com, a site produced by an alt-right Australian blogger. Twitter included larger numbers of Australian sites (twelve in all) in the top 25 most engaged hostnames. These were split between legacy news sites (i.e., smh.com.au and news.com.au) and conservative political websites (i.e., conservativenationalparty.org and nsw.onenation.org.au).

The striking number of mainstream legacy media groups featured in the sample is consistent with wider research that has found links between far-right tweets and legacy news outlets such theguardian.com, nytimes.com, and bbc.com, and simultaneously to news outlets that have been considered as alt-right—such as Breitbart.com and infowars.com.⁸⁵ This blend of legacy and alt-right news sites is a noted feature of international online far-right ecosystems, where links to traditional media may serve as crucial transnational shared reference points linking geographically dispersed communities.⁸⁶

The presence of links to both legacy and alternative news sites may be partly explained through the presence of differing linking strategies serving alternative purposes. ‘Citational’ links leading to established

83 “Gillette Ad Causes Uproar with Men’s Rights Activists,” *Irish Times*, January 15, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tv-radio-web/gillette-ad-causes-uproar-with-men-s-rights-activists-1.3758621>; Tristan Greene, “Gillette Triggers Twitter’s Right-Wing Elite with ‘Toxic Masculinity’ Ad,” *TNW*, January 15, 2019, <https://thenextweb.com/news/gillette-triggers-twiters-right-wing-elite-with-toxic-masculinity-ad>.

84 Mandie Iveson and Federica Formato, “Men of Today, Soyboys of Tomorrow: Constructions of Masculinities in YouTube Responses to Gillette’s The Best Men Can Be,” *Discourse, Context & Media* 49 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2022.100628>.

85 Zannettou, Caulfield, De Cristofaro, Kourtellis, Leontiadis, Sirivianos, Stringhini, and Blackburn, “The Web Centipede.”

86 Heft, Knüpper, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer, “Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?”

legacy news sources may strengthen the credibility and reputation of a user through their connection with mainstream and reputable sources. This may allow for far-right extremist narratives to move from alternative fringe sources into more mainstream platforms, and to then potentially achieve an agenda-setting function among wider society.⁸⁷

Alternatively, links to ideologically similar sites that confirm established far-right extremist narratives may serve a group identity-building strategy by reinforcing and cementing ideological cohesion and amplifying shared perspectives.⁸⁸ The use of identity-building links has been noted as prevalent among marginalized or extremist groups, particularly when the links are used to criticize opponent groups and actors.⁸⁹

The countermedia ecosystem

A significant number of most engaged news sites from both the Twitter and Gab samples belonged to an alternative digital news infrastructure, rather than to mainstream legacy sites. Links to these alternative right-wing news outlets made up the majority of most engaged news hostnames on Gab, and a lesser fraction on Twitter. On Twitter these came to five of the top 25 hostnames in January, three in April, and four in September. The numbers from Gab were higher, with fully 14 from the top 25 hostnames the January data, and 13 from both April and September. On Gab, these alternative sites appear 40 times across the three month-long samples, while legacy news sites appear eight times. On Twitter, this trend is reversed, with alternative sites appearing 12 times, and legacy sites 30 times.

Variiously labelled ‘alternative’, ‘radical’, or ‘hyperpartisan’ news sites,⁹⁰ the connection between far-right extremism online and alternative digital news infrastructures pushing a radical far-right political philosophy and agenda has been noted internationally⁹¹ and in Australia.⁹² Existing to the right of established and legitimate conservative news outlets such as foxnews.com in the US or skynews.com in Australia, these outlets self-identify as an anti-establishment corrective to more mainstream or legacy media and political opinion.⁹³ Adopting the appearance, style, and tone of mainstream news sources, these sites

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- 87 Robert Faris, Hal Roberts, Bruce Etling, Nikki Bourassa, Ethan Zuckerman, and Yochai Benkler, *Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election* (Berkman Klein Center Research Publication, 2017), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3019414>; Zannettou, Caulfield, De Cristofaro, Kourtellis, Leontiadis, Sirivianos, Stringhini, and Blackburn, “The Web Centipede”; *Trans-Atlantic Journeys of Far-Right Narratives Through Online-Media Ecosystems* (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020). https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TransAtlanticJourneysOfFar-RightNarratives_v4.pdf.
- 88 Froio and Ganesh, “The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter”; Heft, Knüpfer, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer, “Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?”
- 89 Robert Ackland and Rachel Gibson, “Hyperlinks and Networked Communication: A Comparative Study of Political Parties Online,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 16, no. 3 (2013): 231–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2013.774179>.
- 90 Annett Heft, Eva Mayerhöffer, Susanne Reinhardt, and Curd Knüpfer, “Beyond Breitbart: Comparing Right-wing Digital News Infrastructures in Six Western Democracies,” *Policy & Internet* 12, no. 1 (2020): 20–45, <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.219>.
- 91 Heft, Knüpfer, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer, “Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?”
- 92 Imogen Richards, Maria Rae, Matteo Vergani, and Callum Jones, “Political Philosophy and Australian Far-Right Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis of The Unshackled and XYZ,” *Thesis Eleven* 163, no. 1 (2021): 103–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/%2F07255136211008605>.
- 93 Guhl, Ebner, and Rau, *The Online Ecosystem of the German Far-Right*; Heft, Knüpfer, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer, “Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?”; Heft, Mayerhöffer, Reinhardt, and Knüpfer, “Beyond Breitbart.”

create a distorted ‘countermedia’, an alternative knowledge systems that aims to limit democratic values of inclusion, veracity, and fairness, and provide opportunities for far-right political mobilization.⁹⁴ More starkly, these sites have been described as an “ecosystem of online alternative media outlets that masquerade as ‘news’ sources ... potentially contributing to a rise in far-right motivated terrorism.”⁹⁵ With weaker norms of truth-seeking, a higher propensity for including content that confirms identity, and fewer connects out to legacy media spaces, this countermedia ecosystem is particularly susceptible to rumor, disinformation, and conspiratorial content.⁹⁶

Sites typically link to one another, and present hyperpartisan and conspiratorial clickbait content that primarily promotes audience engagement and political mobilization rather than verifiable information. The prevalence in our data of links out to this countermedia ecosystem, particularly from Gab, demonstrates its function as a transnational infrastructure through which narratives and conspiracy theories can be transmitted, new group identities and communities developed, and the further “polarisation and radicalisation of political views” can be enacted.⁹⁷

A parallel media world

The countermedia news sites identified across the sample of most engaged hostnames contain a diverse set of alternative news outlets that, when followed and investigated, offer a strikingly similar set of repeated content presented across multiple forums. This apparent redundancy, with multiple sites apparently presenting the same information, is apparent in the high number of discrete sites that appear in the sample, particularly Gab, and their consistency across the three collection periods. In total, 25 countermedia alternative news sites appear across the three month-long Gab samples, with six sites consistently appearing in the top 25 most engaged across all three (breitbart.com, infowars.com, newswars.com, thegatewaypundit.com, truepundit.com, zerohedge.com). The topmost highly engaged hostnames from Twitter, by comparison, include 12 countermedia alternative news sites, none of which appear consistently across all three samples. Two sites, breitbart.com and thegatewaypundit.com, appear across both the Gab and Twitter samples.

On closer inspection it is apparent that this multiplicity of sites present similar or the same far-right content from a range of differing perspectives. These include straight news sites that mirror the style of legacy outlets (i.e., citizenfreepress.com), news magazines (i.e., frontpagemag.com), video news sites (i.e., brighteon.com), economic and financial news (i.e., zerohedge.com), and even a satirical news site

94 Tuukka Ylä-Anttila, Gwenaëlle Bauvois, and Niko Pyrhönen, “Politicization of Migration in the Countermedia Style: A Computational and Qualitative Analysis of Populist Discourse,” *Discourse Context & Media* 32, no. 100326 (2019): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2019.100326>; Toby Hopp, Patrick Ferrucci, and Chris J. Vargo, “Why Do People Share Ideologically Extreme, False, and Misleading Content on Social Media? A Self-Report and Trace Data–Based Analysis of Countermedia Content Dissemination on Facebook and Twitter,” *Human Communication Research* 46, no. 4 (2020): 357–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqz022>.

95 Guhl, Ebner, and Rau, *The Online Ecosystem of the German Far-Right*, 7.

96 Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, “Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics,” in *Network Propaganda*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2018).

97 Heft, Mayerhöffer, Reinhardt, and Knüpfer, “Beyond Breitbart,” 21.

(babylonbee.com, offering “fake news you can trust”). Sites also sit across a tonal spectrum from those that emulate legacy news outlets, including claims to conform to high journalistic norms and ethics (i.e., Breitbart.com), to those that promote a more explicitly anti-establishment, militant, and conspiratorial content and branding (i.e., InfoWars.com). It is noteworthy that an Australian far-right milieu draws heavily from a constellation of non-Australian sources presenting a set of clear and repeated ‘globalized’ far-right narratives.

The upshot is that these networks of countermedia sources may work to create a largely self-contained parallel media world. With citational hyperlinks leading predominantly to one another,⁹⁸ the network appears to create a relatively homogenous eco-chamber that individuals can link out to from social media to support far-right narratives. Within this networked echo chamber, misinformation and disinformation may be presented as evidence through the placement of content within a web of mutually self-referencing hyperlinked citations.⁹⁹ In this way, rumor and disinformation can become decontextualized from their sources, and narratives supportive of far-right extremist ideology can be amplified and circulated through a network of countermedia sources to seed distrust and disinformation into public discourse.

Transnationalism

Far-right extremism in Australia has a long history of meaningful online international connectivity and exchange,¹⁰⁰ which partly explains its longevity.¹⁰¹ Connections from Australian sites out to US, British, and Canadian sites, have been observed,¹⁰² with Australian far-right personalities creating dedicated content for foreign media and YouTube channels.¹⁰³

Findings from this study showed that the most engaged hostnames from both Twitter and Gab were largely US-based or focused, with relatively few specifically Australian sites present. The dominance of US-based media was particularly pronounced on Gab, with only two Australian sites listed: skynews.com, a conservative news outlet; and theaustralianvanguard.com, a site produced by an alt-right Australian blogger. Twitter included marginally larger numbers of specifically Australian sites in the top 25 most engaged hostnames, with 12 Australian sites present. These were split between legacy news sites (i.e.,

98 Heft, Knüpfer, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer, “Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?”

99 Benkler, Faris, and Roberts, “Network Propaganda”; P. M. Krafft and Joan Donovan, “Disinformation by Design: The Use of Evidence Collages and Platform Filtering in a Media Manipulation Campaign,” *Political Communication* 37, no. 2 (2020): 194–214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1686094>.

100 Ariel Bogle, *Buying and Selling Extremism: New Funding Opportunities in the Right-Wing Extremist Online Ecosystem*, (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2021), https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2021-08/Buying%20and%20selling%20extremism_v2.pdf?VersionId=sxdjG71eon6eknBYP5x56r13aO988Uye.

101 Kristy Champion, “A ‘Lunatic Fringe’?: The Persistence of Right Wing Extremism in Australia,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 2 (2019), https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/29338723/A_Lunatic_Fringe_POT.pdf.

102 Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales*.

103 Bogle, *Buying and Selling Extremism*.

smh.com.au and news.com.au) to conservative political websites (i.e., conservativenationalparty.org and nsw.onenation.org.au).

The appropriation by the Australian far-right of topical news stories as a way of engaging with popular discourse to create a political in-group or to mainstream their propaganda has been noted in previous studies.¹⁰⁴ What is distinctive here is the high prevalence and importance of internationally focused news and events. Previous research looking at more targeted samples, i.e., a political movement such as Reclaim Australia, a public anti-Islamic campaign, has identified the importance of local domestic news and public debates in shaping far-right rhetoric – in these cases the introduction of halal certification in Australian confectionary¹⁰⁵ or the erection of a mosque in the region.¹⁰⁶ However, this wider link analysis of a broader far-right milieu suggests that while local issues may be elevated at a particular time and in a target way for mobilizing broader support, this exists against a backdrop of continual interest in and commentary on wider international (particularly US) events and debates.

This evidence for strong transnational links out from the Australian sample is not surprising. Digital technologies offer significant opportunities to build and maintain transnational networks, with linking forming an essential part of this system.¹⁰⁷ This process has been noted among the Australian far-right more broadly, particularly in the creation of ‘anti-public’ subcultures that exists in opposition to mainstream liberal democratic norms.¹⁰⁸ The link-analysis presented here adds to this by providing a more nuanced understanding of the scale and way in which international news currents are used in this process.

The prevalence of US countermedia news sites across both datasets suggests strong transnational interest and shared narratives between the Australian far-right and the USA, and the importance of US-based sites and content among online Australian far right milieu ecosystems. This underscores how attempts to understand these ecosystems must consider the type of content individuals within them are interested in, including transnational and international news and media that go well beyond purely national issues, with implications for how we conceptualize them. Worth considering in this vein is that other research has shown that countries with less-developed far-right countermedia infrastructure, such as Australia, are more likely to link into transnational networks, particularly with the US.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, however, unlike similar studies of far right online ecosystems, there were no examples from the top 25 most engaged hostnames of Russian news sites or websites.¹¹⁰

104 Nouri and Lorenzo-Dus, “Investigating Reclaim Australia and Britain First’s Use of Social Media”; Waldek, Droogan, and Ballsun-Stanton, “Online Far Right Extremist and Conspiratorial Narratives during the COVID-19 Pandemic”; Hutchinson, “The New-Far-Right Movement in Australia.”

105 Nouri and Lorenzo-Dus, “Investigating Reclaim Australia and Britain First’s Use of Social Media.”

106 Peucker, Smith, and Iqbal, “Mapping Networks and Narratives of Far-Right Movements in Victoria.”

107 Park, “Hyperlink Network Analysis.”

108 Mark Davis, “Transnationalising the Anti-Public Sphere: Australian Anti-Publics and Reactionary Online Media,” in *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia*, eds. Mario Peucker and Debra Smith (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 127–49.

109 *Trans-Atlantic Journeys of Far-Right Narratives Through Online-Media Ecosystems*; Heft, Knüpfer, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer, “Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?”

110 Macdonald, et al. *The European Far-Right Online*.

Echo chambers

The links identified in the Twitter dataset are reflective of the platform's close association with political commentary and discussion of world events.¹¹¹ This aligns with the platform's self-identification: "Twitter is what's happening and what people are talking about right now."¹¹² Links occur in both tweets and retweets created and shared by users whose networks incorporate aspects of community structures. These elements of community may encourage users to follow or friend other users based on a perceived similarity of interests. While there has been a tendency for these communities to be described as echo chambers, emerging research indicates a more nuanced understanding of information flows within and between communities.¹¹³ The relative diversity of most engaged links found in the Twitter dataset reflects the presence of what are perhaps more accurately described as polarized networks in conflict with one another.¹¹⁴

This diversity of links increases the chances of Twitter users encountering opposing content and communities. This in contrast to Gab, where users have little exposure to alternative and oppositional content or users.¹¹⁵ This is reflected in our dataset showing a relative homogeneity of top engaged hostnames in the Gab sample. The social networks that form on Gab are more representative of echo chambers, a finding that is in line with the wider literature.¹¹⁶ Links in our Gab and Twitter datasets demonstrate connectivity between these two platforms and the broader digital environment, with far-right communities on social networks engaging with the broader media ecology to inform and discuss their views.

Twitter's infrastructure and its level of platform moderation facilitate an environment where different communities intersect not just with other Twitter users but also with a largely mainstream network of online media sites. As discussed previously, the environment on Twitter may facilitate polarizing rather than echo chamber effects, as individuals are exposed through links to differing perspectives and may debate and argue across the political spectrum.¹¹⁷ In contrast, Gab's infrastructure and level of platform moderation have created a social network that intersects primarily with websites within the counter-media network. These characteristics may contribute to an echo chamber effect where narratives are reinforced and expanded to more extreme positions.¹¹⁸ However, the presence of links between Twitter and Gab indicate movement between these platforms. Users, even those engaged in an echo chamber environment such as Gab, are not entirely isolated. Opportunities may exist in these inter-connections to consider ways to increase exposure to credible alternative content and narratives.

111 Mark McFarland, "What is Twitter, As Explained by its Evolving Tagline," *The Washington Post*, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/innovations/wp/2014/09/12/what-is-twitter-as-explained-by-its-evolving-tagline/>.

112 Twitter, "About Twitter," 2021, <https://about.twitter.com/en>.

113 Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales*.

114 Jesse Shore, Jiye Baek, and Chrysanthos Dellarocas, "Network Structure and Patterns of Information Diversity on Twitter," *arXiv [cs.SI]*, 2016, <http://arxiv.org/abs/1607.06795>.

115 Jasser, McSwiney, Pertwee, and Zannettou, "'Welcome to #GabFam'."

116 Zhou, Dredze, Broniatowski, and Adler, "Elites and Foreign Actors among the Alt-Right"; Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales*.

117 Ballsun-Stanton, Waldek, and Droogan, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales*.

118 Zannettou, Caulfield, De Cristofaro, Kourtellis, Leontiadis, Sirivianos, Stringhini, and Blackburn, "The Web Centipede."

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION: LINKING TO WHAT?

To provide a content analysis of the type of material that Australian far-right milieu accounts linked to, we followed a sample from the most highly engaged links from each of the one-month periods and performed a qualitative analysis of the content found at the other end of the link. Where links were broken and no longer worked due to either removal or suspension, we used archival sites and the URL text to determine the type of content. For deleted or suspended Twitter posts, we also looked at the responding tweets and comments. However, some links remained unclear and were linked as ‘unknown’.

Table 3 presents 96 distinct links from the Twitter sample and the type of content each link led to. These links were selected from the top ten most highly engaged hostnames across each of the one-month sample period. Where possible (i.e., for twitter.com and bit.ly) we followed the top ten most highly engaged URLs from each of the top ten most highly engaged hostnames. However, most of the most highly engaged hostnames included only a single highly engaged URL (see tables in Appendices 1).

Table 3. Twitter: Content linked to

Twitter - Content Linked To						
Type of content	January		April		September	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
News - USA	8	26.67	11	32.35	11	34.37
News - Australia	12	40	16	47.07	9	28.12
News - International	5	16.67	2	5.88	5	15.63
Environmentalism	-	-	1	2.94	4	12.5
Other	1	3.33	1	2.94	1	3.13
Unknown	4	13.33	3	8.82	2	6.25
Total	30	100%	34	100%	32	100%

Table 4. Gab: Content linked to

Gab - Content Linked To						
Type of content	January		April		September	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
US News – Anti-left / Democrats	14	7.22	33	22	14	12.4
US News – Anti-immigration	8	4.12	12	8	3	2.65
US News – Anti-liberal media	26	13.4	2	1.33	-	-
US News - Border security	6	3.1	3	2	1	0.88
US News - Economics	6	3.1	3	2	1	0.88
US News - General politics	17	8.76	9	6	3	2.65
US News - Pro guns	2	1.03	2	1.33	2	1.77
US News - Sexual violence	-	-	-	-	23	20.35
US News - Social media	1	0.5	5	3.33	4	3.55
US News - Terrorism / anti-Islam	8	4.12	4	2.66	1	0.88
US News - Trump supporting	29	14.95	8	5.33	2	1.77
US News - International issues	15	7.73	18	12	8	7.08
US News - Other	24	12.37	21	14	10	8.85
Australian News	3	1.55	-	-	2	1.77
Anti-left / conspiratorial	3	1.55	-	-	10	8.85
Anti-immigration	-	-	-	-	4	3.55
Environmentalism / survivalism	5	2.58	-	-	-	-
Incel	-	-	1	0.7	-	-
Merchandising / app / donation	-	-	2	1.33	1	0.88
QAnon	3	1.55	2	1.33	-	-
Satire	-	-	-	-	3	2.65
White genocide / pro-fascism	3	1.55	-	-	-	-
Other	8	4.12	8	5.33	7	6.19
Unknown	13	6.7	17	11.33	14	12.4
Total	194	100%	150	100%	113	100%

Table 4 presents 457 distinct links from the Gab sample and the type of content each link led to. These links were selected from the top ten most highly engaged hostnames across each of the one-month sample period. However, because many of the top ten lists included numerous distinct links occupying equal tenth place, we ended up following more than the expected 300 links (i.e., the top ten URLs from the top ten hostnames times three collection periods).

Tables 15 to 20 in Appendices 3 and 4 present the top ten most highly engaged links overall for each of the three months across the Gab and Twitter data. Rather than following links from the most highly engaged hostnames, here we followed the ten most highly engaged links from the full data sample. Content found at the end of the top ten most highly engaged links is briefly described in the tables to give insight into the themes that were most popular overall among our sample and across time.

Notably, most of the content we followed was non-violent and not obviously illegal. This conforms with wider research and commentary showing far-right online ecosystems to predominantly consist of highly partisan right wing political material as well as mainstream content that is decontextualized or framed through commentary to fit a more radical agenda.¹¹⁹ We did see the presence of content with a white supremacist, pro-fascist, as well as a QAnon focus across the Gab sample. Much of this material came from links to social media rather than countermedia news platforms, particularly bitchute.com. It is highly likely that more extreme links exist in the data but are found outside the top 25 most highly engaged hostnames.

International themes

There is a strong focus on US political news and commentary found across both the Gab and Twitter samples. On Gab, US countermedia news dominates, with a total of only five links to specifically Australian content found in the 457 links (see Table 4). On Twitter, Australian content features much more strongly, with Australian focused news stories appearing in slightly higher numbers than US-focused content (see Table 3). The prevalence of US material on Gab is likely due to ease of access these US sites provide in the absence of similar Australian sources, and underlines the function of the US online countermedia environment acting as a hub for far-right milieu populations in Australia, in addition to the important place that American far-right themes and narratives occupy in Australian far-right discourse.¹²⁰

We were able to provide greater granularity of thematic content for our Gab hostname derived sample, due to its larger size and high number of URLs linking out to news stories. This allowed us to provide a more in-depth thematic analysis of the Gab content than was possible with the Twitter content. Across this sample we saw a sustained focus on anti-leftist and anti-Democrat posts, as well as attacks on the supposedly left-wing media.

119 Guhl, Ebner, and Rau, *The Online Ecosystem of the German Far-Right*; Warzel, "What Happens on Facebook?"

120 Dean, Bell, and Vakhitova, "Right-Wing Extremism in Australia."

The US centric bias in the data is reflected on the plethora of stories focused on anti-immigration, pro-guns, and border security in the Gab hostname sample. 2019 witnessed a renewed focus by the administration to restrict asylum at the US-Mexico border and crackdown on undocumented migrants. There were stories about terrorism, in particular the threat posed by the Islamic State, which were often highly anti-Islamic in tone. These declined over time.

Overall, the Gab sample shows an ideological convergence through common and repeated narratives based upon common far-right tropes such as strong masculine leadership and fears about immigration, the threat of terrorism, and cultural displacement. These themes have all been previously shown to figure heavily among transnational online far-right audiences.¹²¹ A focus on President Trump and ‘Trumpism’ was also evident in the Gab top ten most highly engaged links overall, which included a tweet from @realdonaldtrump as the most highly engaged link from our April Twitter sample. The presence of the Twitter accounts of high-profile right-wing news personalities and politicians, including former President Donald Trump, has been noted in other link studies.¹²²

We saw significant changes over the three months. There was a decline in Gab linked content focused on the support of President Trump, dropping from 29 posts in January to just two in September. In parallel, we saw a growth of stories about the supposed excesses of the Democrats, the left, leftist culture, and ‘woke’ culture. Content focused on the supposed excesses of the liberal media also declined across the three months, while there is a steady but smaller growth of stories about the social media companies and their supposed anti-conservative biases and policies.

Real world events based in the US were also drivers of the types of content linked to from the Gab dataset. For instance, in September there was a large rise in themes around crime and sexual violence. These were mostly posts about 2009 murder of Arkansas news anchor Anne Pressly. These links largely came from archival sites such as archive.is. This historical issue appears to have become highly engaged due to the similarity between the victim’s name and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley who in September 2019 filed a resolution calling to launch impeachment proceedings against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

A steady number of links leading to countermedia news articles looking at international issues were additional found in the data. Common themes included Brexit in the UK, positive stories about President Bolsonaro in Brazil, difficulties with immigration and terrorism in Europe, and conspiratorial content blaming the fire at Notre Dame in Paris on illegal Muslim immigrants. Overall, any broader focus on international issues or the wider world was heavily filtered through the prism of US-centric far-right politics and concerns.

121 Froio and Ganesh, “The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter”; *Trans-Atlantic Journeys of Far-Right Narratives Through Online-Media Ecosystems*; J. M. Berger, *The Alt-Right Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Audience for Alt-Right Content on Twitter*. (VOX-Pol, 2018), https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/AltRightTwitterCensus.pdf.

122 Heft, Knüpfner, Reinhardt, and Mayerhöffer. “Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right?”

Environmental themes

Environmental themes appeared in small number across both the Gab and Twitter samples. However, their distinctiveness from the more common political themes identified in the thematic review suggested they formed a distinct separate category. Environmental themes were both negative and positive in tone, with negative stories about Greta Thunberg contrasted with stories about coming environmental catastrophes and the benefits of survivalism and rugged libertarianism. These environmental themes were mirrored in the two top URL posts overall from the January Gab data, both of which linked out to survivalist related content. The most highly engaged link for January led to a website selling a fiction book within a plot related to time travel and survivalism. Indeed, previous research has illustrated the importance of e-book sales within far-right culture and fundraising,¹²³ and online stores such as Amazon have been repeatedly criticized for the presence of materials promoting extremism and hate on their platforms.¹²⁴

Hashtags

Hashtags are used on social media platforms to draw attention to, organize, and promote user content. The use of hashtags makes it easier for users within and across platforms to find content that relates to a specific theme, event, or type of content. We examined two different uses of the hashtag. The first explored the most frequently found hashtags contained in tweets and toots, while the second examined the hashtags that most frequently occurred in account related profiles and data ('account hashtags'). The difference between the two reflects the way hashtags are used not only to search for content but also by users to quickly create ideological points of reference and identity-markers within their profile information that can be read as social cues by other users.

Analysis of the Twitter hashtags (Tables 5 and 6) reveals a greater number of references to Australian politics and culture than seen in the link examination. This likely reflects Twitter's own self-identification as a space for users to discuss real world events and politics. For example, the #auspol hashtag is shorthand for 'Australian politics' and is associated with political speculation, commentary, and rumors. The analysis of the top Twitter hashtags also reiterates the connectivity between social media platforms and legacy media sites. #PMLive is one of the twitter handles used by the Paul Murray Live, a political commentary show hosted on Sky News Australia, while #outsiders reflects another political commentary show broadcast on Sky News. The focus on Australian politics is interspersed with hashtags that point to local political events (#YellowVestAustralia), entertainment (#Iamcelebrityau), sports (#StKilda), and social scandals (#PeterRidd).¹²⁵

123 Andrews and Pym, "The Websites Sustaining Britain's Far-Right Influencers."

124 Jason Wilson, "Amazon and Other Platforms Allowing Payments to Far-Right Groups," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/28/amazon-online-platforms-far-right-splc>.

125 #YellowVestAustralia refers to the popular French protest movement; #Iamcelebrityau refers to an Australian reality television program; #St.Kilda refers to a popular Australian rugby team from Victoria; while #PeterRidd makes reference to a scandal whereby an Australian scientist was dismissed from his university after publishing an opinion piece challenging the prevailing scientific evidence and understanding about the state of the Great Barrier Reef.

Table 5. Twitter: Top 10 hashtags

Twitter - Top 10 Hashtags					
January		April		September	
Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count
#pmlive	82	#auspol	126	#auspol	52
#OutSiders	81	#pmlive	65	#OutSiders	35
#auspol	55	#OutSiders	58	#pmlive	27
#ConcernCitizens	14	#WarringahVotes	38	#DayZero	12
#StKilda	10	#ausvotes	27	#climatechange	10
#WTF	10	#ausvotes19	23	#Brexit	9
#gleeso	9	#AusVotes2019	16	#theirABC	7
#imacelebrityau	7	#GetUp	14	#PeterRidd	6
#YellowVestAustralia	7	#captaingetup	14	#ClimateStrike	6
#YellowVestSYDNEY	7	#GameofThrones	13	#nswpol	5

Table 6. Twitter: Top 10 account hashtags

Twitter – Top 10 Account Hashtags					
January		April		September	
Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count
#MAGA	4	#auspol	5	#MAGA	5
#auspol	3	#BringBackCommonSense	2	#WWG1WGA	3
#PARRAdise	2	#MAGA	2	#Trump2020	2
#1.	2	#Trump2020	2	#science	2
#2A	2	#PARRAdise	2	#WSW	2
#LIBERTY	2	#Australia	2	#KAG	2
#KAG2020	2	#KAG2020	2	#BringBackCommonSense	2
#Walkaway	2	#climate	2	#auspol	2
#SydneyRoosters	2	#1.	1	#Brexit	2
#Easts	2	#Trump2020Landslide	1	#Deplorable	1

The top account hashtags are more reflective of narratives focused on US politics, with #MAGA featuring in the top three account hashtags across all three months. Likewise, the hashtags #Trump2020, #KAG2020, and #KAG ('Keep America Great') are frequently used in accounts. The hashtags #1a #2a most likely reflect references to the first and second US amendments (free speech and the right to bear arms) reiterate the influence of American politics across the Australian far-right online network. Reflecting the growth of conspiratorial narratives particularly those associated with QAnon, we see an increase in the presence of hashtags that point to these narratives such as #WWG1WGA.¹²⁶ The use of these types of hashtags may allow a user to quickly indicate their political orientation and ideological position in their profile without incurring the risk of moderation or deplatforming.

The top hashtags on Gab (Tables 7 and 8) are more reflective of its characterization as an echo chamber heavily influenced by US-centric and political narratives. Although #auspol features in January, and #brexit features in March, by September the top ten hashtags reflects both a focus on Trump (#MAGA, #Trump, #KAG) and the growth of the QAnon conspiracy theory (#qanon, #Q, #Thegreatawakening, #Trusttheplan). The significant growth of hashtags (both from toots and from accounts) associated with QAnon provides early evidence of the influential role Gab's creator Andrew Torba and his platform have played in the dissemination of QAnon related content and narratives.¹²⁷

Table 7. Gab: Top 10 hashtags

Gab – Top 10 Hashtags					
January		April		September	
Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count
#Auspol	5417	#Qanon	5	#MAGA	2206
#AusFam	5394	#Trump	2	#qanon	2157
#QAnon	2621	#MAGA	2	#Trump2020	2048
#Trump	2560	#WWG1WGA	2	#Q	1824
#Australia	1855	#TheGreatAwakening	2	#WWG1WGA	1679
#MAGA	1335	#Mueller	2	#GreatAwakening	1648
#Q	1252	#Q	2	#TrustThePlan	1167
#WWG1WGA	711	#Brexit	2	#KAG	1079
#Pelosi	529	#Democrats	1	#TheGreatAwakening	949
#GreatAwakening	504	#TrustThePlan	1	#Democrats	713

126 #WWG1WGA likely refers to the QAnon slogan "Where we go one, we go all". For more on QAnon, see: Suber and Ware, "Examining Extremism: QAnon."

127 Jasser, McSwiney, Pertwee, and Zannettou, "'Welcome to #GabFam'."

Table 8. Gab: Top 10 account hashtags

Gab - Top 10 Account Hashtags					
January		April		September	
Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count
#MAGA	326	#MAGA	310	#MAGA	345
#2A	117	#2A	108	#WWG1WGA	99
#WWG1WGA	82	#WWG1WGA	85	#2A	85
#KAG	78	#KAG	76	#Qanon	82
#Trump2020	66	#Trump2020	72	#KAG	81
#1A	66	#1A	58	#Trump2020	74
#Trump	56	#Trump	54	#1A	50
#QAnon	48	#QANON	48	#TRUMP	47
#GabVets	40	#NRA	35	#GabVets	43
#Christian	36	#BuildTheWall	33	#GreatAwakening	34

CONCLUSION

This project began with a sample of online Twitter and Gab accounts associated with Australian REMVEs. The snowballing techniques adopted to expand the sample created a broader network of users more appropriately defined as being part of an online connected far-right milieu. Links from this broader sample leading out to the top-most engaged domains were then examined. The analysis provided insights into the types of materials and themes that shape the Australian far-right milieu. Differences in linking dynamics were observed between Twitter (a mainstream service) and Gab (an alt-tech service extensively used by far-right extremists).

The findings demonstrate how links afford far-right networks opportunities to spread across a broader mediascape, contributing to the resilience of this movement. While a connection between the Australian far-right and domestic alternative news sites as well as international anti-democratic subcultures has been noted,¹²⁸ this study has provided a richer and more nuanced empirical exploration of exactly what this distributed ecosystem looks like and how it responds to wider global events. While we did not find evidence for links out to explicitly violent material, the interplay between content from a range of social

¹²⁸ Davis, “Transnationalising the Anti-Public Sphere”; Richards, Rae, Vergani, and Jones, “Political Philosophy and Australian Far-Right Media.”

media platforms and websites spanning mainstream and countermedia sites, reinforce the importance of multi-platform studies to understand how networks develop and expand across the diverse and complex media ecology. The cross-platform examination of networks emanating out from both Twitter and Gab moves beyond earlier single-platform studies to reveal the different ways communities on mainstream and alternative platforms interact and engage with global material to reinforce their narratives and in-group identities.

Several key findings emerge from the empirical multi-platform analysis conducted in this report:

REMVE and the far-right

The absence of explicitly violent content in the top highly engaged links is an important finding. However, we only qualitatively examined the very top-most engaged portion of our sample, and it is highly likely that links out to explicitly violent material exist within the data but did not appear within the top 25 most highly engaged hostnames identified. Instead of explicit violence, however, we found an environment characterized by the propagation of narratives promoting, either explicitly or implicitly, by racism, hatred, and othering. These narratives were supported by a network of links from far-right milieu accounts out to an ecology of international content largely generated by traditional and countermedia websites.

The findings raise questions about how we define and identify REMVE actors from within a wider online milieu in which they may exist, and how we identify the threat they pose. A focus on explicit violence is necessary, but how these activities connect and are sustained and expanded by a wider landscape defined by ideologies of othering, racism, and hatred must also be considered. Platform moderation polices focused on the removal of violent content are important but do not tackle the wider online environment within which extremism and, at its fringes, REMVE actors can be nurtured. Indeed, the fact that no explicitly violent material was identified in the top-most linked to sites from our dataset, and the high numbers of links we found to content that had been removed, may be an indication that Australian legislation is effective in encouraging the removal of material that is explicitly abhorrent and violent.

Yet, historically, a significant threat posed by far-right extremists and REMVE actors to liberal democracies has been through shifting the boundaries of political discourse away from liberal and democratic norms, and towards anti-liberal and authoritarian ends. This makes the embeddedness of REMVE actors within a wider right-wing and conservative ecosystem of mainstream and alternative websites troubling. Attempts to mitigate and arrest the effects of REMVE movements online should look for signs of REMVE activity in those environments, to be sure, but also should involve wider programs adopting a whole-of-society focus. These may include broad public education programs that encourage media literacy and the ability to discern bad faith countermedia sites and narratives, as well as civic education programs covering the fundamentals of liberal democratic institutions (which are often lacking in Australian education systems). In addition, broadening public awareness and discourse about how extremist and violent actors appropriate wider conservative and right-wing media ecosystems towards anti-conservative goals could help neuter their ability to hijack and derail public debates. Programs that address this wider connection must

be careful to not falsely equate conservative (far right) political opinion with that of the anti-democratic or violent far right (REMOVE and far right extremism), for instance through the overzealous moderation of non-violent online content.

Internationalism and real world events

Link and hashtag analysis highlights the critical role played by American politics and wider social conversations for Australian far-right milieu communities online. We did see limited evidence of engagement with Australian political content and local real-world events, particularly on the news-focused platform Twitter. However, Australian references were greatly overshadowed by content focused on US events and populist narratives. These were used to frame discussions in support of core anti-establishment beliefs and narratives positioning as being under threat. This emphasizes that the far-right movement is a transnational phenomenon with transnational implications. It also suggests that broader US public debates are of high interest to the Australian far-right milieu, and potentially to the smaller number of violent actors who inhabit it.

Increasingly, we saw a focus on conspiratorial narratives coalescing around the QAnon conspiracy theory that was rising in general public awareness in the United States and further afield during the data collection period. Understanding the uptake of conspiratorial narratives across far-right milieu networks in 2019 provides a useful baseline for future analysis exploring the reaction of these networks to later events including the COVID-19 pandemic, the January 6th US Capitol riot, and the conflict in Ukraine. It is also useful when contextualizing the potential growth of conspiratorial narratives outside of online communities traditionally associated with the broader far-right as these ideas become mainstreamed among the wider public, and vice versa.

Local and national programs are unlikely to be sufficient when addressing these internationally networked movements and narratives. While the political, social, and economic conditions found within specific nations and communities may provide protective factors to extremism, there is a need to acknowledge the international dimension of far-right extremist communities and how their use of this international media landscape fuels grievance narratives and (possibly) extremist solutions. Although it must be re-emphasized that we did not find any links to explicitly violent material in our top 25 most engaged destinations, we did identify online networks that propagate hateful narratives and draw on a web of international sites and platforms that often operate in opposition to such local protective factors. This internationalization of hateful messages and content poses challenges to national governments attempting to counter its influence and appeal because of the limited reach national governments have in addressing these globalized online narratives. Government efforts to address these narratives and the potential radicalizing effects they may have must be cognizant of their own limitations in this regard and the broader global narratives that may fuel online hate, stigma, and polarization.

Content provision – mainstream media & counter media

Far-right extremist narratives do not exist in isolation, siloed away in reaffirming echo chambers, or pushed to the dark corners of the world wide web. Link analysis illustrates how users connect across multiple platforms to mainstream and countermedia social media platforms and news media. In this way, extremists can appropriate everyday topical news and public debate to reaffirm their in-group status and spread their antisocial ideology. These intersections create opportunities for far-right extremists to disseminate and mainstream narratives to new audiences while reaffirming existing extremist identities within their own networks.

The countermedia environment provides the far-right milieu with a wide infrastructure of supportive content. These platforms and sites exist in purposeful opposition to liberal democratic values of inclusion and pluralism, while often presenting narratives that are conspiratorial, racist, and hateful. Many of these countermedia sites appropriate the stylistic and functional features of mainstream media websites but without a commitment to veracity, fairness, or accountability to truth. As such, they provide a veneer of objectivity and legitimacy to those encountering the site, particularly for the first time.

It is however important to note these spaces do not exist in isolation. This study has highlighted the numerous connections far-right milieu online networks create between the wider countermedia environment and mainstream media and social media platforms. Gab users were particularly likely to link out to mainstream social media sites in an attempt to appropriate their content to their cause. These connections create opportunities to raise awareness, disseminate content, and frame mainstream discussions in support of far-right narratives. Understanding engagement with distorted, false, and polarizing content requires future research into the infrastructure and content of countermedia sites and its connectivity to the mainstream media environment, including offline traditional media. Increased understanding by policymakers of these connections and appropriations will improve the effectiveness of initiatives developed to respond to harmful digital content. Public information initiatives, for example, could raise awareness of how these anti-liberal and corrosive networks can be used by far-right violent extremists and other bad actors targeting liberal democracies to undermine Australia's political norms, social cohesion, and – ultimately – national security.

Contemporary far-right extremist movements online are highly decentralized, networked, and enabled by an ecosystem of social media platforms, websites, and other online forums. This ecosystem not only incorporates far-right users, platforms, and content but also appropriates mainstream material. These social networks are, of course, fundamentally social, and moderating the nuances of social activity is not politically or technically feasible, nor desirable when these networks exist below thresholds of illegality and violence. The creation of effective strategies and policies to address online REMVE communities and actors will require broader public education and awareness campaigns resting on a holistic understandings of the dynamics of online ecosystems and the antisocial subcultures that can inhabit them and flourish online.

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APPENDIX 1: TOP 25 MOST ENGAGED HOSTNAMES - TWITTER

Per RESOLVE Editorial Policies, given the nature of a very small portion of some of these links, all links have been de-identified to the extent possible for consistency and so as to not identify the small number of links that may contain sensitive information. Tables including full links are available upon request to resolve@resolvenet.org.

Table 9. Twitter: Top 25 most engaged hostnames – January

Twitter January			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Count
kam*****.org	Political website (USA)	253860	1
The*****.org	Gillette company website	61551	1
bor*****.com	Border security advocacy website (USA)	24953	1
twj*****.com†	Mainstream social media	23858	92
le***.eu	Pro-Brexit website (UK)	13863	1
bi*.ly	URL shortener	11738	25
clo*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	7790	1
Neo*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	6037	1
The*****.com	News magazine (USA)	5706	1
Was*****.com	News (USA)	5638	1
Mir***.co.uk	News (UK)	3542	1
The*****.com	News (UK/global)	2852	3
9S***.al	News (Australia)	2692	1
You*****.com††	Mainstream video sharing	2558	4
s***.com.au	News (Australia)	1998	23
fox*****.com	News (USA)	1975	1
nyt*.ms	News (USA)	1468	2
pat*****.com	Monetized content creator platform	1164	1
Ame*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1084	5
The*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	996	2
Ama***.com	Online shopping	805	1
Bre*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	756	1
Fac*****.com	Mainstream social media	740	4
The*****.com.au	News (Australia)	687	20
ne***.com.au	News (Australia)	567	4

Table 10. Twitter: Top 25 most engaged hostnames – April

Twitter April			
twi****.com†	Mainstream social media	81739	106
ps**.tv	Twitter video sharing	47470	3
nyt****.com	News (USA)	16295	1
def***.*****.org	Website dedicated to defending Julian Assange and WikiLeaks	15015	1
amg*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	10973	1
cn**.com	News (USA)	8951	2
*.mp	URL shortener	6796	1
tr**.al	URL shortener	6605	1
pol***.co	News (USA)	6586	1
b**.ly	URL shortener	6478	26
ma*.***.com	URL shortener	5978	1
the*****.com	News (UK/global)	5975	6
reu****.com	News	4798	2
was*****.com	News (USA)	3744	1
t**.cm	URL shortener	3254	1
spi***_*****.com	News (UK)	3016	1
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	2233	1
na**.gov	Government website (USA)	2067	1
cb**.ws	News (USA)	2061	1
wak*****.com	Anti 'Get Up' political website (Australia)	1925	3
tin****.com	URL shortener	1670	1
the*****.com.au	News (Australia)	1630	26
go****.com.au	Web browser	1178	1
con*****.org	Political website (Australia)	1093	1
ame*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	989	8

Table 11. Twitter: Top 25 most engaged hostnames – September

Twitter September			
twi****.com †	Mainstream social media	323798	177
sar*****.com	Website for conservative news personality (USA)	28535	1
tre*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	26708	1
sta*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	13950	1
fac****.com	Mainstream social media	7513	2
ord**_****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	6388	1
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	5590	1
b**.ly	URL shortener	5031	29
exp****.****.gov	Government website (USA)	4593	1
dai***.ai	News (Australia)	4016	2
a.m**.com	News (Australia)	3929	5
fox****.com	News (USA)	3884	1
gra****.****.gov	Political website (USA)	3858	1
c**.cx	News (USA)	3775	1
apn***.com	News (USA)	3556	1
was*****.com	News (USA)	3408	1
con****.gov	Government website (USA)	1872	1
sky****.com.au	News (Australia)	1784	4
dai*****.co.uk	News (UK)	1770	3
ama***.com	Online shopping	1679	1
bar*****.com	Online bookshop	1679	1
cha****.****.ca	Online shopping	1679	1
the***.co.uk	News (UK)	1496	5
c**.it	News (USA)	1404	2
ny**.ms	News (USA)	1349	1

* A combination of links to twitter.com and twitter.mobile

** A combination of links to youtube.com andyoutu.be

APPENDIX 2: TOP 25 MOST ENGAGED HOSTNAMES - GAB

Per RESOLVE Editorial Policies, given the nature of a very small portion of some of these links, all links have been de-identified to the extent possible for consistency and so as to not identify the small number of links that may contain sensitive information. Tables including full links are available upon request to resolve@resolvenet.org.

Table 12. Gab:Top 25 most engaged hostnames – January

Gab January			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Count
you****.com†	Mainstream video sharing	8150	6506
g**.com	Alt-right social media	2036	1010
fee*****.*****.com	Website used to evade geolocation limitations on file streaming	1726	1698
twi****.com**	Mainstream social media	1635	1413
cit*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1270	957
new*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1195	891
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1190	648
bre*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1104	738
tru*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	880	853
bit****.com	Alt-right video sharing	763	627
fro*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	695	120
new*****.org	Alt-right news (USA)	686	26
dai*****.co.uk	News (UK)	648	530
gat*****.org	Think tank (USA)	556	55
fox****.com	News (USA)	525	357
inf****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	484	393
rig*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	482	467
brj*****.com	Alt-right video news (USA)	421	373
lto*****.com	Privately run website	391	5
con*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	378	375
bla*****.ca	Alt-right news (Canada)	364	360
zer*****.com	Alt-right financial news (USA)	315	248
b**.ly	URL shortener	312	285
voi*****.com	Alt-right news (EU)	296	170
law.*****.edu	Website offering legal information	288	15

Table 13. Gab: Top 25 most engaged hostnames – April

Gab April			
you****.com†	Mainstream video sharing	10435	8211
fee*****.*****.com	Website used to evade geolocation limitations on file streaming	1739	1724
twi****.com††	Mainstream social media	1708	1506
g**.com	Alt-right social media	1342	869
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1322	772
tru*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1291	1263
bre*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1101	734
inf*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1046	747
new*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	993	865
bla*****.ca	Alt-right news (USA)	855	831
dai*****.co.uk	News (UK)	834	693
rig*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	823	807
cit*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	728	689
bit*****.com	Alt-right social media	547	482
fox****.com	News (USA)	535	385
con*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	509	509
law.*****.edu	Website offering legal information	428	21
zer*****.com	Alt-right financial news (USA)	399	311
sum***.news	Alt-right news (USA)	399	186
sky****.com.au	News (Australia)	381	298
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	379	329
b**.ly	URL shortener	335	298
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	305	273
han****.com	Website for conservative news personality (USA)	293	280
iro*****.*****.com	Private blog (removed)	274	274

Table 14. Gab: Top 25 most engaged hostnames – September

Gab September			
you****.com †	Mainstream video sharing	80,045	7,243
twi****.com ††	Mainstream social media	50764	1662
inf****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	25395	490
bit****.com	Alt-right social media	20332	966
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	19740	690
bre*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	14833	634
sum***.news	Alt-right news (USA)	14689	104
arc****.is	Web archiving	10235	386
dai*****.co.uk	News (UK)	9305	371
bab*****.com	Alt-right satirical news (USA)	8388	107
new*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	8042	681
fee*****.*****.com	Website used to evade geolocation limitations on file streaming	6803	1321
tru*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	6675	890
vda**.com	Alt-right news (USA)	6246	155
mas****.*****.com	Website providing a list of bots	5518	2
fox****.com	News (USA)	5321	298
nyp***.com	News (USA)	4961	161
the*****.com	Alt-right blog (Australia)	4927	7
nat*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	4810	61
grr*****.com	Private site of Alt-right cartoonist (USA)	4737	19
g**.com	Alt-right social media	4549	473
zer*****.com	Alt-right financial news (USA)	4513	221
i**.io	Alt right Infowars video hosting (USA)	3950	79
the*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	3553	304
voi*****.com	Alt-right news (EU)	3549	129

† A combination of links to youtube.com andyoutu.be

†† A combination of links to twittercom and twitter.mobile

APPENDIX 3: TOP 10 MOST ENGAGED LINKS - TWITTER

Per RESOLVE Editorial Policies, given the nature of a very small portion of some of these links, all links have been de-identified to the extent possible for consistency and so as to not identify the small number of links that may contain sensitive information. Tables including full links are available upon request to resolve@resolvenet.org.

Table 15. Twitter: Top 10 most engaged links – January

Twitter January			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Link Content
kam*****.org	Political website (USA)	253,860	Campaign website
The*****.org	Gillette company website	61,551	Company website hosting an advertisement
bor*****.com	Border security advocacy website (USA)	24,953	Website producing anti-immigration and pro-border security information
le***.eu	Pro-Brexit website (UK)	13,863	Website producing pro-Brexit and anti-EU information
b***.ly	URL shortener	9,577	Unknown
clo*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	7,790	Article claiming France moves to ban all protests and crack-down on Yellow Vests
twj****.com	Mainstream social media	6,536	Sky News Australia report on Brexit
neo*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	6,037	Article claiming the Vatican is quietly paying \$4 billion to child abuse victims
the*****.com	News magazine (USA)	5,706	Article claiming Nancy Pelosi 'beat Trump' during a government shutdown
was*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	5,638	Article claiming 205 'historic results' to help Trump make case for 2020 re-election

Table 16. Twitter: Top 10 most engaged links – April

Twitter April			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Content
cn**.com	News (USA)	8,950	Article claiming survey finds that higher minimum wage means restaurants raise prices and lower employee hours
reu****.com	News (USA)	4,771	Article claiming U.N. torture expert urges Ecuador not to expel Assange from embassy
wak*****.com	Anti 'Get Up' political website (Australia)	1,881	Website arguing that the Australian NGO 'Get Up' is in fact a front for leftist and green political parties
b**.ly	URL shortener	1,418	Link to Australian Sky News article – content unknown
goo***.com.au	Search engine	1,178	Link to Australian ABC news article claiming LNP Senate candidate accuses weather bureau of fudging data to suit 'global warming agenda'
b**.ly	URL shortener	970	Unknown
s**.com.au	News (Australia)	397	Article claiming taxpayers face bill of up to \$1b to fund politicians' retirements
b**.ly	URL shortener	199	Unknown
twj****.com	Mainstream social media	197	Tweet from Realdonaldtrump – content unknown
s**.com.au	News (Australia)	133	Article claiming the NSW Liberal Party has wrongly expelled ex-army foreign policy expert

Table 17. Twitter: Top 10 most engaged links – September

Twitter September			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Content
twj****.com	Mainstream social media site	59,249	Tweet from WIRED showing a speech by Greta Thunberg
twj****.com	Mainstream social media site	49,998	Tweet from Dan Scavino Jr. linking to Realdonaldtrump
twj****.com	Mainstream social media site	41,553	Tweet from The Daily Show showing an interview with Greta Thunberg
twj****.com	Mainstream social media site	36,621	Tweet from CBS Evening News claiming a new sexual misconduct allegation against SCOTUS Justice Brett Kavanaugh
twj****.com	Mainstream social media site	31,486	Tweet from Lindsey Graham about impeachment
sar*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	28,535	Article claiming the US embassy pressured Ukraine will not investigate a liberal donor
tre*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	26,708	Article claiming President Trump rightly ignored Greta Thunberg at the United Nations
twj****.com	Mainstream social media site	25,122	Tweet from Sean Davis – content unknown
twj****.com	Mainstream social media site	16,154	Tweet from The Lead CNN citing Al Gore on President Trump as the face of climate change denial
sta*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	13,950	Article claiming Christine Ford's lawyer admits Kavanaugh accusations politically motivated

APPENDIX 4:

TOP 10 MOST ENGAGED LINKS - GAB

Per RESOLVE Editorial Policies, given the nature of a very small portion of some of these links, all links have been de-identified to the extent possible for consistency and so as to not identify the small number of links that may contain sensitive information. Tables including full links are available upon request to resolve@resolvenet.org.

Table 18. Gab: Top 10 most engaged links – January

Gab January			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Content
lto*****.com	Online bookshop	387	Website to buy the book 'Delta' - time travel fiction
oil*****.org	Survivalist site	92	Survivalist / climate change information site
new*****.org	Alt-right news (USA)	91	News article arguing that immigrants enter the USA as children and engage in stabbing
new*****.org	Alt-right news (USA)	83	News article about New York law legalizing late-term abortion
law*****.edu	Website offering legal information	82	Link to US Law: Article IV of the US Constitution
new*****.org	Alt-right news (USA)	80	US news article arguing that racism exists on the Left
fro*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	77	US news article about the Gillette advertisement
new*****.org	Alt-right news (USA)	76	US news article about Bill Maher's comments referring to the 'Covington kids'
new*****.org	Alt-right news (USA)	75	US news article arguing the mainstream news downplay homicides by illegals
new*****.org	Alt-right news (USA)	70	US news article about government shutdown and immigrant crime

Table 19. Gab: Top 10 most engaged links – April

Gab April			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Content
twj****.com	Mainstream social media	119	Tweet from Realdonaldtrump about the construction of a border wall
you****.com	Mainstream video sharing	83	Laura Loomer YouTube clip about a Council on American-Islamic Relations event in California
The*****.tv	Alt-right video sharing	74	Trailer for The Greatest Story Never Told – a revisionist documentary about Adolf Hitler
law*****.edu	Website offering legal information	61	Link to US Law: 18 U.S. Code § 2381 - Treason
g***.com	Alt-right social media	46	Gab post about Laura Loomer
you****.com	Mainstream video sharing	46	Laura Loomer YouTube clip
you****.com	Mainstream video sharing	46	Laura Loomer YouTube clip
law*****.edu	Website offering legal information	45	Link to US Law: Article IV of the US Constitution
was*****.com	News (USA)	44	US news article about the Defense Department identifying \$12.8 billion to fund a border wall
mob***.*****.com	Mainstream social media	44	Tweet from Realdonaldtrump - content unknown

Table 20. Gab: Top 10 most engaged links – September

Gab September			
Hostname	Site type	Engagement	Content
mas*****.*****.com	Website providing a list of bots	5482	Providing services to support Alt-right online infrastructure
the*****.com	Alt-right blog (Australia)	3083	Australian Alt-right website
the*****.com	Alt-right blog (Australia)	1317	Australian Alt-right website
inf*****.com	Alt-right news (USA)	1266	Merchandising site for Infowars
bit*****.com	Alt-right video sharing	905	Satirical skit about CNN
c***.org	Alt-right news (USA)	830	Article about 50 years of failed eco-apocalypse predictions
bit*****.com	Alt-right video sharing	679	Clip showing the Dali Lama speaking about how refugees should eventually return home
a***.com	Online shopping	662	Site offering to replace Walmart in selling ammunition
twj****.com	Mainstream social media	626	Tweet from Realdonaldtrump - content unknown
pro.***.com	Alt-right social media	591	Link to site to upgrade to Gab PRO
was*****.com	News (USA)	581	US news article about Laura Loomer

About the Authors

Dr. Julian Droogan is Associate Professor of Terrorism Studies and Director of Research and Innovation at the Department of Security Studies and Criminology, Macquarie University. He is also the Editor of the *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (Routledge). Julian has worked on project for the Australian and US Departments of Defence, and as chief investigator on numerous funded research grants. Topics include investigating how young people engage with online violent extremist content; examinations of online right-wing extremism and conspiratorial narratives across multiple social media platforms; and evaluations of online countering violent extremism programs. He was instrumental the creation of the \$12 million COMPACT countering violent extremism program currently operated by the NSW state government and aimed at fostering societal resilience to extremist narratives. As well as supervising a number of PhD and Masters of Research students in the field of terrorism studies, Julian convenes the courses PICT2015: Terrorism in the 21st Century as part of the Bachelor of Security Studies, and PICT8020: Advanced Terrorism Studies as part of the Masters in Counter Terrorism.

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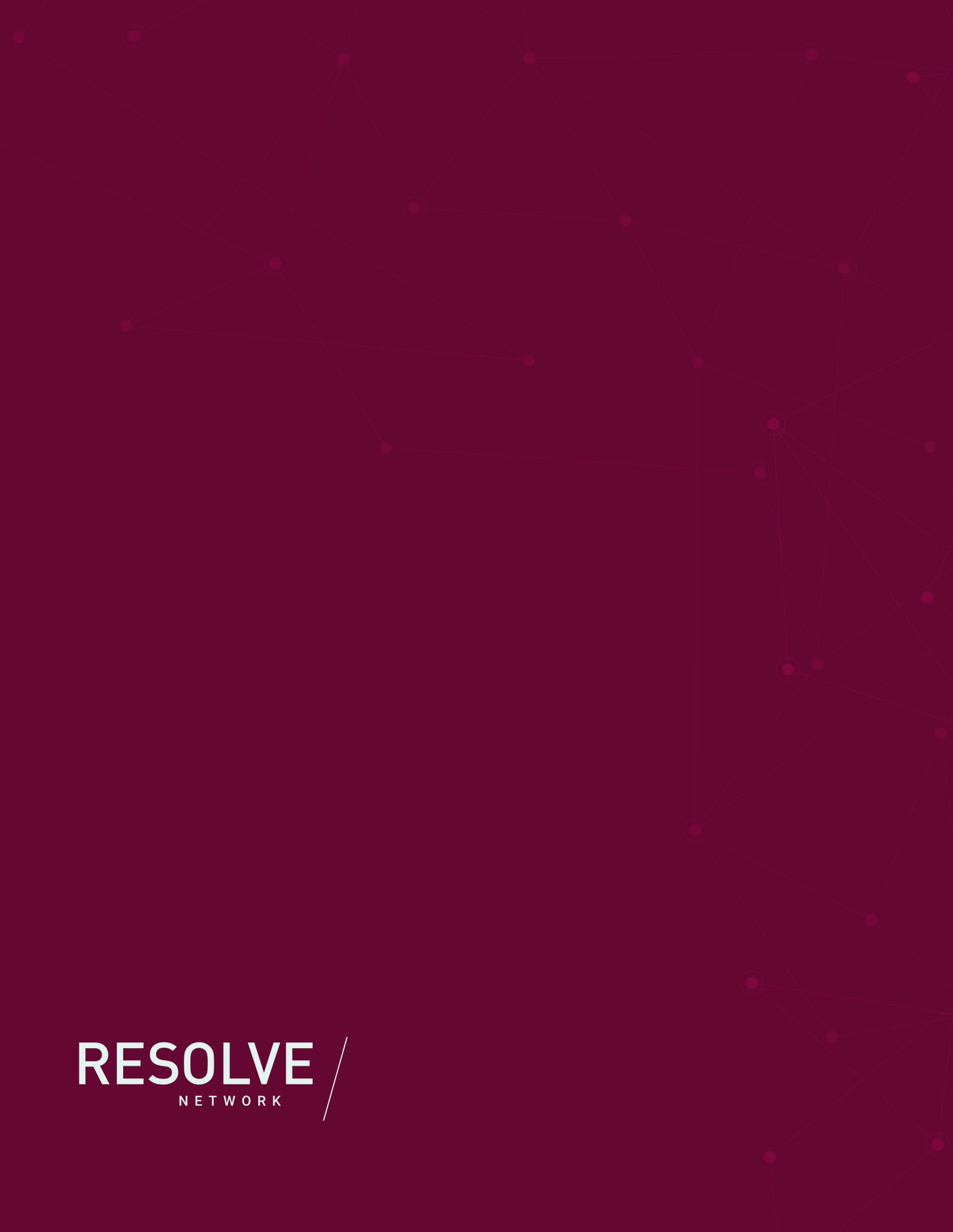
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