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Mobilizing Extremism Online: Comparing Australian and Canadian Right-Wing Extremist Groups on Facebook

Jade Hutchinson, Macquarie University (Australia) and Groningen University (The Netherlands)

Amarnath Amarasingam, Queen's University (Canada)

Ryan Scrivens, Michigan State University (United States)

Brian Ballsun-Stanton, Macquarie University (Australia)

Abstract

Right-wing extremist groups harness popular social media platforms to accrue and mobilize followers. In recent years, researchers have examined the various themes and narratives espoused by extremist groups in the United States and Europe, and how these themes and narratives are employed to mobilize their followings on social media. Little, however, is comparatively known about how such efforts unfold within and between right-wing extremist groups in Australia and Canada. In this study, we conducted a cross-national comparative analysis of over eight years of online content found on 59 Australian and Canadian right-wing group pages on Facebook. Here we assessed the level of active and passive user engagement with posts, and identified certain themes and narratives that generated the most user engagement on these group pages. Overall, a number of ideological and behavioral commonalities and differences emerged in regard to patterns of active and passive user engagement, and the character of three prevailing themes: methods of violence, and references to national and racial identities. The results highlight the influence of both the national and transnational context in negotiating which themes and narratives resonate with Australian and Canadian right-wing online communities, and the multi-dimensional nature of right-wing user engagement and social mobilization on social media.

Keywords: Right-wing extremism; Internet; Australia; Canada; Facebook.

Introduction

In the digital age, administrators of right-wing groups are becoming increasingly adept at using social media technology. Over the last 10 years, social media has become the most popular transnational medium for digital communication among right-wing groups and movements. Social media platforms like Facebook now play a significant role in facilitating

right-wing extremist support networks and propagating right-wing extremist narratives (Davey & Ebner, 2017). Among other nations, Australia and Canada host a range of right-wing extremist groups who use Facebook to communicate narratives conducive to movement objectives, such as strategically excommunicating the ‘Other’ from society (Hutchinson, 2019a; Hutchinson, 2019c). In this context, identifying how Australian and Canadian right-wing groups negotiate the use of violence, what national identities are valued, and what racial identities are targeted, is an important priority for countering violent extremism (CVE) programs and intelligence agencies who are trying to understand right-wing extremism in their countries (Blackbourn, et al., 2019; Champion, 2019a, 2019b; Cohen, et al., 2014; Scrivens, et al., 2018; Voogt, 2017).

Research into online right-wing extremism and terrorism has predominately focused on the United States and Europe. However, recent instances of right-wing related terrorism in Australia and Canada has redirected academic focus toward right-wing extremist narratives and online activity in these countries (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019; Hutchinson, 2019a; Hutchinson, 2019c). Recent research has analyzed the degree to which certain platforms and websites facilitate right-wing extremist activity and support groups in either Australia or Canada (Dean, et al., 2016; Johnson, 2018; Peucker, et al., 2018; Perry & Scrivens, 2019; Scrivens, et al., 2018), and scholarship on the right-wing extremist use of Facebook is emerging (Davey & Ebner, 2017; Dean et al., 2016; Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2017; Hutchinson, 2019a; Scrivens & Amarasingam, 2020; Stier et al., 2017). However, despite recommendations for a transnational focus (e.g., Cai & London, 2019; Caiani, 2018; Caiani & Kröll, 2015; Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Jones, 2015; Peucker, et al., 2018), cross-national comparative analyses of right-wing extremist groups remains relatively uncommon in the literature. Notwithstanding the few exceptions (e.g., Hutchinson, 2019a; Poynting & Perry, 2007), few efforts have been made to systematically analyze and directly compare Australian and Canadian right-wing extremist narratives and online activity. Rarer still are studies that cross-nationally identify the level of online user engagement and conceptually analyze the preferred use of violence and identities pertinent to Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on social media.

But why compare right-wing activity in Australia and Canada in general? Both nations share historical, cultural and technological synergies and idiosyncrasies. For instance, Australia and Canada share similar yet distinct histories of colonialism and post-colonial ethnocentrism;

they both embarked on multi-decade campaigns to establish multiculturalism into the national social and political framework using similar legislation; each nation has expressed similar aspirations to welcome non-Anglo-European immigration and the LGBTQ community while being met with variations of socio-political resistance; and have witnessed a growth in online extremism and instances of right-wing terrorism related to resident right-wing extremist groups (Ambrose & Mudde, 2015; Hutchinson, 2019a; Hutchinson, 2019c; Poynting & Perry, 2007; Scrivens, 2020). These synergies and idiosyncrasies provide avenues for social mobilization and shape the ideological and moral inclinations of right-wing extremist groups and movements in each country, including their propensity for and preferred method of violence against targeted identities (Peucker, et al., 2018; Perry & Scrivens, 2016b). As Harris-Hogan, Dawson, and Amarasingam (2020) point out in their comparison of the domestic jihadist threat to Australia and Canada:

The comparison of similar societies facilitates a more controlled comparison of variables that are under at least the partial influence of their respective governments. In seeking to grasp the global-local dynamic in this context, identifying the similarities and differences between roughly comparable situations may prove more enlightening than merely substantiating the more obvious differences between disparate situations (p. 79).

Similarly, Australia and Canada are geographically distant from Europe, and the current rise of far-right politics and social movements in Europe, both countries have emphasized the use of hard and soft power when it comes to counter-terrorism as well as countering violent extremism (CVE) programming. As Harris-Hogan and colleagues (2020) note, "...Canada and Australia are uniquely comparable societies for studying the emergence, manifestation and evolution of jihadist terrorism in the twenty-first century (p. 79)." We believe the same is true for right-wing extremist movements.

In this article, we draw from a sample of 97,479 posts on 30 Australian and 29 Canadian right-wing group pages on Facebook between 2011 – 2019, to assess the level of active and passive user engagement with posts, and identify themes and narratives that are pertinent to Australian and Canadian right-wing extremism which generated the most active user engagement on these group pages. This was paired with a conceptual analysis of certain themes and narratives being engaged with by followers of these groups. First, we will provide descriptive statistics on the frequency with which users across both countries actively and

passively engaged with posts on Facebook. Second, we will present descriptive statistics on the popularity of linguistic references related to three prominent ideological themes, namely violence and the law, national identities, and racial references.

Literature Review

Internet technology has become a vital component of the transnational right-wing movement. Internet technology enables members of right-wing groups to participate, both in isolation and collectively, to advance their own self-interest and movement objectives (Whine, 1999). Right-wing extremist internet webpages, such as ‘Stormfront’, ‘Iron March’ and ‘Fascist Forge’, have or continue to broadcast extremist dialogue and content negotiating the use of violence and identifying identities of importance (Berman, et al., 2019; Bowman-Grieve, 2009; Koster & Houtman, 2008; Scrivens, et al., 2018; Visser, et al., 2019). Over the last 10 years, however, social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and GAB, have increasingly become the place where such dialogue and content are shared and popularized (Davey, et al., 2020; Droogan, et al., 2020; Johnson, 2018; Kingdon, 2020).

Surges in online activity over social media has served as a precursor to and punctuated recent acts of right-wing terrorism (Cai & London, 2019; Dearden, 2019; Hutchinson, 2019a; Hutchinson, 2019b). For instance, since 2011, there has not only been an increased concentration of right-wing terrorist attacks globally, but each attacker has been virtually connected to others over social media (Cai & Landon, 2019). Despite this trend in right-wing extremism and terrorism, the majority of research on the extremist use of social media has largely focused on content linked to groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS (Amarasingam, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Awan, 2017; Ducol, 2012; Johnson et al., 2016; Kennedy & Weimann, 2012; Parekh et al., 2018; Van San, 2015; Vergani, 2014; Weimann, 2010). However, recent publications have addressed important questions related to the issue of online right-wing extremist networks, and explored the role of social media in facilitating extremist content and right-wing violence (e.g., Conway, et al., 2019; Davey & Ebner, 2017; Gill, et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2017; Perry & Scrivens, 2016a). These contributions to the literature have complimented adjacent research documenting the ‘rise’ of right-wing populism and national right-wing movements in various countries (e.g., Guibernau, 2010; Hutchinson, 2019b; Hutchinson, 2019d; Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Lees, 2018; Parent & Ellis, 2014; Perry & Scrivens, 2019; Podobnik, et al., 2017; Pupcenoks & McCabe, 2013; Solheim, 2018; Wodak, et al., 2013). However, this research remains ill-defined to which themes and narratives are

most engaged within and between right-wing online communities on social media platforms like Facebook.

Facebook has become both revolutionary and indispensable to Australian and Canadian right-wing extremist groups. With over 2.6 billion monthly users world-wide, Facebook is one of the most popular techno-social extensions of the internet (Noyes, 2020). Facebook's popularity offers administrators of right-wing groups greater interconnectivity between localized groups and the national or international movement (Caiani & Kröll, 2015). Although increased interconnectivity does not equate to interoperability, it does cultivate a sense of community and cross-pollinates content and conversations regarding the use of violence and identities of importance (Amarasingam, 2015; Cohen, et al., 2014; Edwards & Gribbon, 2013; King & Leonard, 2016).¹ The concern is that Facebook's twin capacity to broadcast the use of extremist violence and facilitate online mobilization towards targeted identities, will lead to greater or more severe instances of right-wing violent extremism (Lumsden & Harmer, 2019; Winter, 2019). Subsequently, in recent years, Australian and Canadian right-wing extremists have discriminated online, violently targeted and committed acts of terrorism against identities depicted as the 'Other' on Facebook, such as Muslims, women, and LGBTQ individuals (e.g., Baele, et al., 2019; Moro, 2019; O'Malley, 2019; Rushton & Di Stefano, 2019; Westcott, et al., 2019).

Although research into right-wing extremism and terrorism has predominately focused on the United States and Europe, recent research has pivoted academic attention toward how online right-wing extremism and terrorism has evolved in Australia and Canada respectively (e.g., Campion, 2019a, 2019b; Dean, et al., 2016; Hutchinson, 2019a; Hutchinson, 2019c; Parent & Ellis, 2014; Perry & Scrivens, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2019; Scrivens & Perry, 2017). However, these contributions do not address recommendations in the literature related to aspects of transnational right-wing extremism (e.g., Caiani, 2018; Caiani & Kröll, 2015; Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Jones, 2015; Peucker, et al., 2018).² Subsequently, those studies that have cross-nationally examined the presence and popularity of right-wing themes and narratives,

¹ Although Facebook is used by administrators to streamline, share and string together right-wing extremist content between users, instances of right-wing terrorism, such as the Christchurch attack in New Zealand, has promoted the removal of extremist material as an increasingly significant goal to maintain the platform's paramount objective as a private company (Cox & Koebler, 2018; Kosoff, 2018; Lamoureux, et al., 2019; Mason, 2019; McCann, 2018).

² It has been suggested that this focus on the 'rise' of 'new', nationalist-orientated right-wing extremist groups as stand-alone, unique phenomena, has narrowed the considered scope of influence to the national setting (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Rydgren, 2005a, 2005b;).

have predominately focused on the United States and Europe (e.g., Greven, 2016; Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Mondon, 2016; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren; 2005a, 2005b).

Academic contributions that include either Australian or Canadian right-wing groups in cross-national comparative analyses are relatively rare within the literature (e.g., Johnson, 2018). Rarer still are cross-national or collaborative Australia-Canada studies that directly compare Australian and Canadian right-wing extremist groups on social media (e.g., Hutchinson, 2019a). Subsequently, the literature is without an accurate depiction of the comparative ideological viewpoints and value systems supportive of ‘value-based extremism’ or preferred methods of violence indicative of ‘action-based extremism’, within Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on popular social media platforms like Facebook (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010). Given the increasingly important role of social media to shape right-wing extremism and facilitate the right-wing engagement in terrorism, it is necessary to understand and compare markers of ‘value-based extremism’ (e.g., national and racial identities) and ‘action-based extremism’ (e.g., methods of violence) that frequent administrator posts on Facebook and are actively engaged with by users in Australia and Canada (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010).

Data Selection and Method

We conducted a cross-national comparative analysis of 59 Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook between 2011 and 2019. This research draws from a data set of 97,479 publicly available posts that contained 9,811,144 ‘Likes’, 13,614,287 ‘Shares’, 2,921,544 ‘Comments’, and 26,469,481 ‘Post Views’ present across 30 right-wing group page accounts who self-identified as Australian, and 29 right-wing group page accounts who self-identified as Canadian on Facebook (Figures 1. & 2).³ Each right-wing group account was selected for analysis based on the following criteria:

- (1) *Literature* - the academic literature identified the grouping as either an Australian or Canadian right-wing group of importance (e.g., Dean, et al., 2016; Hutchinson, 2019a; Johnson, 2018; Perry & Scrivens, 2019);

³ It is not understood why one of the Canadian accounts, ‘Unit 14 (Blood & Honor Alberta)’, was not captured by Facebook’s online software program ‘Crowdtangle’ during data collection. During the time between selecting Facebook accounts for analysis and capturing online content, this account may have been suspended for violating Facebook’s terms of service, or as is characteristic of skinhead groups, intentionally decommissioned the account on suspicion of being identified by authorities (Dean, et al., 2016).

- (2) *Public Activity* - these groups and/or members of these groups have participated in a public event related to right-wing ideology. This includes rallies, demonstrations, marches, online campaigns, ‘neighborhood patrols’, and right-wing terrorism;
- (3) *Active Account* - these groups maintained a ‘group page’ account on Facebook at the point of data collection;
- (4) *Popularity* - each account had accrued enough followers to sustain consistent activity between administrators and users for the duration of its existence on Facebook; and
- (5) *Content* - each account featured a corpus of more than 10 administrator posts with user engagement at the point of data collection.

Two points were considered during the selection of Facebook accounts: auxiliary and ‘group page’ accounts. Select Australian and Canadian right-wing groups are credited with multiple Facebook accounts, referred to here as auxiliary accounts. Auxiliary accounts allow right-wing groups to geo-locally represent themselves in multiple locations, while representing the same group identity. Although several Facebook accounts are patented by a single group identity, each respective group page was submitted as an individual data point during the curation of data. Auxiliary accounts are often styled as ‘chapters’, ‘charters’, ‘clubs’ or ‘fronts’ and are representative of the same group identity in a specific geo-location, such as a city, town or region. Auxiliary accounts represent a strategic use of Facebook’s popular online space, and subsequently, make up for 23 of the 59 accounts within the data set, with an asymmetric distribution between Australia (15) and Canada (9).⁴ Furthermore, during data selection, a distinction was made between ‘group’, ‘group page’ and ‘page’ accounts on Facebook. Facebook ‘groups’ are considered closed social spaces on the platform that require administrative permission to enter and interact with other members. ‘Group pages’ are considered open online social spaces that represent a social grouping, existing either online or offline, that does not require administrative permission to access. ‘Pages’ are open online social spaces that do not self-identify as a group or require administrative permission to access. Group page accounts were chosen during data selection because they allow administrators to create multiple auxiliary accounts, and relative to Facebook ‘groups’ and

⁴ This is not to say that right-wing groups who use auxiliary accounts on Facebook are restricted to the national context. For instance, certain groups identities included in this study have originated outside of either Australia or Canada, such as Pegida who originated in Germany, Defence League groups who originated as the English Defence League, and Soldiers of Odin who originated in Finland. The internationalization of right-wing ideology and culture over the internet has encouraged certain right-wing groups to migrate outside their country of origin by creating auxiliary accounts on one or more social media platforms and geo-locally representing themselves as in either Australia or Canada (or both).

‘pages’, represented the most popular choice among right-wing groups in Australia and Canada at the time of data collection.

Australian Right-Wing Groups	Canadian Right-Wing Groups
Australia First Party (Main Page) Australia First Party (Brisbane) Australian Defence League (Main Page) Australian Liberty Alliance Australian Right-Wing Resistance Combat 18 (318 Australia) Cooks Convicts Lads Society Nationalist Alternative Nationalist Uprising Patriots Defence League Australia (Australia) Patriots Defence League Australia (Eastern Victoria) Patriots Defence League Australia (Adelaide) Patriots Defence League Australia (Bendigo) Patriots Defence League Australia (South Queensland) Patriots Defence League Australia (Sydney) Q Society Reclaim Australia (Main Page) Reclaim Australia (Western Australia) Reclaim Australia (New South Wales) Reclaim Australia (Townsville) Rise-Up Australia Soldiers Of Odin (Main Page – Melbourne) Soldiers Of Odin (Sydney) Soldiers Of Odin (Brisbane) Soldiers Of Odin (Perth) Soldiers Of Odin (South Australia) True Blue Crew (Queensland) True Blue Crew (New South Wales) United Rights Australia	28 Canada (Blood & Honour Alberta) ACT for Canada Canada First Canadian Coalition of Concerned Citizens Canadian Combat Coalition Canadian Defence League Canadian Nationalist Front Canadian Patriots Canadian Silent Majority Canadians-Against-Islam Cultural Action Party (Ontario) Guard Canadian Civil Militia Services III%ers (Canada) Immigration Watch Canada Independent Patriots (Canada) Légitime Violence Old Stock Canadian Pegida (Alberta) Pegida (British Columbia) Pegida (Canada) Proud Goys Soldiers of Odin (British Columbia) Soldiers of Odin (Grand Prairies) Soldiers of Odin (Red Deer) Soldiers of Odin (Vancouver) Unified National Conservative Movement Canada Unit 14 (Blood & Honour Alberta) United North Vinland Awake

Figure 1. details the names of the Facebook accounts belonging to the Australian and Canadian right-wing group pages.

In this study, we chose Facebook as the main platform due to the following conditions:

- (1) *Significance* – like other social media platforms, Facebook is considered an important location for collective identity formation, out-group identification and the negotiation of the use of violence by right-wing groups in these countries (Hutchinson, 2019a; Perry & Scrivens, 2019);
- (2) *Relevance* – at the time of data collection, Facebook hosted a large selection of Australian and Canadian right-wing groups; and
- (3) *Access* – at the time of data collection, Facebook allowed academic access to the online content contained within the group page accounts.

For this study, we captured over eight years of online activity belonging to administrators and users from 59 Australian and Canadian right-wing group pages on Facebook using Crowdtangle, Facebook’s social media analytics tool. The entirety of the data was collected in February 2019 using Crowdtangle’s “fetch history” feature, which collects the entirety of a public Facebook page or group for analysis (CrowdTangle, 2020). Our analysis examined post behavior and frequency, as well as user engagement in the form of content sharing and “likes”.⁵

Keyword and Theme Selection

Next, in order to assess how administrators and users negotiated the use of violence and identified national and racial identities of importance on Facebook, we sought to determine the prevalence of the following themes across Australian and Canadian right-wing accounts:

- (1) *Violence and the Law* – references to methods of violence, the judicial system, and instances of right-wing terrorism;
- (2) *National Identity* - references related to various national identities, nationalism and patriotism, and select socio-cultural practices specific to each country; and
- (3) *Racial References* – references related to various racial identities and select right-wing extremist references to race and racial purity.

⁵ It must be highlighted that the ‘Like’, ‘Share’ and ‘Comment’ features have been available on posts for Facebook users to engage with since February 2009. However, in February, 2016, Facebook introduced an additional selection of modified emojis. These emoji-based ‘reactions’ are graphically designed to represent certain emotions and emotional expressions, including ‘Love’, ‘Thankful’, ‘Haha’, ‘Wow’, ‘Sad’ and ‘Anger’, and are referred to collectively as ‘reactions’ (Eberl, et al., 2020). Although ‘reactions’ represent an important aspect of online user engagement and gratification, it was considered outside the scope and purpose of this study.

These themes were selected based on their foundational importance within right-wing ideology in general, and right-wing extremism in Australia and Canada in particular (e.g., Abbas, 2012; Bar-On, 2018; Baysinger, 2006; Bowman-Grieve 2009; Champion, 2019a, 2019b; Feldman & Pollard, 2016; Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Perry & Scrivens, 2019). We chose national and racial identities as two distinct but important markers of ‘value-based extremism’⁶ because in-group/out-group identity is intrinsically linked to the ideological viewpoints and value systems shared by Australian and Canadian right-wing groups (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010). The theme methods of violence and the law was thought to connote evidence of ‘action-based extremism’ as extremist violence embodies these viewpoints and values to progress the in-group, while legal authority presents a threat and obstacle to extreme ideological objectives (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010).

Once the themes were selected, a general dictionary of words was composed to gauge the popularity of these themes among Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook.⁷ Built upon previously collected words by Peucker et al. (2018), this study employed a dictionary of words to measure the frequency and concentration of certain ideological references related to violence and the law (28 words), national identity (21 words), and racial references (21 words).⁸ In this study, we focused primarily on what methods of violence and what references to the judicial system frequented the most within and between each country. This is because references to violent solutions, an interest in violent methodologies, and anti-authority rhetoric are considered important precursors to physical violence and markers of

⁶ National identity and references made to race were placed into separate themes because each identity category is valued differently depending on the strain of right-wing extremist ideology, they represent different locations of identity work with variations in deductive meaning, and are expressed differently among right-wing groups in Australia and Canada. This does not imply that other identity categories are synonymous or unimportant. Ethnic and religious identities are important to right-wing extremism and subsequent ideological groups and movements, however, a comprehensive conceptual analysis of an additional two layers of identity was considered outside the scope of this study.

⁷ This dictionary does not capture every unique or extreme identifier within the corpus of data. This dictionary was constructed to achieve a broad overview of the popularity of certain identifiers related to selected themes. Although a dictionary consisting of extreme identifiers provides analytical insight, it was outside the scope and purpose of this study to conduct such an analysis. Dictionaries involving extreme identifiers are semantically sensitive and require significant adjustments to capture all possible spelling arrangements. Subsequently, a dictionary composed of general word frequencies was used to gauge a broad overview the prevalence of these themes across Australian and Canadian right-wing accounts on Facebook.

⁸ Peucker et al. (2018) used a similar dictionary of words to analyze patterns in online mobilization among right-wing groups in Victoria, Australia. Peucker et al. (2018) recommended that future research be directed, among others, toward the connection and cooperation between the localized Australian right-wing groups and its international counterparts on social media. Accordingly, the authors of the current study took reference of Peucker’s et al. (2018) dictionary of words and sought to apply an amended set of keywords to analyze patterns of online mobilization among Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook. Subsequently, this study used the following collection of keywords specific to three themes: violence and the law; national identity; and racial references. For the theme ‘violence and the law’, the following keywords were employed: ‘crimes’, ‘criminal’, ‘thugs’, ‘bashing’, ‘gang’, ‘probation’, ‘sentencing’, ‘parole’, ‘police’, ‘Cronulla’, ‘robbery’, ‘police’, ‘jail’, ‘prison’, ‘punishment’, ‘courts’, ‘victims’, ‘violence’, ‘Christchurch’, ‘Tarrant’, ‘Brevik’, ‘El Paso’, ‘shoot’, ‘shooting’, ‘mass-shooting’, ‘Toronto’, ‘Minassian’ ‘antifa’, ‘punch’. The theme ‘national identity’ consisted of the following keywords: ‘nation’, ‘nationalist’, ‘country’, ‘people’, ‘Australia’, ‘Canada’, ‘Canadian’, ‘first’, ‘Australian’, ‘patriots’, ‘patriotic’, ‘CAD’, ‘CAN’, ‘aussies’, ‘flag’, ‘anthem’, ‘immigration’, ‘multiculturalism’, ‘ANZAC’, ‘military’, ‘soldiers’. And for the theme ‘racial references’, the following keywords were used: ‘white’, ‘anglo’, ‘European’, ‘immigration’, ‘white genocide’, ‘replacement’, ‘great replacement’, ‘blacks’, ‘hispanic’, ‘Asian’, ‘American’, ‘Australian’, ‘Canadian’, ‘Africans’, ‘take over’, ‘invasion’, ‘breed’, ‘race’, ‘superior’, ‘1488’, ‘eugenics’.

action-based extremism (Bouhana, et, al., 2018; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010). Accordingly, seven additional words were assigned to the theme of violence and the law to capture a broader overview of this theme among Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook.

A corpus-assisted framework was employed to gauge the popularity and importance of the aforementioned themes (Taylor, et al., 2013). Subsequently, this study statistically measured and comparatively assessed the frequency and concentration of keywords contained within administrator posts in selected Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook. To achieve this, we used two methods of content analysis: a word frequency count to identify the frequency in which certain words appear across the Australian and Canadian sample (Angus, 2020); and a guided lexical density analysis to measure the proportion use of words specific to the prescribed dictionary related to right-wing ideology and methods of violence (Gregori-Signs & Clavel-Arroitia, 2015; 546-547). Lexical dispersion plots⁹ were used to illustrate how frequently and in what concentrations each keyword appeared in the Australian and Canadian sample over the eight-year time period. In addition, the frequency of active ('Like', 'Share', 'Comment') and passive ('Post Views') forms of user engagement with administrator posts was counted in the Australian and Canadian sample respectively. Following these statistical analyses, aspects of each nation's historical, social, and political circumstance were comparatively examined to better understand the context in which the statistical patterns in language use and online engagement emerged (Taylor, 2010, 2014; Taylor et al., 2013). Corpus-assisted discourse analyses have proven useful in previous studies examining patterns of ideological language use specific to nationalism in the Canadian context (Vessey, 2013). This study, however, used a cross-national comparative approach to correlate statistical patterns of discourse and online engagement with qualitative aspects each nation's socio-cultural and political context (Taylor et al., 2013).

Macro-level Assessment

Following this sampling procedure, we sought to identify the level of active and passive user engagement with administrator posts, and gauge the frequency and concentration of certain keywords across the 59 Australian and Canadian right-wing accounts between 2011 and

⁹ In regard to the lexical dispersion plots, each corresponding figure has a y-axis which represents the list of keywords under analysis while the x-axis of represents the frequency and concentration in which each keyword sequentially appears in the corpus. If the keyword appears in the corpus it is highlighted in a dark tone. Along the x-axis, the term 'word offset' represents the total number of words (word types) in the corpus and how many words from the beginning of the corpus does each keyword appear.

2019. To do this, a Python script was written to actualize patterns of language use and online engagement within the corpora, including:

- (1) a quantified sum total of active ('Like', 'Share', 'Comment') and passive ('Post Views') user engagement with administrator posts in the Australian and Canadian sample respectively;
- (2) a lexical density analysis using lexical dispersion plots to measure and illustrate the proportionate use of selected keywords over time in the Australian and Canadian sample respectively and across each theme (violence and the law, national identity, and racial references); and
- (3) a word frequency count to identify the most frequently used words contained within administrator posts over the eight years of online activity across the Australian and Canadian sample respectively (for more information see Python, 2019).

Results

In what follows, descriptive findings from data analysis will be explored. The results are divided into the following sections: (1) a comparative macro-level assessment of the active and passive user engagement in the Australian and Canadian sample; (2) a comparative macro-level assessment of the linguistic diversity of certain keywords related to the themes 'violence and the law', 'national identity', and 'racial references' across each sample.

Macro-Analysis: Active and Passive User Engagement

In order to gauge the nature and degree of user engagement, a comparative macro-level analysis was employed to measure the frequency of active user engagement ('Likes', 'Comments', 'Shares'), and passive forms of user engagement ('Post Views') within the Australian and Canadian samples respectively (Figure. 2). Data analysis reveals that, in contrast to followers of Canadian groups, Australian Facebook users participated more so using 'Likes' (+21.4%). However, users from Canadian groups 'Shared' content far more than their Australian counterparts (+178.3%). Users within Australian groups utilized the 'Comment' feature (+17.8%) and engaged in significantly more 'Post Views' (+64.9%) relative to followers of Canadian groups. Furthermore, compared to administrators within the Australian sample, administrators of Canadian groups produced more posts from 2011 – 2019 (+10.5%) and Canadian users actively engaged the content at a higher rate relative to their Australian counterparts (+43%). Relative to the disparity in population size between Australia and Canada (with Canada hosting a greater population size of +48.3%), users

within Australian groups favored passive forms of user engagement at a significantly higher rate (+64.9%) compared to those within Canadian groups (Worldometers, 2019; 2019).

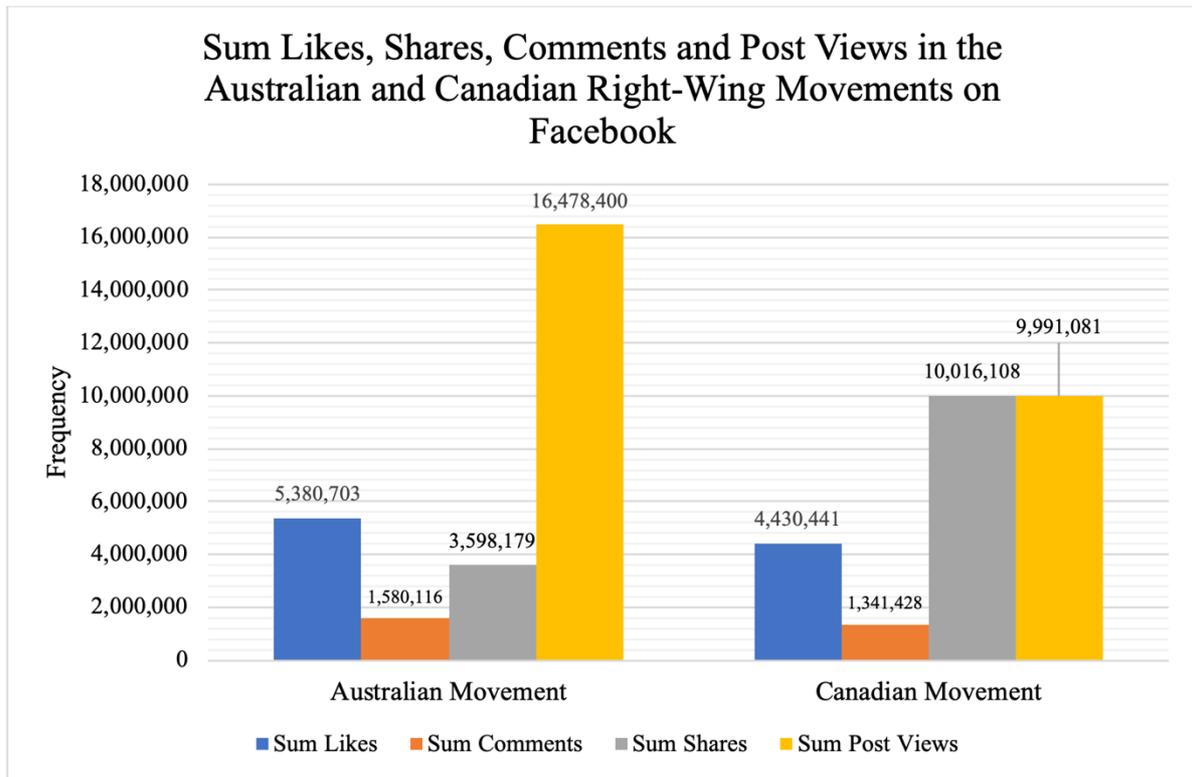


Figure. 2: Drawing from a data set of 9,811,144 ‘Likes’, 13,614,287 ‘Shares’, 2,921,544 ‘Comments’, and 26,469,481 ‘Post Views’, Figure. 2 illustrates the comparative sum total of ‘Likes’, ‘Comments’, ‘Shares’, and ‘Post Views’ in the Australian and Canadian sample respectively.

Macro-Analysis: A Lexical Density and Word Frequency Analysis

Illustrated using lexical dispersion plots, a lexical density analysis was used to identify the frequency and concentration of selected keywords in administrator posts among Australian and Canadian groups over time. As introduced in Section ‘Keyword and Theme Selection’, the content analysis was guided by a dictionary of words which consists of previously collected words by Peucker et al. (2018) and unique identifiers related to the following themes: violence and the law (28 words), national identity (21 words), and racial references (21 words). It is reasoned that the greater the frequency and concentration of certain keywords over time, the more appealing those thematic associations were, and the more likely users actively engage the content. In addition, a word frequency analysis was used to gauge the most frequently used words in posts over the eight years of data collected (Figure. 3). The following sections are separated by theme and offer descriptive findings using lexical dispersion plots and word frequency counts respectively.

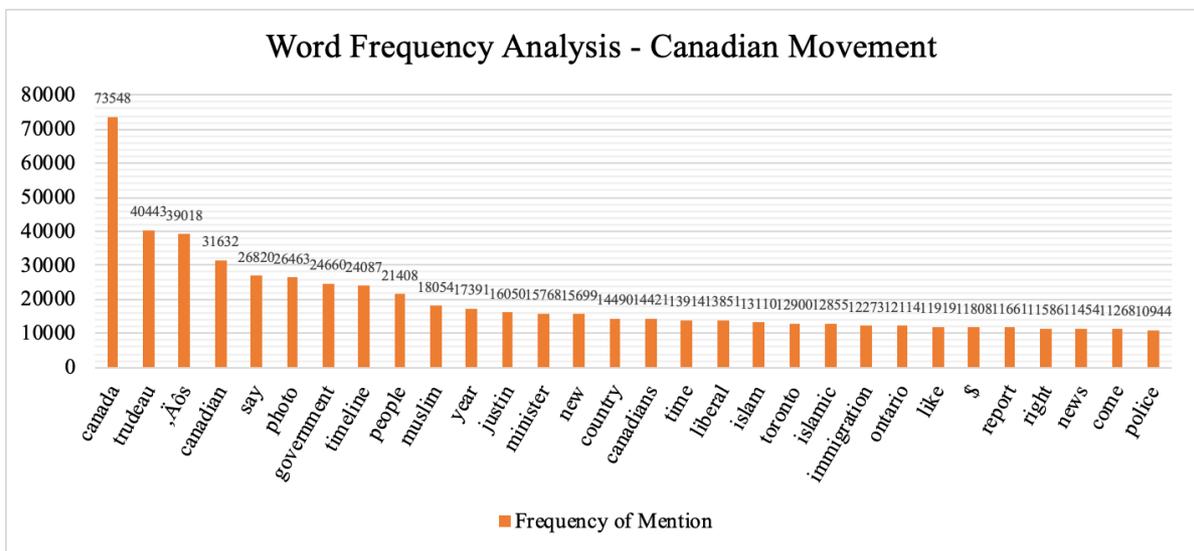
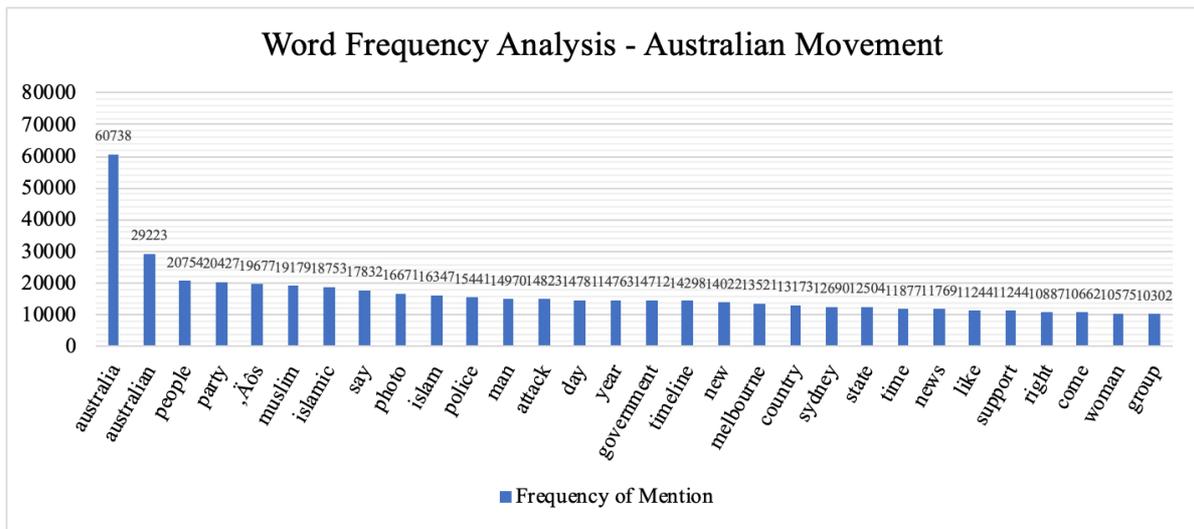
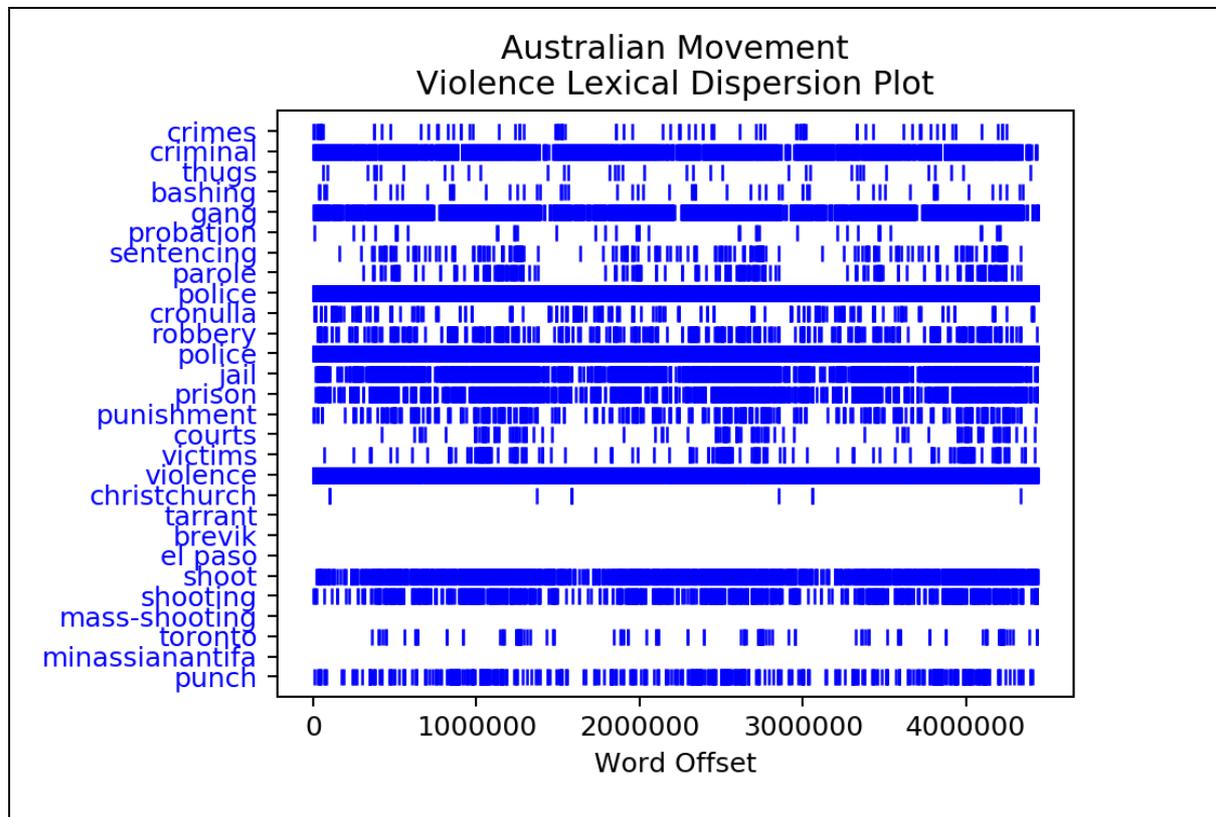


Figure. 3 represents the 30 most frequently used words contained within administrator posts across the Australian and Canadian sample.

Violence and the Law

While administrators within Australian and Canadian groups largely shared an interest in words related to violence and the judicial system, differences remain in their preference for methodologies of violence. For instance, the Australian sample referenced more physical and personal forms of violence, such as ‘punching’ and ‘bashing’, while the Canadian sample referenced more lethal forms of firearm violence, such as ‘shooting’ and ‘shoot’, in greater concentrations and with greater consistency over time (Figure. 4). This not only sponsors divergent instructions related to either physical or firearm violence, but is likely to be reinforced by the socio-historical context with which these group are resident. Additionally, findings from the word frequency analysis reveal that while the Australian and Canadian

sample feature the words like ‘Muslim’, ‘police’ and ‘women’ in the top 30 most frequently used words, the Australian sample used ‘attack’ as its 13th most featured word over the eight years of online activity.



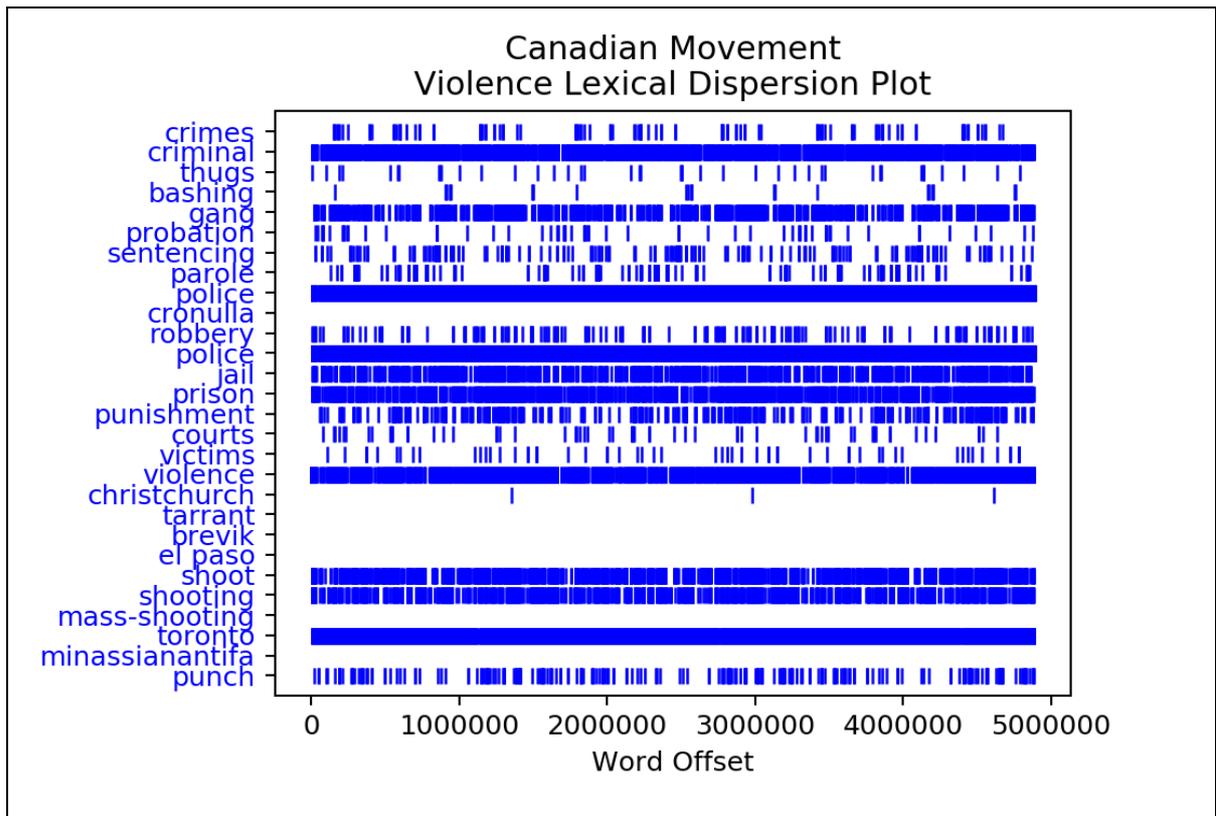
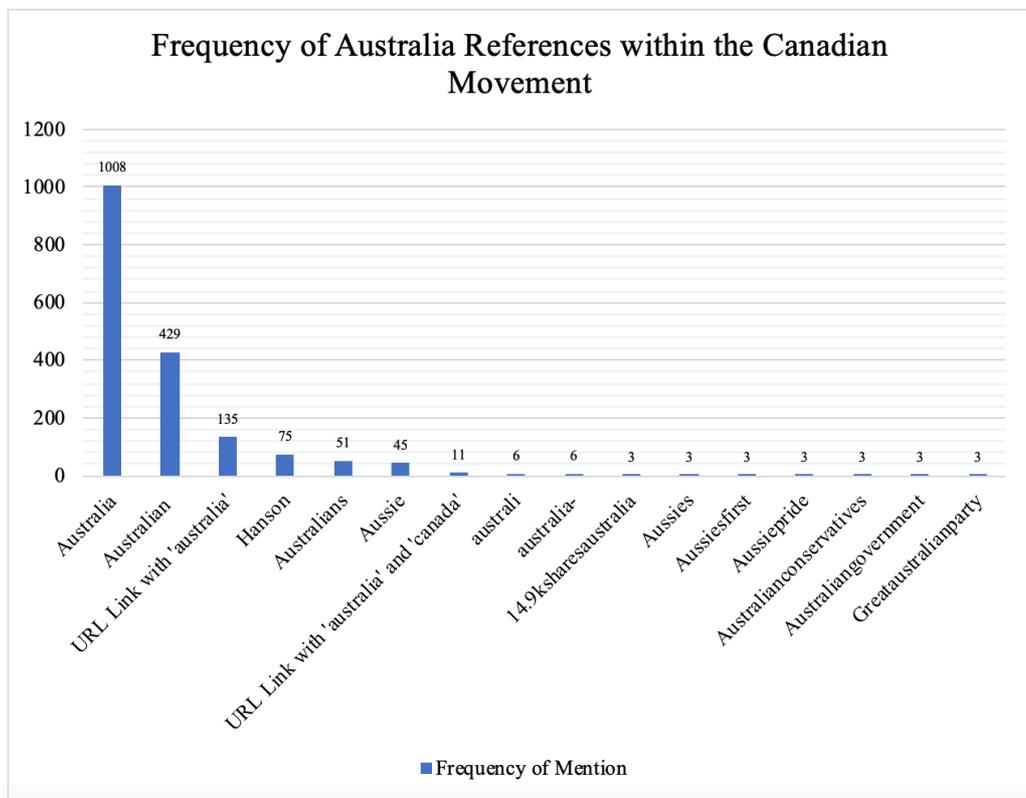


Figure. 4. illustrates the frequency and concentration of words related to violence, the judiciary system and constabulary forces found within the Australian and Canadian sample.

National Identity

Administrators of Canadian groups harnessed Australia as a mobilizing theme, more so than administrators of Australian groups employed Canada. Across both nation-wide samples, Australian and Canadian right-wing groups referenced their own national identity in greater concentrations and with greater consistency over time than any other national identity (Figure. 5). However, administrators of Canadian right-wing groups disproportionately mentioned the Australian identity more frequently and with greater variation on Facebook. For instance, the word frequency analysis revealed that administrator posts within the Canadian sample referenced Australia ('Australia', 'Australian', 'Aussies' 'Aussiepride', etc.) more frequently and with greater variation over time, compared to references to Canada ('Canada', 'Canadian', 'neveragaincanada', 'canadaday', etc.) within the Australian sample. For instance, Australia is referenced (1791 times) within the Canadian sample at a higher frequency (+36.6%) and with greater variation (16 different variations), than Canada is referenced (1314 times) within the Australian sample (11 difference variations) (Figure. 5). This is not to say that administrators of Australian or Canadian groups referenced Australia

or Canada exclusively. For instance, the Australian sample featured ‘syria’ (3948), ‘europe’ (3642) and ‘china’ (3417) among the most referenced international nationalities. While the Canadian sample featured ‘europe’ (4608), ‘america’ (3627) and ‘france’ (2655) among the most mentioned international nationalities. However, compared to their Australian counterparts, administrators of Canadian groups disproportionately leveraged references to Australia to mobilize users on Facebook. Although each sample references the nationality of the constituent country, the domestic national identity of the movement served as the most popular reference to national identity (either ‘australia’ or ‘canada’).



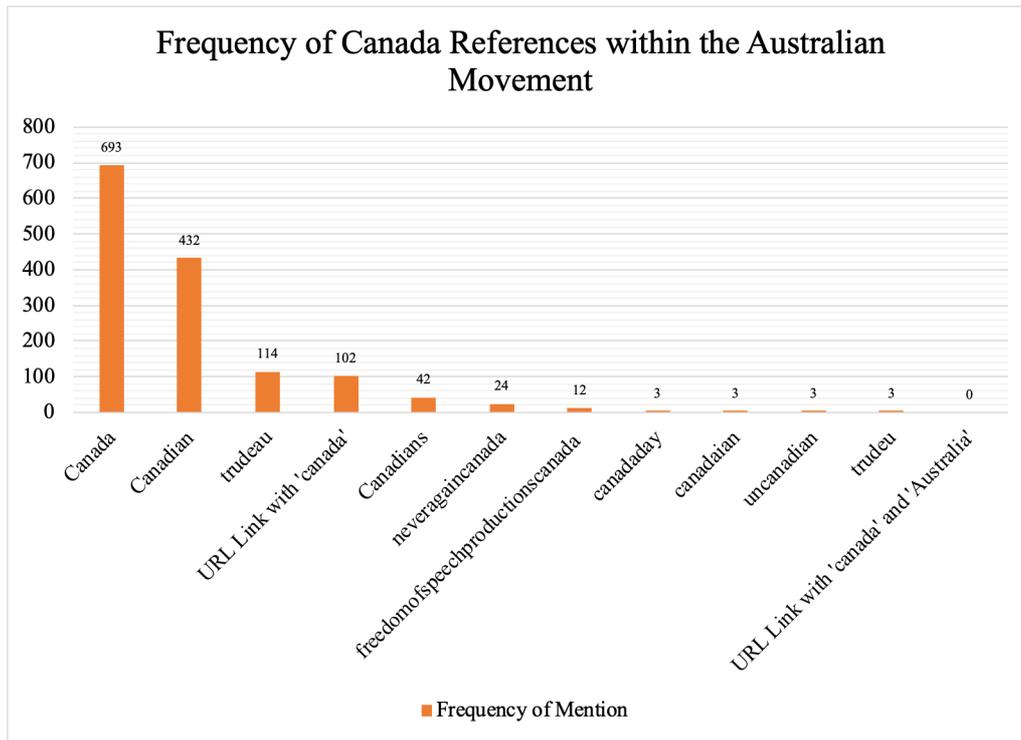


Figure. 5 represents the frequency and variation of cross-national references made by the corresponding movement-wide sample.

Other findings from the word frequency analysis highlight the importance of regions and cities centers that are residentially located in the national context. For instance, ‘melbourne’ and ‘sydney’ as well as ‘toronto’ and ‘ontario’ featured in the top 30 most frequently used words in the Australian and Canadian sample respectively. In regard to socio-cultural traditions, the words ‘anzac’, ‘military’, ‘multiculturalism’, ‘soldiers’, ‘patriots’, ‘patriotic’ and ‘anthem’ were used with greater consistency and greater concentrations among administrators of Australian right-wing groups over time. While the words ‘multiculturalism’, ‘patriots’, ‘patriotic’, ‘anthem’ and ‘flag’ was slightly less concentrated in administrator posts in the Canadian sample over the same time period (Figure. 6).

Furthermore, Canadian right-wing groups personally referenced certain politicians with significantly greater frequency and consistency over time. For instance, in the Canadian context, although politician and leader of the Liberal Party Justin Trudeau assumed the office of Prime Minister in late 2015, references made to Trudeau occupied the 2nd most frequently used word among Canadian groups.

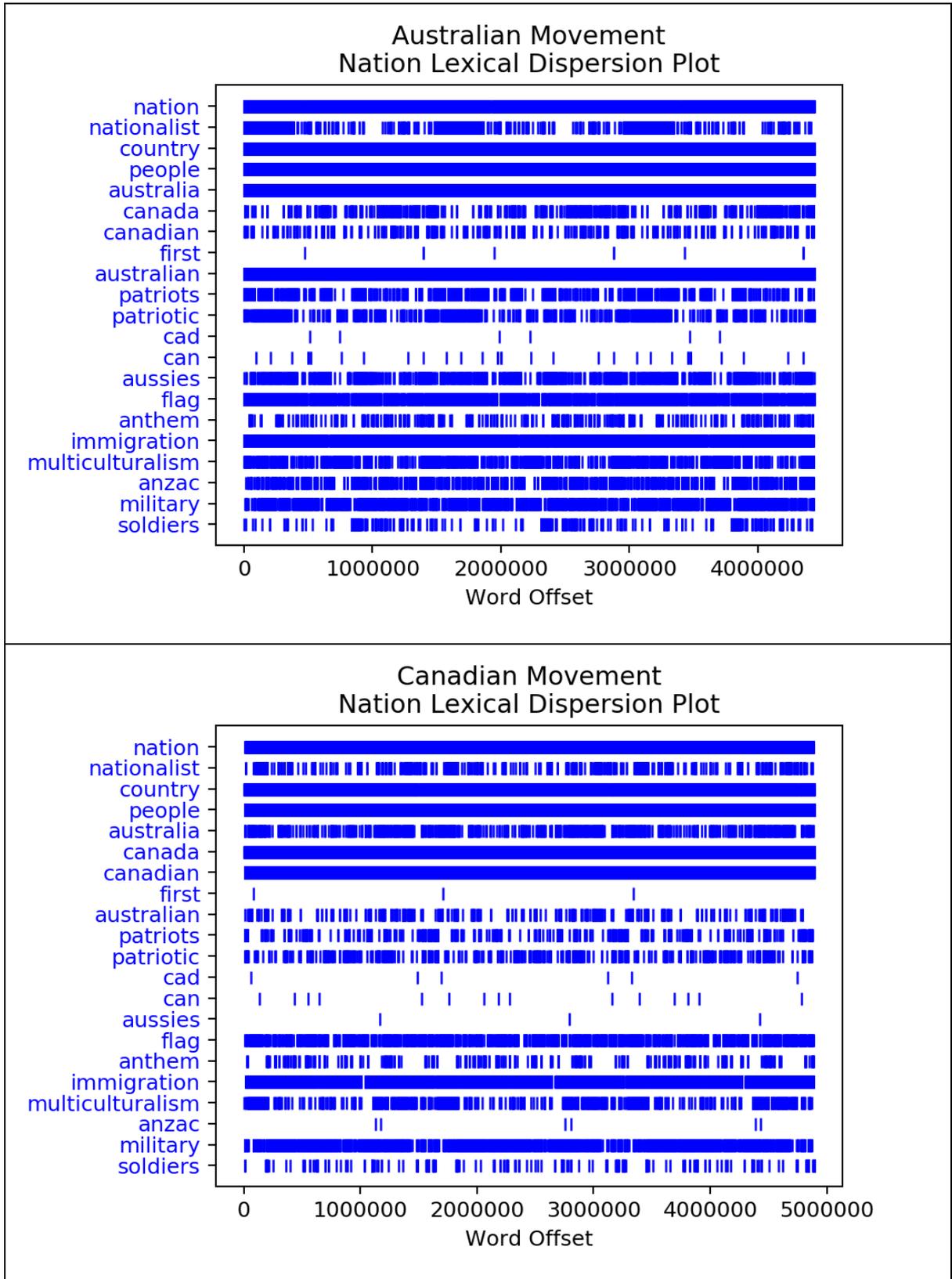
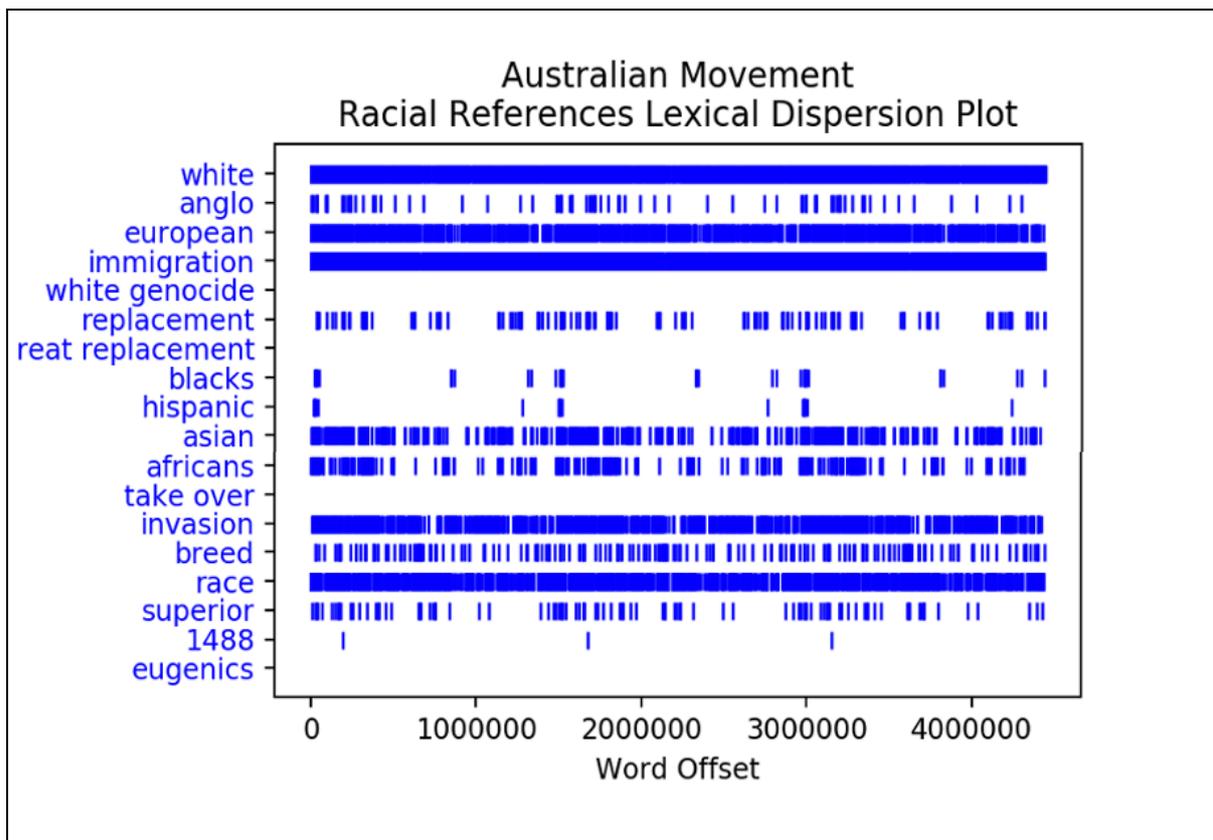


Figure. 6 represents the frequency and concentration of words related to national identity within the Australian and Canadian sample.

Racial References

Racial references are important projections of right-wing ideology in Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook. For instance, compared to the Canadian sample, the words ‘Asian’, ‘African’, ‘anglo’, ‘breed’, ‘invasion’, ‘european’ and ‘1488’¹⁰ featured in slightly greater concentrations and with greater consistency in the Australian sample over time (Figure. 7). While compared to the Australian sample, words such as ‘blacks’, ‘hispanic’, ‘replacement’ and ‘superior’ was referenced more concentrated and consistently over time in the Canadian sample. The most frequently used racial reference was ‘white’ and the nationality in which the movement was residentially located (either ‘Australia’ or ‘Canada’). However, there exists a disparity in the frequency of ‘white’ across both samples. While ‘white’ was the most popular racial reference in each sample, ‘white’ featured 8271 times as the 42nd most frequently used word in the Australian sample, and only 4734 times as the 136th most frequently used word in the Canadian sample.



¹⁰ The numbers 1488 are a combination of two important white supremacist symbols: the “14” is in reference to the “14 words” (we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children), coined by David Lane, a member of the white supremacist group The Order. The 88 stands for Heil Hitler (with H being the 8th letter of the alphabet).

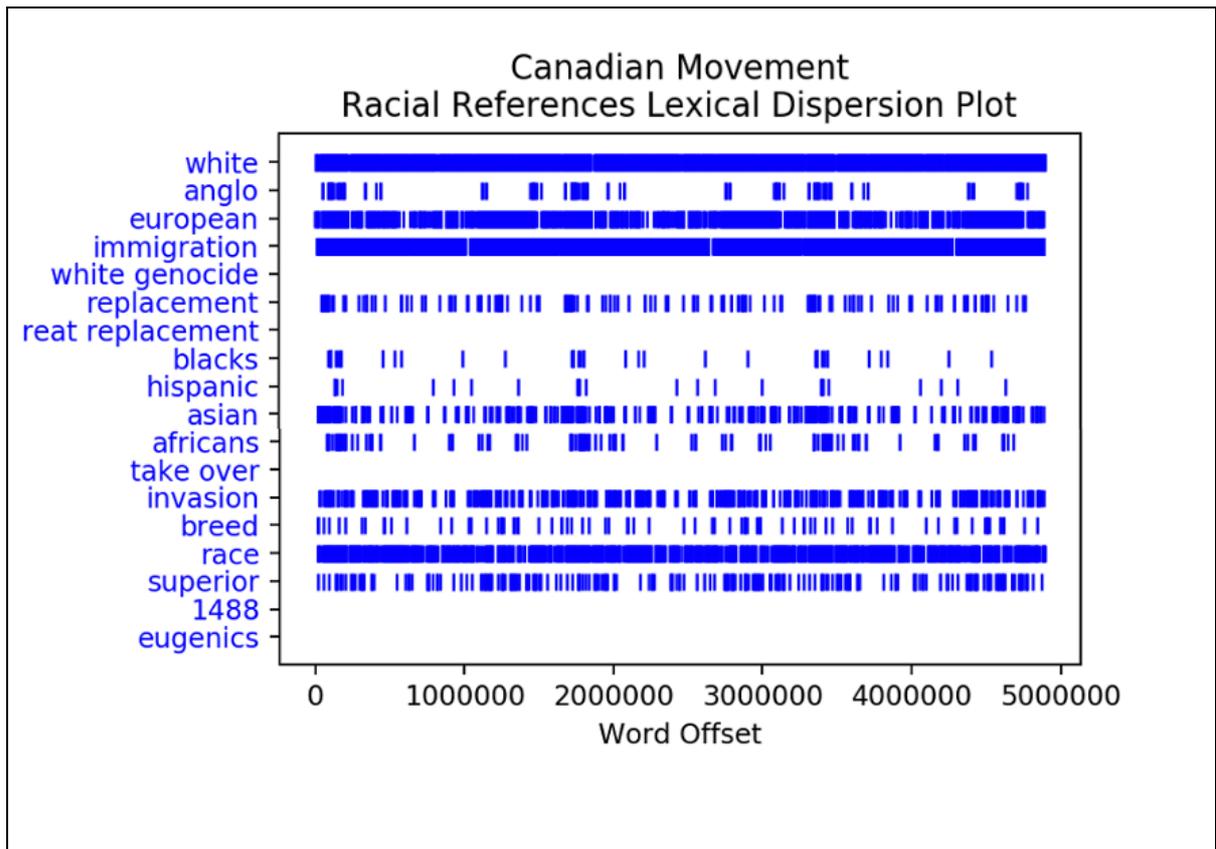


Figure. 7 illustrates the frequency and concentration of racial references within the Australian and Canadian sample over time.

Discussion

In this study, we provided a macro-level analysis of the online activity pertaining to 59 Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook from 2011-2019. The following section contains a series of theoretical discussions in reference to the results of data analysis. These observations offer socio-cultural explanations as to why certain themes and narratives most appealed to Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook over time. Certain contributive and contextual factors were identified that are likely to have shaped the evolution and popularity of certain right-wing themes and narratives on Facebook, and how these themes and narratives facilitate the mobilization of sympathetic users toward movement objectives. This research finds that Australian and Canadian right-wing groups online share similarities and exhibit idiosyncratic patterns in user engagement, trends in thematic content, and instances of social mobilization over Facebook.

Violence and the Law: Firearms and Fists

On Facebook, Australian right-wing groups referenced physical forms of violence in greater concentrations and with greater consistency over time, while Canadian groups referenced

lethal forms of firearm violence. These divergent methods of violence were likely reinforced by variations in the socio-historical context associated with each population's access to firearms and ammunition. For instance, the 1996 Port Arthur mass-shooting in Tasmania, Australia, resulted in the Australian Government overhauling the nation's firearm legislation, including restrictions on licensing and accessibility to firearms, banning semi-automatic rifles and pump action shot guns, and the application of stringent security regulations for the storage of firearms, such as mandatory locked storage (Australian Government, 1996; National Museum of Australia, 2019). From 1996 to 2019, only on two subsequent occasions have Australians used firearms to commit mass-shootings (Torre, 2018). This contrasts Canada's recent history of firearm legislation and instances of mass-shootings. From 1996 to 2019, the Canadian Government reformed firearm legislation in favor of less-stringent licensing, the procurement of long-gun rifles, and subsequently, Canada has experienced at least 12 mass-shooting events some of which involved the assailant using a long-gun rifle (Saminather, 2018; CTV News, 2018).¹¹ However, this has meant that Australian right-wing extremists are circumstantially required to accumulate and use alternative weaponry to engage in ideological violence. For example, in August 2016, Phillip Galea, a member of Reclaim Australia and True Blue Crew, was arrested for targeting pro-multiculturalist left-wing groups with an extremist plot to use potassium nitrate smoke bombs and an improvised explosive device (Hutchinson, 2019c). Galea accumulated other weaponry and hazardous chemicals, including five electrified cattle prods and a substantial amount of mercury for future plots (Hutchinson, 2019c). Additionally, a group that Galea was a member, True Blue Crew, featured at a number of demonstrations alongside other right-wing extremist groups such as United Patriots Front with some of its members carrying knuckle-dusters, bats, knives, and other weaponry (Hill, 2017). The historical and legislative context that regulated each population's access to firearms and ammunition may, in part, account for the difference in popular reference to specific methods of violence among Australian and Canadian right-wing extremist groups on Facebook.

¹¹ For example, in February 2012, the Canadian Government removed the legislative requirement to register long-gun firearms (Bill C-19) (openparliament.ca, 2012). In April 2015, the Canadian Government legislated into law the Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act (Bill C-42) which: reduced the requirement to administratively record the transportation of restricted firearms to the shooting range, gunsmiths or gun shows; removed the ban on a military-grade, semi/fully-automatic assault rifle (SG 550); permitted firearm owners six months of gun ownership after license renewal is required; and automatically transitioned possession-only license holders to possession and acquisition license holders without any security or competence tests, which allowed previously possession-only license holders to procure additional firearms and ammunition (openparliament.ca, 2015; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2015).

Who is identified as an appropriate target for intimidation and violence is influenced by the socio-cultural context. Branded as the ‘common enemy’, Islam was conceptually re-framed by right-wing movements, media outlets, and right-wing politicians in response to a number of domestic and international events.¹² Through this lens, Islam became conflated with the Middle Eastern ethnic identity and together were associated with religious-inspired terrorism. For instance, in Australia, Marr (2017) aptly observed that Scanlon Foundation surveys show little to no difference between discrimination and negative attitudes toward ‘Middle Eastern’ or ‘Muslim’ persons, who received near five times (24-25%) the negative sentiment of any other religious or ethnic groups (4-5%) between 2010-2015 (Markus, 2016). As a result, the presence of Islam and Middle Eastern ethnic groupings became associated with socio-cultural degradation and were flagged as a threat to Western liberal democracies, which supported extreme-right caricatures of Islam and terrorism in causal unison and online propaganda depicting the looming threat of Islamist terrorism in Australia and Canada (Anahita, 2006; Poynting & Perry, 2007; Rane, et al., 2010; Dunn, et al., 2015; Perry & Scrivens, 2016a; 2020; Kanji, 2018).

This not only crystalized Muslims and those of Middle Eastern appearance as foreigners and an existential threat to each nation and movement, but elevated right-wing nativism and advanced the use of violent directives on social media in Canada and in Australia in particular. For instance, comparative to both Canadian and British right-wing groups and congruent with the findings of data analysis, Australian right-wing groups exhibit a historic tendency to direct violent, non-judicial solutions at Othered identities using aggressive, ends-orientated language on Facebook (e.g., Johnson, 2018). However, it is difficult to discern the online context in which these words were used. For instance, terms such as “violent”, “attack” and “terrorist” may be used to emphasize the threat of outgroups or an in-group threat against an out-group. As such, this study sought to give a general overview of the popularity of terms. Future counter violent extremism programs must take into account not only the historical and legislative context, but the unique socio-cultural contexts in which propensities for violence are exhibited by each movement online.

¹² The following are examples of such domestic and international events: the United States’ declaration to wage a global war on terror; the rise and fall of Islamic-inspired terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State (IS); decentralized and personalized Islamist-related terrorist attacks in Australia and Canada (e.g., Zammit, 2015); waves of immigration from Muslim majority countries in response to humanitarian crises; (ultra)-nationalist, populist attempts to prohibit Muslim immigration or Islamic garb into the United States, Australia and Holland (e.g., Tait, 2017; Murphy, 2017); intelligence agencies raised the terrorist threat level in Australia and Canada (Griffiths, 2014; Ljunggren, 2014); and negative mass-media interpretations of Islam (Rane, et al., 2010).

National Identity: Transnational and Local

Australian and Canadian right-wing groups make reference to their own and each other's national identity on Facebook. Although right-wing actors are often characterized as 'lone wolves', right-wing actors engage with and often rely on an ideological support network (Davey & Ebner, 2017; Ebner, 2020; Schuurman et al., 2019). Due to Australia and Canada's contextual similarities, complimentary socio-historical features, and mutually prolific adoption of social media, right-wing groups in these countries have become nodes of a broader ideological support network. Each nation hosts a resident movement, who, through using social media, is connected to constituent movements and able to make comparable claims about shared grievances and socio-historical circumstance (Caiani & Kröll, 2015; Caiani, 2018; Froio & Ganesh, 2018). Further, ideological directives that are applicable to each movement can be instructional to coexisting objectives, such as engaging in reactionary violence to defend the nation's socio-cultural well-being from the perceived encroachment of Muslims within society (Rydgren, 2005a, 2005b; Hogan & Haltinner, 2015).¹³ Used as a conceptual bridging tool, these points of convergence and shared cultural narratives provide an avenue for social mobilization and motivation for lone-actor terrorism over social media (Perry & Scrivens, 2016; Singer & Brooking, 2018). These findings suggest that while local concerns remain disguisable components of each movement, their international constituents are becoming increasingly significant.

Regardless of the international context, localized concerns, practices, and politics vary depending on each nation's unique history and political representation. Accordingly, the most featured identity in data analysis was the nationality in which the movement is residentially located (either 'australian' or 'canadian'). This is significant as local socio-cultural narratives can legitimise collective action over social media (Peucker, et al., 2018). Since the end of World War I, the Australian Government politically embellished a cultural narrative which depicted the Australian soldier gallantly fighting in poor conditions to preserve the freedoms of Australian society, as being quintessentially Australian ('Aussie battlers') (Campion, 2019b). Culturally celebrated as Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) day, Australians are periodically asked to prioritize their attention and appreciation for veterans and servicemen during ritualistic events at designated locations which feature symbols of the ANZAC tradition. This represents a significant cultural occasion for Australian nationalism,

¹³ Like right-wing extremist groups located other countries, Australian and Canadian groups exhibit ideological frames that is 'ethnonationalist xenophobia based on the doctrine of ethnopluralism with anti-political establishment populism' (Rydgren, 2005a; 413).

patriotism and national identity. This is not to say that Canada is without a military-related cultural narrative, only that Australia's long-standing cultural exhibitions related to the ANZAC is likely to account for the popularity of certain thematic associations related to national identity.

In the Canadian context, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau champions a political disposition antithetical to that of Canadian right-wing extremist groups and represents a tyrannical governmental authority who indoctrinates Canadian citizens with liberal aims and values. Because of this, Trudeau provides a particularly antagonistic invitation for both administrators to publish Trudeau-related posts on Facebook and for users to publish reactionary online activity in response. This makes sense as cultural narratives need to be adapted to the national socio-political context and socio-cultural conditions present, to best convey and convince domestic right-wing extremist groups of the need for collective action (Rydgren, 2005a; 2007). Therefore, in the digital age, any future counter narrative efforts must be equally adapted to the socio-political context and socio-cultural conditions present at the national and transnational level.

Racial References: Ethnography and Cultural Superiority

References to racial identity are drawn from recent history and the national ethnographic distribution in which each movement is resident. At least since Australia's Federation in 1901, Australia's history reveals a cultural fear of foreign invasion by non-Anglo-European or non-Australian identities (Hirst, 2001). Since the 1980s, an increase in Asian and African migrants into Australia was followed by a rise in anti-Asian aggression and accusations of African criminality by local right-wing groups well into the 2010s (Campion, 2019a; 2019b; Peucker, et al., 2018;). These injunctions between non-Anglo-European migrants and Australian ultra-nationalistic and/or racial superiority groups accounts, in-part, for the popularity of certain racial associations on Facebook. However, consistent references to African America and South American ethnicities and popular use of the term 'superiority' among Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook, may be due to the ethnographic apportionment and distribution of racial minorities throughout North America and the reactionary presence of organized racial superiority groups within Canada, such as the Klu Klux Klan's establishment in Toronto since 1926 (Ballingall, 2014; Jewish Daily Bulletin, 1926). Both movements are composed of cultural superiority fractions that strive to secure a cohesive, homogeneous population of culturally Australian or Canadian citizens. This

fraction of the movement hosted the most amount of online activity and followers which contributed to the seeming prioritization of domestic nationality, as analogous to racial identity. Subsequently, these findings highlight the importance of local ethnography and disparities in online followings when weighting the value and concern for certain racial identities taking residence among right-wing extremist groups.

Active and Passive User Engagement: Social Acceptance and Online Social Mobilization

Australian and Canadian right-wing groups are situated within their own socio-historic and political contexts. These contexts characterize both the social movement and the society in which the movement resides. As social movements develop and evolve over time in reference to the wider context in which they operate, this also influences how individuals within the movement behave relative to the wider context (Hacking, 2000; McPherson, et al., 2001; Murphy, 2001). For instance, the context could dictate whether a society largely tolerates, acknowledges, or accepts a particular social movement's ideology, behavior or objectives. If a society is perceivably less tolerant or accepting of certain ideas or behavior associated with a social movement, members of the social movement may reflexively express their commitment and promote those ideas and values in response. If a society is seen to be more tolerant or accepting of ideas or behavior associated with a social movement, movement members may feel that it is unnecessary to explicitly demonstrate their commitment. Right-wing movements in Australia and Canada are self-framed as social justice and cultural preservation movements, and subsequently, stand outside the norms of conventional society to defend the movement from perceived threats. However, the level of acceptance within each national context can reinforce or release movement members from the need to demonstrate their commitment to movement objectives. For instance, following an analysis of user behaviour on the right-wing extremist website *Stormfront*, a recent study recommended the importance of identifying and understanding the possible reasons behind differentiating patterns of active and passive user engagement within right-wing extremist online spaces (Bright, et al., 2020). Within the context of social media, this may be the difference in an online user using active ('Likes', 'Comments', 'Shares') or passive ('Post Views') forms of online engagement in response to right-wing movement-related content.

In this study, the Australian right-wing groups' overwhelming preference for passive forms of online engagement may suggest that such groups perceive themselves to be situated in a socio-political context that is more tolerant of important aspects of Australian right-wing

ideology and objectives. Conversely, due to the Canadian right-wing groups' significant use of active forms of online engagement, suggests that they perceive themselves to be situated in a socio-political context which provides greater resistance to Canadian right-wing ideology and objectives. This contextual resistance may have generated disproportionate instances of active online engagement to overcome the adversity necessary to attain movement objectives. This is not to say that Australian society condones, accepts, or celebrates right-wing extremist ideology or behavior of any kind, or that societal adversity is the only measure which informs the online behavior of right-wing groups on social media. However, in the face of societal adversity, a pseudo-social-justice movement may be required to mobilize its members to quell advances of social correction and attain ideological objectives. In the absence of societal adversity, movement members may feel that the socio-political context is unresistant to or perceivably sanguine with certain movement objectives, and subsequently, the necessity to participate in social mobilization radically decreases. Therefore, if the Canadian movement has produced more content and users were more actively engaged with the content compared to Australian right-wing groups on Facebook, this may suggest that followers of Australian right-wing groups perceive themselves in a more socio-politically supportive context.

Algorithms and the Allocation of Extremist Content

A central experiential component of online extremism using social media concerns the way algorithmic selection applications¹⁴ frame content for users in response to previous user engagement (Just & Latzer, 2017). Information about each user's behaviour, including their attention-time (passive engagement) and their behaviour in reaction to the content (active engagement), is gathered by social media companies to selectively prioritise future content to encourage individualised patterns of user engagement (Zuboff, 2019). Recent studies have highlighted that certain Othered identities (namely, Muslims and The Left) are not only denounced by right-wing groups across multiple social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, but feature as the most popular content in some these spaces (Berger, 2018; Droogan, et al., 2020; Gaudette, et al., 2020; Heiss & Matthes, 2020; Hutchinson, 2019a; Johnson, 2018; Massanari, 2015). In the current study, users who visited Australian and Canadian right-wing accounts on Facebook left distinct patterns in online engagement in response to the content. Therefore, during the timeframe of analysis, algorithmic selection applications created by Facebook likely allocated extremist content to users in Australian and

¹⁴ Algorithmic selection applications are technologies designed to process information generated through online user engagement to predict user behaviour and automatically tailor content that reflects user interests and values (see Just & Latzer, 2017).

Canadian right-wing groups to encourage their respective patterns of online engagement. Countering violent extremism (CVE) considerations must be made to the broader socio-cultural and political context that broadly tolerates or resists core ideological elements of right-wing extremist ideology, and how social media algorithms preferentially allocate content for and seek to influence the psychology and social perceptions of users.

Conclusion

Our findings show that while local concerns remain important components of each movement, their constituents' national circumstance is becoming increasingly applicable as a mobilizing theme. The Australian and Canadian movement respectively employ thematic associations within all of the mobilizing themes surveyed on Facebook. Australian and Canadian groups have preferences for certain thematic associations and mobilizing themes, related to each movement's national socio-historical context. Australian groups favored passive forms of online engagement at a significantly higher rate than Canadian groups, while their Canadian counterparts favored active forms of online engagement on Facebook. The Australian movement may be situated in a socio-political context that is more accepting of movement's ideology and objectives compared to the Canadian context. The Canadian policy approach, and popular opinion, has generally been more positive when it comes to issues such as multiculturalism, asylum seekers, and immigration (e.g., Amarasingam et al., 2016b). These findings offer foundational research for future studies investigating mobilizing themes on social media, and how social media facilitates extremist movements and users with avenues for social mobilization and online extremism using platform-based affordances. These findings highlight a distinction between meta-narratives and local concerns within and between national movements, and offers counter narrative efforts with an ability to highlight the diversification of local concerns and lack of consistency between different movements.

The observations in this study are drawn from the linguistic content contained in administrator post from Australian and Canadian right-wing groups on Facebook. Analyzing the mobilizing themes contained within photos and videos fell outside the scope of the research. Visual images and iconographic interpretations are significant in understanding right-wing ideology and what motivates right-wing groups to mobilize online (Watkin, 2018). Future research should include additional linguistic content born of online user engagement, such as user comments, and focus on the intertextuality of photos and videos that feature across and between extremist movements. Additionally, the results of this research only

represent a sub-section of right-wing extremism across the social media landscape. This sample of groups is not entirely representative of right-wing extremist movements in either Australia or Canada since some “boots on the ground” groups do not currently have a Facebook page. This may be because Facebook has removed these pages for violating the company’s terms and conditions or because these groups maintain social media accounts on alternative platforms (e.g., Lopez, 2019; Kingdon, 2020). Due to practical limitations, this study sought to provide a broad, cross-national comparative assessment and excluded meso and micro-level analyses. Future research should seek to understand the popularity of right-wing narratives among ideological sub-movements and individual right-wing groups from Australia and Canada across social media.¹⁵ This study sought to provide an overview of the popularity of content related to racial and national identities on Facebook. However, additional identity categories such as ethnic and religious identities are important to right-wing groups and movements. Future research should assess the distribution of right-wing extremist content related to ethnic and religious identities across multiple social media platforms. These findings complement studies investigating the impact of social media algorithms to preferentially allocate content containing mobilizing themes to certain users on right-wing accounts. Future research should consider how these variations in online behaviour influence Facebook algorithms and how social media algorithms preferentially allocate right-wing content which influences the psychology and social perceptions of users in these countries.

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¹⁵ For example, in a recent study, Klein and Muis (2019) differentiated Facebook pages under analysis into categories such as political parties, social movement organizations, and online communities, to illustrate similarities and differences in online activity and user engagement between specific groups.

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