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A SNAPSHOT OF FAR-RIGHT ACTIVITY ON GAB IN AUSTRALIA

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A SNAPSHOT OF FAR-RIGHT ACTIVITY ON GAB IN AUSTRALIA

This paper is the second in a series analysing the interplay between far-right and far-left groups in the state of Victoria, Australia, across a range of social media platforms. This series is produced by the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies through the centre's research stream 4 'Dynamics of Violent Extremism'. Stream 4 is a collaboration between researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and the Institute for Sustainable Industries & Liveable Cities at Victoria University (VU).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 27 October 2018, an American white supremacist made a final post on the fringe social media platform Gab before entering a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and shooting and killing 11 people.¹ The platform, which was launched in 2016 and bills itself as a champion of free speech, has gained notoriety in recent years for hosting a range of far-right extremist communities. In 2021, following the 6 January storming of the US Capitol building by a range of far-right extremists, Gab reported a record uptick in new members, as far-right communities that had been banned on Twitter and Facebook moved to the platform.²

As mainstream social media platforms increase their content moderation and scrutiny of far-right extremists, the role of alternative social media and online platforms in driving extremist mobilisation of the far-right has been the subject of growing concern.³ Assessing the activities of far-right actors on Gab is important to understand the nature of contemporary far-right mobilisation online.

However, the role that Gab plays in the Australian context is still poorly evidenced. To help build an understanding of how Australian far-right actors use the platform, researchers at ISD and VU analysed the content of Australian far-right users on the platform between 1 January and 30 September 2020. The results are detailed in this briefing paper. This study is based on the analysis of the activity of 40 Australian Gab accounts, geolocated in Australia to a high degree of accuracy using machine learning technology.

We have prioritised accuracy over sample size, so this briefing cannot be considered a comprehensive picture of all far-right activity on Gab in Australia, but rather as a snapshot of far-right mobilisation on the platform, focusing on a network of active accounts. Through this analysis, we help evidence the role Gab plays as a hub for often explicitly antisemitic far-right extremism and radicalism in the Australian context. It also looks at disinformation around COVID-19, as well as the impact the global racial justice protests and the COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne had on the activity of Australia's far-right. Additionally, this briefing helps detail how the Australian far-right uses oppositional narratives targeting left-wing actors and movements in order to reinforce their supremacist and conspiratorial world views.

KEY FINDINGS

Over the period of study, far-right accounts in our network produced a total of 45,404 posts. Far-right conversation saw a sharp uptick from June to August 2020. During this period we recorded more than 7,500 posts per month and a 90% increase compared to May, coinciding with global racial justice protests and the second COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne. This increase in posts during the period of global anti-racist protests mirrors observations made by researchers on the activity of Australian far-right Facebook groups and pages.⁴

Far-right mobilisation was driven by a small number of highly active accounts, with the top-three most active Gab accounts producing a combined total of 34,597 posts, or 75% of the total posts made during the period of study. The top-three most active accounts produced an average of 55, 41 and 31 posts per day respectively, indicating a high volume of output, although we could not establish evidence of automated activity.

COVID-19 featured as one of the key topics of interest in the dataset (13% of posts) alongside related discussions of the local lockdown in Victoria (over 4%). Other prominent topics included Black Lives Matter (BLM) (over 7% of posts) China-Australia relations (over 8%), energy and climate change (nearly 3%) and white identity (nearly 2%). White identity was also a central element of most active Gab accounts. One of the top-ten most active accounts' self-description and imagery explicitly endorsed white supremacy, while six out of the top-ten most active accounts commonly promoted white supremacist, ethnonationalist or antisemitic views in their posts.

Antisemitism appeared as a significant marker of the most active accounts in the network. We found that Gab provided a platform for overt hate speech targeting Jewish people, with over 11% of posts in the dataset including explicitly antisemitic terms and slurs. In particular, we identified direct calls for violence against Jewish people as well as calls to remove them from Australian society.

Discussion about political opponents on the far-left represented a notable subset of discussion, with such posts accounting for over 4% of the total. The most dominant narrative took the form of conspiracy theories alleging a Marxist-socialist or communist plot to infiltrate institutions such as the media, schools and universities in order to destroy Western civilisation and implement a communist-socialist (and anti-white) regime. As a response to this alleged plot, posts regularly advocated for white separatism or violence to defend 'our culture' against this alleged existential threat.

INTRODUCTION

In its 2019-2020 annual report, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) stated that right-wing extremists represented a third of its domestic investigations.⁵ The report stated that many of these groups and individuals have:

‘seized on the COVID-19 pandemic believing it reinforces the narratives and conspiracies at the core of their ideologies. They see the pandemic as proof of the failure of globalisation, multiculturalism and democracy, and confirmation that societal collapse and a “race war” are inevitable.’

According to a report by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the highest number of ASIO’s investigations are counted in Victoria and Queensland.⁶

The pandemic has also resulted in a rise in conspiracy theories with connections to far-right ideology in Australia. This has manifested in the heightened spread of misinformation and mobilisation online as well as offline anti-lockdown protests, including several ‘Freedom Day’ protests, partially linked to QAnon conspiracies.⁷ According to a poll carried out by the research company Essential in May 2020, 20% of the Australian respondents agreed that the ‘number of COVID-19 deaths have been exaggerated by the media and government to scare the population’; 13% believe that Bill Gates played a role in the creation and spread of COVID-19, and the same proportion agreed with the statement that the ‘virus is not dangerous and is being used to force people to get vaccines’. The latter two beliefs are even more prevalent among younger cohorts (aged 20-34 years: 20%).⁸ Australia also features among the top-five countries driving discussion of QAnon on Twitter, according to a recent report by ISD.⁹

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Gab has become a rallying place for many far-right figures banned from mainstream social media platforms following the Christchurch attack in March 2019. The Gab subgroup ‘Australia’ saw a drastic increase in new members after Christchurch, from around 4,500 in mid-March to over 11,000 in June 2019, and has since continuously grown to over 45,000 members as of March 2021. This is driven by large increases in the aftermath of the 6 January storming of the US Capitol building in Washington, DC, when the number of group members skyrocketed from 18,600 to 29,000 within only two weeks (6-20 January).

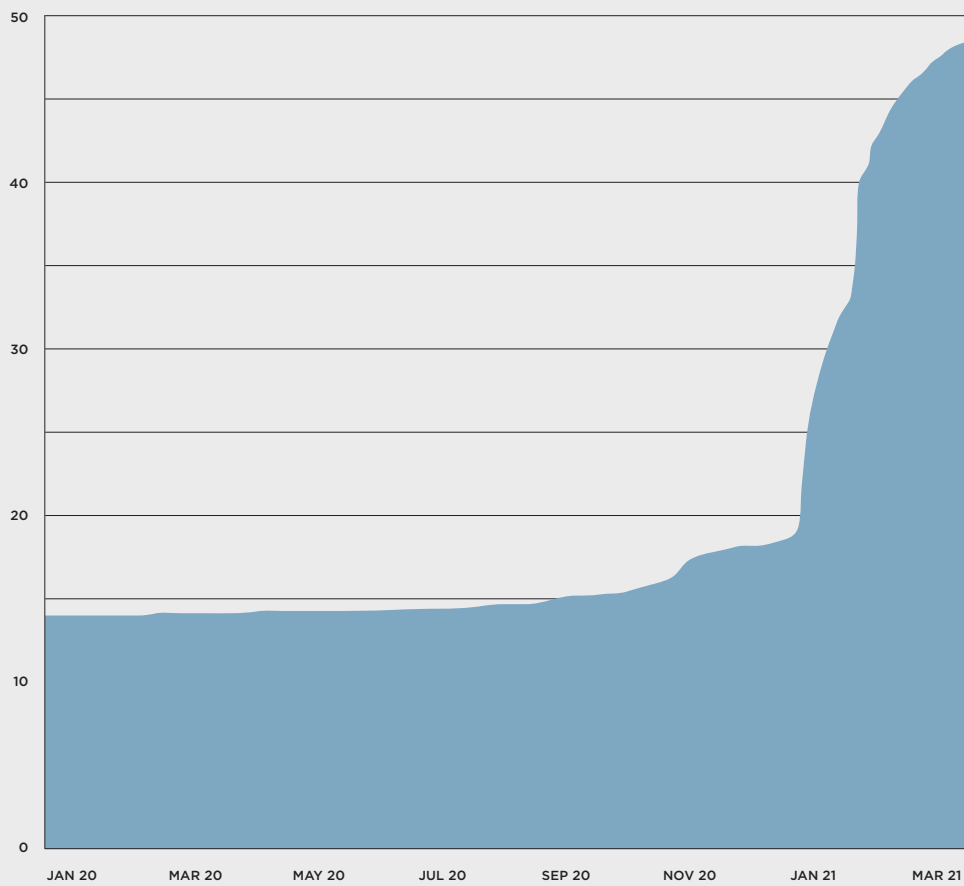


Figure 1 Membership of 'Australia' Gab group between January 2020 and March 2021.

GLOSSARY

FAR-RIGHT

When creating our working definition of the far-right we drew on established scholarship, although we recognise that there is no unanimously agreed definition of the far-right. We refer to the well-established conceptualisations of right-wing extremism, put forward by Dutch political scientist and right-wing extremist expert Cas Mudde and UK-based academic Elisabeth Carter, which understand the extreme right to be typically marked by several of the following characteristics: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and strong-state advocacy and authoritarianism.¹⁰ We use the generic umbrella term far-right to cover both radical and extreme right-wing groups, actions, and ideologies. The conceptual difference between right-wing radicalism and extremism is that the former is not explicitly anti-democratic (e.g. far-right libertarian, anti-Islam groups), while the latter is characterised also by an explicit anti-democratic stance (e.g. openly fascist, neo-Nazi groups). Both share the core ideology of exclusivist nationalism, which openly advocates against the principle of egalitarianism.

ETHNONATIONALISM

We define ethnonationalism as a form of nationalism where the nation is defined in terms of ethnicity. Central to ethnonationalism is the belief that nations are tied together by a shared heritage and culture that is based on ethnicity. Ethnonationalists are often marked by the implicit promotion of racism and exclusionary attitudes and rarely promote overt supremacism.

WHITE SUPREMACY

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

ANTISEMITISM

We refer to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)'s definition of antisemitism as 'the belief or behaviour hostile toward Jews because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.'¹¹

FAR-LEFT

There is no broadly agreed definition of the far-left, and the scholarship on radical or far-left actions and groups in contemporary Western societies is much less developed than research on the far-right.¹² Following Mudde and political researcher Luke March, and resonating with the differentiation of the far-right, we propose making a distinction between left-wing radicalism and extremism, where the latter groups are, again, anti-democratic, and the former advocate fundamental political and economic changes without being anti-democratic per se.¹³ Radical left groups, actions or networks are typically rooted in Marxist, socialist or anarchist ideologies, and pursue an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and radically egalitarian, anti-fascist agenda, typically with an internationalist outlook.¹⁴ Radical left groups can sometimes be identified by the use of certain symbolism (e.g. Antifa flag, three arrows). While, in general, far-left groups may or may not see violence, especially against their political opponents (e.g. perceived representatives of fascism and capitalism), as a legitimate tool to pursue their political agenda, there is currently no evidence that Australia's far-left poses a significant security threat.¹⁵

METHODOLOGY

NETWORK CREATION

Researchers at VU provided an initial list of six known far-right Gab accounts. Accessing Gab's Application Programme Interface through ISD's in-house data collection programme, we scraped the accounts following and accounts followed by the six seed accounts. This left us with an expanded network of 46,162 connected Gab users.

To determine which of these accounts are based in Australia, we analysed this network of accounts with a bespoke geolocation tool. The tool analyses data from the account including biography and posting times that produce a score assessing the likelihood that accounts are run by users in Australia. This score can be adjusted to allow for a larger or smaller margin of error. For our purposes, we used a score of 80% or higher to determine if an account was based in Australia. While machine learning is not an exact science, an overall accuracy of 80% is broadly in agreement with other peer-reviewed research.¹⁶

This process left us with a network of 40 Gab accounts which were determined with a high degree of certainty to be based in Australia, and which produced a total of 45,404 posts between 1 January and 30 September 2020. We chose to focus on a smaller network of users to ensure analysis only encompassed accounts that could be geolocated in Australia with a high degree of accuracy. The analysis presented in this briefing should not be considered as a comprehensive picture of all activity on Gab in Australia. Rather, this research is intended to be an initial investigation, trialling a new methodology that aims to shed light on the activity of Australian-based Gab users, their volume of activity, and key topics of discussion.

ANALYSIS

We analysed the dataset of 45,404 posts using both qualitative and quantitative methods. This analysis focussed on identifying the key topics of discussion engaged with by the Australian far-right on Gab; an examination of the volume of activity of these accounts to identify events which correlated with increased discussion; an analysis of the most active accounts in our dataset; and a specific analysis of the ways the Australian far-right frame and discuss their political opponents on the left.

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VOLUME OVER TIME

The number of posts produced by accounts in the network increased significantly during the period of study. It grew substantially between January and February, from 989 posts per month to 3,173 posts, plateauing between March and May, before increasing dramatically between June and August, when BLM and global anti-racist demonstrations took place. The month with the most posts made by our network was August with over 8,500 posts, preceded by June with over 8,300 posts.

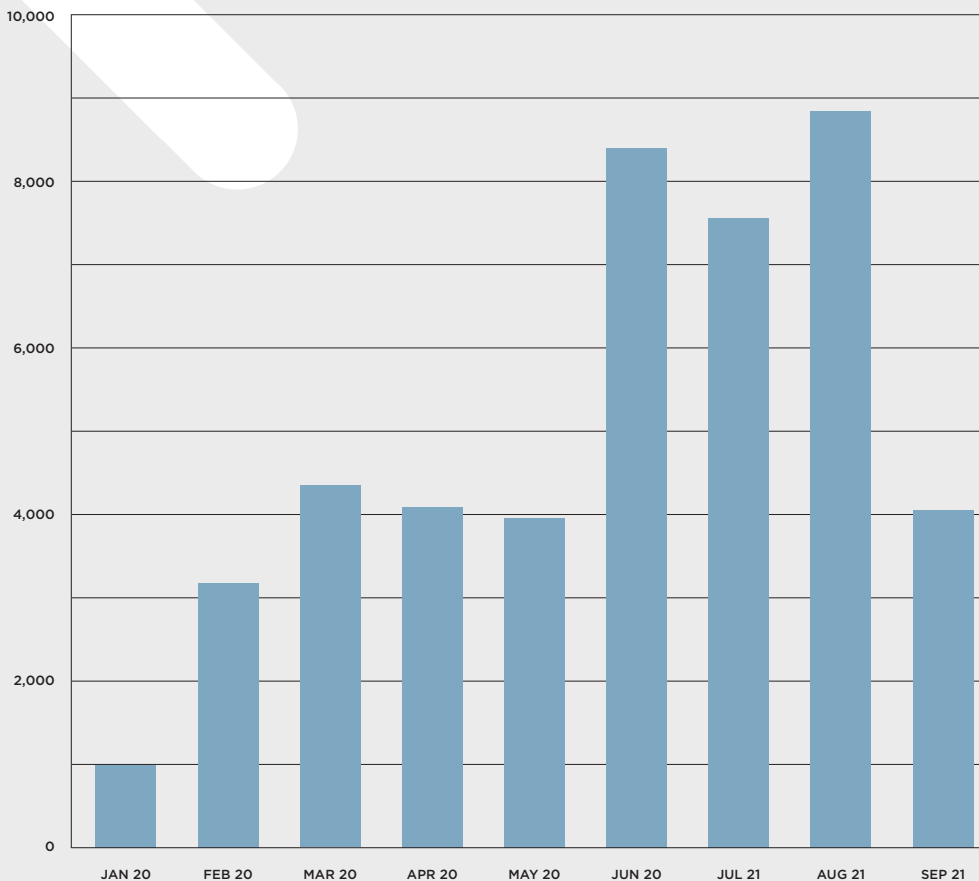


Figure 2 Volume of posts produced by Australian Gab accounts between January – September 2020.

To identify events or factors driving mobilisation in the network of accounts, we examined the days with the three highest spikes in the discussion, performing a qualitative analysis of the content of a random sample of 20 posts to determine which events or topics drove mobilisation on the platform. The days on which conversation was highest were 17 June, 6 August and 1 September. These spikes were primarily driven by a discussion about BLM and COVID-19.

SPIKES IN DISCUSSION

Our qualitative analysis of a random sample of 20 posts showed that mobilisation on 17 June revolved around a number of themes, including BLM, COVID-19, and US news. The discussion of COVID-19 focused on the impact of lockdown and the government's response to the pandemic and the economy. This signals the significance of COVID-19 to far-right mobilisation in Australia, a trend documented in other countries, including in the US and in Europe where the far-right have sought to weaponise the pandemic to spread their ideology.¹⁷

Posts about BLM blamed protests on black people, accused BLM of anti-white racism and called for white separatism and segregation. Posts shared these narratives about Australian and US protests alike. The sample of posts analysed frequently engaged with the 'great replacement' and 'white genocide' conspiracy theories.¹⁹¹⁸ The following post illustrates how 'non-whites' are blamed for the persistence of racism and calls for white separatism:

'White are inherently racist? Okay, whatever, then stop begging us to stop running from you with White flight, stop bussing non-White children to our schools, stop flooding into the areas we live, and just let us live in peace with ourselves. There would not be a problem of "racism" if we were able to live separately.'

The second-largest spike in discussion, on 6 August, was mainly driven by posts about lockdown restrictions in Victoria as the state progressed into stage 4 restrictions. Posts condemned the government's handling of the pandemic, presented lockdown as a plot to restrict individual freedoms, and shared disinformation about COVID-19, either by promoting unverified cures (e.g. hydroxychloroquine (HCQ)) or anti-vaccination views.

The third spike in discussion on 1 September was also on pandemic restrictions in the state of Victoria, coinciding with the government's roadmap out of lockdown.¹⁹ Posts frequently expressed strong opposition to the lockdown and measures such as compulsory mask-wearing in specific public spaces, describing these measures as liberticide.

TOPIC ANALYSIS

To identify the most salient topics of discussion in the dataset, we conducted a topic-modelling exercise using natural language processing (NLP) classifiers. We applied a process known as ‘clustering’ or ‘topic discovery,’ which is an unsupervised computational technique that allows researchers to identify key topics within a dataset while avoiding introducing potential unconscious biases into the analysis.

We analysed the data through four rounds of NLP classifier analysis, organising language in the dataset into 40 lists of ten associated keywords. We qualitatively determined the salient topic in each list based on the combination of keywords. Recurring themes were identified as the most salient topics of discussion. These topics are outlined in Figure 3.

LIST OF TOPICS

COVID-19	13%
China-Australia	8%
BLM	7%
Australian lockdown	4%
Energy and climate change	3%
White identity	2%

Figure 3 Topics of discussion in Gab network.

We qualitatively analysed a random sample of 20 posts in the dataset corresponding to each theme to determine key narratives within each. COVID-19 conspiracies and the Australian lockdown are presented in the same subsection as they both relate to the pandemic.

COVID-19 AND AUSTRALIAN LOCKDOWN

The network we analysed on Gab engaged significantly with COVID-19 conspiracy theories, reflecting a global trend in far-right mobilisation. Since the beginning of the pandemic, far-right groups and networks have opportunistically used

the pandemic to advance their movements and ideologies across North America and Europe, spreading disinformation about the virus and using the pandemic to call for violence, as documented in previous research carried out by ISD.²⁰ An explorative analysis of Australian far-right online spaces came to similar conclusions.²¹

Posts about COVID-19 in our dataset focused on two topics: denial or downplaying the pandemic, and the promotion of various fake cures. Posts frequently described COVID-19 as a ‘scam’ to further the political agenda of shadowy elites. For example: ‘Coronavirus is an obvious scam to anyone paying attention’, or ‘The only reasons to keep this fear shit going are political. They want to turn the west into a satanic Marxist hell-hole and inject everyone with Gates swamp juice.’

COVID-19 denial tied in with anti-elite conspiracy theories, including those targeting figures such as Bill Gates, which have served as a rallying point for a range of far-right groups during the pandemic.²² High-profile medical authorities such as Drs Deborah Birx and Anthony Fauci were commonly cited as being corrupt and manipulated by higher powers, as in the following post:

‘So get this straight: based on the recommendation of doctors Fauci and Birx, the US shut down the entire economy based on 9,000 American deaths to the China coronavirus. Sounds like crimes against humanity to us – and one of those pesky crimes that will need to see both Birx and Fauci face Nuremberg-type trials for the whole world to see, including their executions, if found guilty.’

Mentions of American public figures and engagement with international news and use of international examples to support a domestic far-right agenda reflects a broader internationalisation of far-right activity, which has been increasingly documented in research.²³

In addition to the trend highlighted above, several posts focused on promoting alternative treatments to COVID-19 specifically, HCQ, the medication presented by Donald Trump as an effective cure. One post, for instance, read: 'Cannot FORCE a vaccine if viable alternative treatments are available such as HCQ. Why are they pushing so hard to discredit these drugs?'

Posts about lockdown focused on two main themes: the ineffectiveness of the lockdown in stemming infections and the ineffectiveness of the government's response to the pandemic. While the former aimed at downplaying the pandemic, the latter was frequently used to discredit COVID-19 restrictions (e.g. hotel quarantine) and fuel anti-minority sentiment. Indeed, many posts claimed that minorities allegedly broke lockdown rules. A post sharing an article from the Daily Mail read: 'Shameful jokers: Chinese students film themselves breaching curfew for a McDonald's run and mocking the lockdown - and are hit with fines and scorn of compatriots'. This shows again how the pandemic was hijacked to inflame anti-Chinese sentiment.

The intersection of disinformation and ideological mobilisation, particularly through anti-minority sentiment and overt hate speech, highlights the weaponisation of the pandemic for far-right agendas and the growing overlap between disinformation and hate. The nexus between disinformation and extremism has reflected in anti-Chinese disinformation and a rise in anti-Chinese hate crimes and attacks across different geographical contexts, including in the US, Europe and Australia. The US has seen a notable rise in hate crimes fuelled by disinformation, while a recent survey by the

policy think tank the Lowy Institute pointed to growing anti-Asian sentiment in Australia.²⁴ This also resonates with the findings of a community survey among Asian Australians, led by the Asian Australian Alliance, collecting reports of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵

CHINA-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS

Posts about China and China-Australia relations were strongly anti-Chinese in tone, reflecting the Australian far-right's attempt to fuel anti-Chinese sentiment and blame the pandemic on China. Posts in our dataset focused primarily on either the Australian government's complicity with an allegedly malevolent Chinese agenda or on conspiracy theories arguing that China manufactured the pandemic with the help of international elites.

The first narrative was illustrated by posts such as: 'Victoria is the most Marxist state in Australia & comrades of the CCP - Communist China party' or 'they have sold out to Chinese money and have to keep the people compliant like they do in China. It's a test case for the rest of the world'. Posts arguing that China created the virus on purpose included claims such as the following: 'China was part of the gang who hatched the plan!!' In addition, posts frequently insulted China and Chinese people, often using slurs.

As highlighted above, Australia has seen a rise in anti-Asian sentiment during the pandemic. The Australian far-right has sought to weaponise events related to China seemingly to inspire anti-Asian sentiment.²⁶ Analysis of key discussion in our network suggests that anti-China mobilisation and attacks on Chinese immigrants in Australia or Australians of perceived Chinese origin is a key rallying point for the far-right on Gab. The combination of disinformation and hateful slurs targeting Asian communities in Australia has security implications and could fuel offline attacks against these communities.

BLM AND GLOBAL ANTI-RACIST PROTESTS

BLM emerged as a major topic of discussion on Gab, echoing the findings of a recent analysis carried out on Australian Facebook, which showed that world events are weaponised by the far-right to further its agenda.²⁷ Posts relating to BLM, both concerning the protests in the US as well as those in Australia, which focussed on Aboriginal deaths in police custody, were uniformly negative in tone. A great number linked to news stories from far-right websites that told of purported BLM crimes (e.g. ‘Trophy Pic Of BLM Soldiers Holding Down And Kneeling On White Baby’s Neck Ignored By Mainline Media’, ‘MASSIVE VOTER BACKLASH as BLM Mob Demands Whites GIVE UP Their HOMES for Blacks!’).

Posts that were not news-related fell into two broad categories. The first was openly racist posts such as ‘BLM are SAVAGES and if you support them, so are you!’. The other category of posts related to the politics of BLM and attempted to discredit the movement by alleging that it is ‘Marxist’ and dedicated to brainwashing people. One user wrote: ‘A series of #BlackLivesMatter school materials were leaked to the internet recently, so I decided to take a look. As expected, it contains a programme to indoctrinate kids of all ages into the #woke #cult with openly postmodern agitprop.’

Attacks on and disinformation about BLM have been at the heart of global far-right mobilisation, including in the US where far-right group spread disinformation about the protests.²⁸ The Australian far-right’s engagement with BLM and attempts to discredit the movement point to internationalisation of trends in far-right mobilisation.

Finally, a distinct subset of posts attempted to discredit the movement by describing it as majority-white and manipulated by global elites, as evidenced in the following posts: ‘Oh and just to clarify, 80% of Aussie BLM is White,,,paid by Soros foundations... what would the poor blacks do without [sic] the whites yet again...’

or ‘BLM doesn’t give a damn about blacks – they only want the money coming to them so they can be part of the “Elitist” establishment.’

Far-right actors and conspiracy theory networks have disseminated disinformation and launched attacks on BLM across the English-speaking world. In the US, Facebook groups at the intersection of far-right ideology and conspiracy theories have spread disinformation about the movement, while UK far-right groups have clashed with anti-racist protesters, using BLM to bolster their activities.²⁹ The Australian far-right’s attacks on BLM reflects a trend already observed on Facebook and the internationalisation of global far-right activity, whereby groups use global events to forge transnational connections while supporting their domestic agendas.³⁰

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Posts related to energy were overwhelmingly opposed to green energies and undermined progressive policies to tackle the climate crisis, often referencing news stories from fringe websites. Several posts for instance referenced blackouts in the US as evidence that green energies are a bad investment. The articles shared included titles such as: ‘Hopeless Joke: Australia’s Wind Industry Keeps On Failing to Deliver the Goods’, ‘If You Like Blackouts, You’ll Love Joe Biden’s Green Energy Plans’, and ‘Simply Staggering: What Weather Dependent Wind & Solar Really Costs.’

Any comments beyond the sharing of news stories tended to reinforce these attitudes: that green energy is expensive and inefficient at best, and a corrupt industry at worst. Fossil fuels were talked up as valuable and reliable commodities, pointing to the far-right’s mobilisation against climate action. For example, one user wrote: ‘More bloody wind turbines on the road today. What a waste of time, effort and energy. Meanwhile, we are shipping our precious coal overseas instead of value-adding and using it to manufacture things.’

Discussions about energy and climate change highlights the far-right's attempt to exploit – and further fuel – divisions over the climate crisis and disputes over natural resources. Globally, there have been signs of far-right mobilisation against progressive climate agendas and attacks on climate activists, including Greta Thunberg.³¹ As climate issues become more prominent in the political agenda, this trend threatens to hijack climate-related issues for anti-liberal and far-right activity.

WHITE IDENTITY

The discussions about white identity were among the most salient topics of conversation in the dataset and reflect the nature of the network analysed and the use of the Gab platform to promote white supremacy or white nationalist ideology.³² In posts revolving around white identity, the concept of white supremacy was debated among posters, who discussed how best to defend their ideology without encountering a backlash. Another sign that the Australian far-right is deliberately discussing how to mainstream extremist ideologies.

Posters discussed various diluted versions of white supremacy ideology, debating what criteria could be used to build white nationalism. According to one user, white nationalism needs to take into account differences between white people: 'Bulldog nationalism is the retreat into an exclusionary Englishness at the expense of our race, while a purely white identity fails to recognise important differences between peoples of European descent. We really need to find the middle ground.'

Another rejects 'obsession' with whiteness, instead citing 'Christian values' as the prime justification for ethnonationalism, and presenting Christianity as a tactic to advocate for white nationalism in the mainstream without being labelled a racist. This points to the far-right's concerted tactics to introduce extremist ideologies into mainstream society:

'Too many people are too obsessed with their white identity, or following failed leaders of the past, and while it's good to value your heritage (honour thy mother and thy father), it is not the only thing that matters... While he doesn't specifically make ethnic mixing a sin, he does make it clear that he uses this as a punishment for abandoning him... God created nations, he makes it very clear that a nation is an ethnic group, and rejecting him is why our nations are currently being flooded with outsiders... Our enemies cannot reasonably call us stupid names like "Nazi" or "white supremacist" if our response is "I'm just a Christian who believes the Bible is the true word of God".'

Other posts discussed the far-right 'white genocide' conspiracy theory, linked to a number of far-right terror attacks, including the Christchurch attack by an Australian white supremacist in March 2019.³³ Users in the sample analysed subscribed to this conspiracy theory, blaming white genocide mostly on Jews, the Chinese or shadowy groups such as 'employees of Facebook'. Comments included: 'Whites need to unite and go after the enemy Jews behind this White Genocide plot', or 'While Whites take care of blacks and millions of immigrants and natives, Chinese are buying historic White properties everywhere... Africa for Africans, Asia for Asians, White countries for everyone IS White Genocide'.

Figure 4 Example of post relating to the 'white genocide' theory.

⚠️ Meanwhile @ Zucc HQ...
 ⚠️ The Employees of Facebook;
 ⚠️ Decide In Favour of;

■ Open Declarations of White Genocide
 > Open Declarations of White Genocide
 ■ Open Declarations of White Genocide
 > Open Declarations of White Genocide
 ■ Open Declarations of White Genocide
 > Open Declarations of White Genocide

> Dated 16/7/2020

NEWS / UPDATES / ARCHIVES / REDPILLS / GOOD COMPENY

Widespread engagement with white supremacist ideology and conspiracy theories, which have been linked to several recent lethal far-right terrorist attacks, highlights the extreme ideological nature of conversations taking place on Gab. These have significant implications for domestic security, and could directly fuel radicalisation and offline violence. There are concerning precedents to this. In 2018, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter used Gab to propagate his ideology. The use of unregulated platforms such as 8chan(8kun) to disseminate ideological documents in attacks was further illustrated in the Christchurch and El Paso attacks in 2019. Overt support for white supremacist ideology and the conspiracy theories that inspired these attacks shows that Gab serves as a platform for extreme right-wing mobilisation.

MOST ACTIVE ACCOUNTS

We qualitatively assessed the ten most active Gab accounts in the dataset to shed light on the nature of their activity and, where possible, their ideological leaning.

Our analysis showed that a small number of accounts were key in driving mobilisation in the Gab network, with the top-three most active accounts in our dataset producing a combined total of 34,597 posts, or over 75% of the total posts in our data. These accounts produced an average of 55, 41 and 31 posts per day respectively.

An overview of the top-ten most active accounts by the number of posts and percentage of posts produced in the total sample is presented below.

ACCOUNT	NUMBER OF POSTS	PERCENTAGE OF POSTS PRODUCED IN TOTAL SAMPLE
Account 1	14,996	33%
Account 2	11,155	25%
Account 3	8,446	19%
Account 4	2,659	6%
Account 5	1,471	3%
Account 6	1,420	3%
Account 7	1,092	2%
Account 8	600	1%
Account 9	577	1%
Account 10	411	<1%

Figure 5 Top-ten most active Gab accounts in the network.

With 14,996 posts, the most active account (who was allegedly one of the administrators of the Gab subgroup Australia at the time) produced 33% of the total output of posts during the period of study, while the second most active accounted for 25% of the total, and the third accounted for a further 19% of posts. This highlights the central role of a small number of very active accounts in driving mobilisation on the platform.

To understand the top-ten accounts' identity and ideological focus, we analysed a selection of recent posts made by each account.³⁴ This was complemented by the analysis of the account's selected imagery and self-description. We found that the top-ten most active accounts in our data engaged with a variety of issue areas.

The ninth most active account was the only one that clearly and explicitly identified with a specific far-right group. The account featured the use of the 'White Pride World Wide' logo with the Celtic Cross (which is also known as the logo of one of the largest and most established white supremacy neo-Nazi internet forum, Stormfront) in its cover picture. The group, formed reportedly in 2009 in Melbourne, frequently posts (also on its still accessible Facebook page) antisemitic and white supremacy content (e.g. white genocide).

While this account was the only one to openly identify with a white supremacy group and imagery, six of the remaining nine most active accounts also engaged in posting white supremacist, ethnonationalist or antisemitic content. One of the most active accounts explicitly engaged in Holocaust denial shared pro-Hitler memes. It also promoted narratives blaming COVID-19 on Jews and claiming that Jews are attempting to create a 'New World Order'. This referenced the short book called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which spells out an alleged secret plan by Jewish elites to take over the world, but has been widely discredited by historians as a political forgery.³⁵ One post read:

'It is good to remember the "Protocols of Zion" dating from 1492. That year, the Great Sanhedrin transmitted to the Jews of Spain its war instructions against the Catholics.'

The Great Sanhedrin is the world Jewish government, an oligarchy of the most learned rabbis, the Elders of Zion. The world Jewish government is the architect of the New World Order. It is also what is called the deep state, in all countries, not just in the United States.'

A self-proclaimed far-right media outlet, based in Melbourne, also featured among the most active accounts. While its articles and posts cover a range of themes including pro-Trump and anti-China content, one of its most recent posts included ethnonationalist and white separatist tropes. Some posts argued that white Australians should create white-only cities for their security, using 'Aboriginal Ethno Cities' as models, as in the following example:

'Most aboriginal communities have voted to restrict alcohol to them and to stop door to door salesmen ripping off their people amongst other things. Can you imagine how wonderful it would be if white people could have ethno cities where we could protect our most vulnerable too?'

Two of the most active accounts appeared to be particularly dedicated to the discussion of conspiracy theories. One of the accounts explicitly aims to 'help inform and teach others about the massive hidden deception by the corporate media and powerful elite who influence the loss of our freedoms and liberty'. In multiple posts the account shared conspiracy theories related to COVID-19, including support for a 'Plandemic' video, and claims that lockdown is a concerted effort to destroy small businesses by global elites and impose a tyrannical rule on Australians.

Another account was explicitly dedicated to the promotion of pro-Trump content and conspiracy theories related to QAnon. The account's description read: 'With Trump as our leader, let's make the world great again! Sydney, Australia.' A qualitative assessment of a sample of posts

produced by this account showed that it subscribes to several conspiracy theories, including QAnon and conspiracies related to voter fraud in the American presidential elections.

It is worth noting that the Gab account of the far-right Australian Protectionist Party featured among the most active accounts. The account was especially active in sharing QAnon, anti-vaccination and pandemic-related conspiracy theories, including the idea that global elites are allegedly seeking to annihilate large parts of the world population and that vaccines contain microchips.

ANTISEMITIC DISCUSSION

Given the presence of overtly antisemitic content in our analysis of the most active accounts in the network, we sought to assess the significance of antisemitic content and identify relevant posts. To this effect, we used three sets of keywords covering explicit antisemitism, implicit antisemitism, and discussion about Judaism.

The distinction was made between these three sets of keywords to ensure we captured as much of the conversation as possible, recognising that antisemitism can also be expressed through implicit tropes, and to determine whether broader discussion about Judaism could act as a gateway towards explicit manifestations of antisemitism. We qualitatively analysed a random sample of 50 posts in each sub-dataset to identify the most important topics of conversation.

We found that antisemitism manifested primarily through explicit terminology, reflecting the use of the platform to promote overt antisemitism. Explicitly antisemitic terms appeared in 11% of posts in the total sample, while keywords marked as implicit antisemitism and neutral keywords appeared in less than 2% of posts respectively. Implicit antisemitism and the use of neutral terms related to Judaism, therefore, represented a very small proportion of the dataset.

The posts using explicit antisemitic terminology were noticeably different from those using implicit antisemitic terms, and frequently discussed supposed Jewish plots to suppress non-Jews, often mentioning Jewish public figures. Examples of such posts include: 'The Jewish Weinstein brothers. Making movies to distract and "entertain" the goyim for decades.'

The theory that non-Jewish people are being deliberately 'distracted', 'brainwashed' or 'hypnotised' was the prevalent theme in the 50 randomly selected posts from this subset, as shown in the following post:

'Germany has been under ZOG³⁶ infiltration and rule ever since the end of WW2. Germans are constantly made to feel bad and inferior for being white. Here is how ZOG keeps the rightful owners of Germany in check with constant anti-white and right-wing propaganda. The jealousy and hate are real.'

Closely connected to the 'brainwashing' trope was the idea that the Holocaust was fabricated; this is partly a result of the inclusion of the keyword 'Holohoax'. The high volume of explicitly antisemitic content and Holocaust denial conversation illustrates Gab's role as a platform for extremist antisemitic mobilisation and the propagation of antisemitic hate speech in Australia. While platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have banned Holocaust denial Gab's weak content moderation allows users to propagate extremist and explicitly antisemitic views.³⁷

NARRATIVES ABOUT THE FAR-LEFT

One of the objectives of this research was to understand the scope and nature of discussions about the far-left among far-right Gab users. The computational analysis of the dataset did not identify the left or far-left as a key topic of discussion in the network, although it should be noted that BLM and anti-racist movements, which are frequently associated with left-wing mobilisation, appeared as a major topic of discussion. Further, qualitative analysis of content produced during spikes in discussion showed that content about the left was present in the dataset.

To determine the proportion of posts about the far-left produced by the Gab network, we looked for mentions of the far-left in the whole dataset by using a list of keywords associated with this ideological group, identifying 2,043 posts containing these keywords.³⁸ Posts about the far-left, therefore, accounted for over 4% of the discussion.

To understand how the far-right discuss the far-left, we conducted a qualitative analysis of a systematic selection of 325 posts (see Appendix 2 for more details). These posts were selected based on their use of any of the following keywords:

- Communist(s)/communism
- Marxist(s)/Marxism
- Antifa
- Socialist(s)/socialism
- Leftist(s)
- Anarchist(s)

Our analysis revealed noticeable narratives and tropes that occurred consistently across the dataset but also significant differences between accounts and at times contradictory framing of left-wing actors and ideologies. This is a reminder of the complexities, inconsistencies, and

ideological divergences even within far-right online echo chambers such as the Gab ecosystem.³⁹ The most dominant narrative is related to conspiratorial allegations that a Marxist-socialist or communist agenda has been infiltrating Western institutions to destroy civilisation and implement a communist-socialist (and anti-white) system of tyranny.

PROFILING THE FAR-LEFT

Often using dehumanising language (e.g. ‘scum’, ‘filth’, ‘parasites’), individuals associated with the far-left are typically characterised as ‘dumb’, ‘mindless’, ‘brainwashed’, intolerant and spoilt (mostly young) people. Overall, they are portrayed as morally inferior; a significant number of posts accuse them of lying and deceiving or even of supporting or being linked to paedophilia as the ultimate proof of their alleged moral degeneracy. Moreover, they are commonly labelled as being anti-white and hypocrites; the latter is evidenced in the following post:

The Marxists love to pretend that they're against the system, [but]...most of the anti-fascist action repertoire relies on the liberal-capitalist system. They work hand in glove with bosses to fire workers for their anti-system political views. They work tirelessly for the billionaire Jew Mark Zuckerberg, reporting anti-system speech to be removed from social media. In reality, these pretended revolutionaries are in full harmony with the powers that be.

Another common accusation of hypocrisy is linked to the Left's claims of being tolerant and peaceful, which is frequently contrasted by presenting them as intolerant and violent, especially in the context of BLM.

The majority of analysed posts are concerned with left-wing doctrines and systems. Pertinent political regimes, both historical and contemporary, are typically described as coercive, illiberal and oppressive systems of tyranny that deny people's freedoms (e.g. freedom of speech). They are also commonly labelled as being anti-capitalist, which includes claims that they do not permit private property, ruin the economy or are guilty of letting their own people starve. It is worth noting that this depiction is not only applied to distant overseas regimes, but to some extent also to the Socialist Party in Victoria, stating that socialists have plans to confiscate private property in Melbourne.

OUR ENEMIES ON THE LEFT: MAIN CULPRITS OF THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST 'US'

Many posts claim that left-wing ideologies have infiltrated Western societies and now constitute an imminent threat to the West. A central element of this Trojan Horse narrative is the frequently articulated claim that various institutions in Australia (and elsewhere) are either actively pushing a communist, Marxist or socialist agenda or are at least sympathetic and complicit. These conspiratorial allegations create and reinforce the image of a powerful left-wing enemy of 'ordinary' patriotic (white) Australians.

Mainstream media (in particular Australia's public broadcasters and some left-leaning outlets) and the education system (both schools and universities) are commonly regarded as either directly associated with or supportive of communism, socialism or Marxism.⁴⁰ Many posts accuse the media of selective reporting (e.g. failing to report on crimes against whites or left-wing violence), gas-lighting the public with their reporting (e.g. representing the BLM protests as mostly peaceful) and applying double standards (e.g. focus on violence at anti-lockdown protests).⁴¹

The other major culprit allegedly involved in the left-wing takeover attempts of Western societies is educational institutions. The school system is frequently accused of brainwashing 'our' children

with 'cultural Marxist, gender-fluidity and climate change alarmism'. Universities are labelled 'indoctrination centres of the far-left' that have, as one post states, 'incubated a mentality of hatred toward Anglos, toward men, toward Christians and traditionally-minded folk for decades', continuously pursuing their Marxist agenda after 'the "Free World" vanquished the Marxist threat with the fall of the Soviet Union'.

Several posts also consider political actors, mainly on the political left, as Marxist sympathisers or supporters. In the US context, for example, some claim that the Democratic Party, and Joe Biden in particular, have supported Antifa and the 'Marxist' BLM protests. In the domestic context, Labor-led state governments, especially the Victorian government, are frequently referred to as socialist, communist or Marxist.

Figure 6 Example of post in the sample.



While some posts praise the police for their actions against left-wing protesters, the general sentiment towards police is rather negative, accusing them of siding with the far-left. One account, for example, posted an image of an Australian police officer kneeling with a raised fist, next to a person of colour, seemingly in the context of an Australian BLM protest. The post reads: 'Australian police join Antifa protest against police, Australia and white people.'

Figure 7 Example of post in the sample.



MODES OF ALLEGED INFILTRATION: CONTROL, STEALTH AND VIOLENCE

Our analysis found that there are different views on the specific modes and mechanisms of this alleged communist or socialist threat.

A common narrative is that domestic institutions play a key role in the alleged Marxist subversion of Australian (or American) society and ‘Western civilisation’ more broadly. So, the threat comes from the ‘enemy within’ – the media, the education system and the political class. One post is very explicit about this:

‘The enemy within is more deadly than the enemy at the gates because the internal enemy is nefarious and unclear. It cloaks its activities in subterfuge and misdirection until it is too late to be properly dealt with. It is the Trojan Horse that was built inside the walls.’

While the conviction that these domestic institutions are part of a Marxist plot is almost unanimously agreed upon, many posts also allude to external forces, actors, and institutions involved in this alleged threat. These allusions are often unspecific and vague in identifying these external forces, but a substantial number of posts mention either China or the United Nations (sometimes using the hashtag #UNcommunists).

Another dominant narrative is that the alleged subversion against the West is a Jewish plot. While many posts are explicitly antisemitic (as discussed above), the ways in which they connect Jews to the alleged communist or socialist threat differ. Some posts make general claims about the association between Antifa or communism and Jews. One account shared an article titled ‘The Jewish Origins of Communism’, accompanied by the text that stresses Israel’s ‘responsibility’ in the ‘communist holocaust’.

Figure 8 Example of post in the sample.



Others allege Jewish support for Antifa and BLM protests and Jews’ power over political parties, making conspiratorial antisemitic allegations of secretive and influential Jewish elites operating in the background. Some posts directly describe BLM as part of a Jewish plot: ‘#NeverForget it was the Jewish ruling class who forced the coming war, they are the aggressors. Antifa and BLM are just Jewish created golems. This is the culmination of a 2,000-year war that started when they killed the Son of God.’

Others claim that the BLM protests have been financially supported by the billionaire business investor George Soros or other 'shadowy backers internationally', describing Antifa as 'paid anarchist agents ... on Soros' payroll', while many others suggest that left-wing activists unwittingly execute a grand plan for a global elite or are unknowingly part of a large communist plot. A commonly occurring term in this context is 'useful idiots'.

The concept of 'useful idiot' is deployed in two ways. Firstly, a number of posts allege that racialised minorities, such as Aboriginal Australians or African Americans, are being instrumentalised by Antifa and other left-wing activists for the latter's socialist-Marxist cause. Secondly, not only are racial minorities allegedly instrumentalised by left-wing activists for their socialist agenda, but the latter are themselves frequently described as 'useful idiots' who unwittingly advance the agenda of larger forces, be it a globalist Jewish elite, the 'Commies' or the US Democrats.

'Stop blaming blacks for the violence [at BLM protests], and treating ANTIFA as anything but a bunch of loser clowns with delusions of revolution. They are useful idiots and can be easily dealt with once we have won back our liberty and self-determination. The true enemy is the globalist Jewish ruling class, the corporate media they own, and the politicians they buy...'

Climate change, multiculturalism, and the COVID-19 pandemic are also presented as part of this take-over agenda. One post, for example, states: 'Multiculturalism is just a vehicle for multinationalists, Islamic fundamentalists, sino-global expansion and communism.' Referring to The Great Reset, a discussion initiated by the founder of the World Economic Forum about the vision for a more equitable post-COVID-19 world, one post links to a Sky News article suggesting that the 'coronavirus tragedy is used by dangerous Marxist leaders ... to destroy capitalism'.

The analysis of the posts also sheds light on how this communist-socialist takeover is allegedly meant to unfold. We identified two salient narratives: firstly, a gradual infiltration and takeover by stealth (creeping socialism), and secondly, the intentional creation of division and chaos, often through more violent actions. Both tactics allegedly aim at the destruction of Western civilisation and the implementation of some form of socialist regime, often explicitly linked to an anti-white agenda.

CALL TO ACTION

Against the backdrop of this salient narrative that white people and Western civilisation are under imminent threat by socialist globalist forces and their violent 'useful idiots', many posts call for action in response to this allegedly looming and destructive takeover. Given that the 'enemy' is typically defined through an institutional-structural lens, the targets of these reactive and often violent actions are usually not certain individuals but remain mostly generic and vaguely defined.

Two different types of actions are advocated for in response to the perceived threats. The first one relates to attempts of cultural, ideological, and racial separation from alleged communist or Marxist institutions or groups. A rather benign version of this is the call on others to consider homeschooling to protect 'our' children from the allegedly Marxist influence in schools. One post, for example, argues that schools are 'used to indoctrinate our children in this wicked, evil agenda [of leftists radicalisation]', adding 'Give homeschooling a look-over'.

What was more common in the dataset, however, are more radical but operationally less specific calls for separation, often with a strong notion of white separatism. One account, for example, states: ‘What is required is the complete separation of nations that are ethnicities, and the removal of all communists/socialists/leftists, and any other assorted parasite or liar, from the West permanently’. In a different post, the same account argues:

‘The choice for white people now is simple, we either separate ourselves from non-white ethnic groups (including Jewish people), and the corporate supported communists using them as a weapon, or we go extinct. The “Left” want us dead and non-whites are ethnically replacing us...we cannot live with these people and why should we? The only viable option is divorce and if the enemies won’t allow that then we are going to have to fight for it.’

Combining white supremacy, antisemitic and anti-communist frames, the post underscores that violence may be the only suitable response to the alleged threat. Other posts advocate for violence as being without an alternative: ‘You cannot negotiate with Marxists (leftists), you either eliminate them or one day they eliminate you.’ One post describes democratic means, such as voting, as futile; it would change ‘absolutely nothing. It’s a rigged game that keeps the ruling oligarchy in power. Democracy always fails and it’s failed in the West’, asserting that there is ‘absolutely no doubt that violence is an effective means of changing things’. The post ends with the implicitly inciting question: ‘what are we going to do about it?’.

What many of these posts calling for violence have in common is that the attack on the political enemy is framed in reactive-defensive terms and as a matter of urgency. The ‘others’ are portrayed as the aggressors leaving ‘us’ no choice but to defend ‘our’ culture or lives against this

alleged powerful threat. This is apparent across the analysed data and made explicit in a number of posts. One of many examples is the following post in the context of the controversies around James Cook statues, where the actions of those ‘leftists’ that seek to take down these colonial statues are described as ‘incitement to anti-Australian violence and terrorism’. The post concludes: ‘They won’t stop until either we remove THESE terrorists from Australia or they remove Australia. What is your choice?’

CONCLUSION

Our analysis shows that far-right mobilisation on Gab increased substantially over 2020, in particular between June and August, coinciding with international and domestic BLM protests and the second COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne. During that period, discussion about COVID-19 and racial justice protests featured prominently in our dataset. Mentions of COVID-19 frequently went hand in hand with conspiracy theories. Seven of the top-ten most active accounts in the network actively posted white supremacist, ethnonationalist, or antisemitic content, with one explicitly supporting a local white supremacist group and one posting overtly antisemitic content.

White identity and antisemitism are central features of the data we analysed. Beyond the explicit use of antisemitic tropes and slurs, implicit antisemitic tropes and a broader discussion about Jewish communities and Judaism provided a gateway to the production of explicitly antisemitic and white supremacist content, including calls to remove Jews from Western civilisation – with implications for the risk of violent mobilisation.

Existing research has shown that antisemitism as an ideological belief system can serve as a gateway to violent radicalisation and provide a linkage between non-violent and violent extremism.⁴² Understanding the ideological features of online far-right mobilisation across platforms is important to inform law enforcement efforts at preventing violent extremism. It also provides insights into how platforms with little to no content moderation such as Gab provide a space where exclusionary and extremist beliefs are not only shared but amplified.

Antisemitic beliefs intersected with discourse about the far-left – with both Jews and the far-left accused of plotting to bring down Western civilisation, fuelling calls for separatism and violent action. Overt antisemitic discourse and violent calls to action against the far-left underscore potential security threats posed by online far-right mobilisation and its potential to spill over into (violent) offline activity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: UNSTRUCTURED CLASSIFIER EXPLAINER

An unstructured classifier analyses a large body of text for commonly recurring words, which are subsequently arranged into a pre-designated number of clusters. These clusters represent the most prevalent themes or topics of conversation throughout the entire time frame covered by the data. The data was ordered into 40 clusters of ten words, which were qualitatively analysed to identify the most prominent topics.

APPENDIX 2: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

We identified all posts that contained any of the following keywords: communist(s)/communism, Marxist(s)/Marxism, Antifa, socialist(s)/socialism, leftist(s), and anarchist(s). Then we randomly selected posts within each keyword specific subgroup; the number of selected posts reflects the prevalence of each of these keywords in the entire dataset (the only exception was the term 'anarchist' used only in 21 unique posts, which were all included in the sample). Deviating from this randomised selection, our sampling strategy also ensured that all Gab accounts in the analysed sample that used any of these particular key terms were included in the selection. This was to ensure our sample represents potential variations between the accounts and their framing of left-wing groups and doctrines in their posting activities. After deleting duplicates, we ended up with a total sample of 325 posts for the qualitative multi-modal content analysis.

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