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# Mapping White Identity Terrorism and Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism

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A Social Network Analysis of Online Activity



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# About This Report

In this research publication, we provide a social network analysis of the global White identity terrorist movement and racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist networks. In it, we respond to congressional requirements for such a study to be completed by an independent research institute to inform government efforts to build a strategy to counter these threats. We began by reviewing existing literature on these movements to outline a baseline of knowledge and identify key gaps. We then collected and analyzed social media data from six social media platforms that host extremist content. Using this material, we developed a network map that evaluated network construction, connectivity, geographic location, and proclivity to violence. We also examined this issue in greater detail in ten countries: Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Russia, Ukraine, Australia, and New Zealand.

This research was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD). NSRD conducts research and analysis for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the U.S. Intelligence Community, the U.S. State Department, allied foreign governments, and foundations.

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# Summary

The U.S. Department of State commissioned the RAND Corporation to produce a comprehensive network analysis of the White Identity Terrorist Movement (WITM) and racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) in response to a Congressional requirement in the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act. In this study, we review existing research on WITM/REMVE and provide new analysis of WITM/REMVE discourse on six social media platforms: Reddit, Twitter, Gab, Ruqqus, Telegram, and Stormfront. In total, we analyzed more than 27 million sampled messages more than 2 million users from around the world.<sup>1</sup> We developed a network map with groups of relatively well-connected individuals (termed *network communities* by network scientists) and evaluated these network communities using geolocation data,<sup>2</sup> potentially violent sentiment that was expressed on those platforms, and mentions of White supremacist organizations. We also sought to refine our network analysis by parsing xenophobic rhetoric from explicitly racist speech, identifying communities that shift between social media platforms, and inferring missing location data using machine learning.

We found that users in the United States are overwhelmingly responsible for REMVE discourse online. Although some of this is driven by the U.S. dominance of social media networks generally and a yet-to-be-fully-measured proportion of the discourse originating from disinformation efforts by U.S. rivals, neither of these factors detract from the conclusion that the United States is the primary proliferator and consumer of REMVE rhetoric online. The global REMVE network on social media is largely U.S.-created and -fueled.

There are some global tenets and doctrine related to right-wing extremism—if not a global strategy—and a loosely connected network of individuals is emerging on a variety of right-wing online forums.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no organized right-wing extremist effort or movement with centralized authority or nationality. Issues of concern to REMVE actors also are

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<sup>1</sup> These messages were principally English-language messages, and some of our language analysis was limited to messages that were in English only. We provide additional analysis about the languages present in our sample in the main body of this report.

<sup>2</sup> By *geolocation*, we mean an inclusive term for all methods that are used to identify physical locations of individuals on Twitter. As explained in detail in the main body of this report, our analyses use a combination of self-reported locations from user profiles, enhancements of these locations provided by the data vendor (Brandwatch), and our own machine-learning process.

<sup>3</sup> These include messaging platforms, such as Telegram and Twitter, and gaming platforms, such as Discord, Steam, Twitch, DLive, and PlayStation and other consoles (see Mattia Caniglia, Linda Winkler, and Solène Métais, *The Rise of the Right-Wing Violent Extremism Threat in Germany and Its Transnational Character*, Brussels: European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, February 27, 2020; and Linda Schlegel, *Extremists' Use of Gaming [Adjacent] Platforms: Insight Regarding Primary and Secondary Prevention Measures*, Luxembourg: Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Commission, 2021). Note that there is no clear definition of what constitutes a *gaming platform*, a *gaming-adjacent platform*, or *platforms containing gaming-related content*.

typically domestic grievances. REMVE movements are diffuse with weak organizational ties. This is a consistent theme in the existing literature and is buttressed by our analysis of White supremacist and terrorist organizations. Most platforms exhibited low rates of mentions of White supremacist organizations. For example, less than 5 percent of individual users mentioned any names of an actively violent or designated White supremacist group.

Not unexpectedly, we found that users on fringe social media platforms—where there is little content moderation—are more likely to use the type of speech that has been tied to dark triad keywords that are correlated to actual violent activity per an existing body of research. The *dark triad* links the personality traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy to violent behaviors.<sup>4</sup> When evaluating speech on mainstream platforms that claim to actively moderate content—Twitter and Reddit—we found that Twitter’s content had lower dark triad scores, but that Reddit’s dark triad scores were much higher, suggesting that content moderation on Reddit might be less effective in deterring the use of violent language and harboring extreme communities.

We found that Gab, Reddit, and Telegram were platforms where xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants were difficult to disentangle from racially or ethnically extremist sentiment. On Twitter, content was more likely to express xenophobic ideas without mixing those ideas with White supremacist motifs, ideas of racial superiorities of Whites, or the need for a segregated society. This suggests that there might be more room to positively engage users on Twitter in a way that could delink issues related to border security, worker health and safety, and worker wages from broader White identity movements that are potentially more linked to terrorism or REMVE.

We identified one Twitter community that stood out as an echo chamber of negative ideas, focused primarily on hard-right stances about illegal immigration and secondarily on White identity issues. Made up of more than 350,000 individuals, it was largely in the United States (92 percent of identified participant locations), had the highest dark triad scores of the Twitter communities, and had the lowest rate of instances in which posts may be reposted to challenge or critique them.

The global REMVE picture stands in stark contrast to the United States’ most recent experience with countering global terrorism: the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In that circumstance, ISIS had called for a global caliphate, propagated its message widely in many languages on social media, and was inspiring tens of thousands from around

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<sup>4</sup> Andrea Pailing, Julian Boon, and Vincent Egan, “Personality, the Dark Triad and Violence,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 67, September 2014; Ahmad Sa’ad Alsheikh Ali, “Delinquency as Predicted by Dark Triad Factors and Demographic Variables,” *International Journals of Adolescence and Youth*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2020; Kagan Kircaburun and Mark. D. Griffiths, “The Dark Side of Internet: Preliminary Evidence for the Associations of Dark Personality Traits with Specific Online Activities and Problematic Internet Use,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, Vol. 7, No. 4, December 2018.

the world to travel to Syria to join its cause.<sup>5</sup> The countries that were the primary source of its manpower and funds generally lacked the resources or the national will to combat recruitment.<sup>6</sup> The United States was a major champion of a global coalition to counter ISIS and jihadist terrorism writ large.<sup>7</sup> REMVE concerns are often national or local, not global. Hundreds of REMVE-motivated actors outside Russia and Ukraine have traveled to Ukraine to join the conflict there, but there are generally weak transnational connections among the movement, and ties are typically virtual rather than material. European states, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada are concerned about and committed to combatting REMVE. They bring national funds, talent, and experience in combatting terrorism. They can benefit from coordinated global efforts and the sharing of best practices. However, any global counter-REMVE movement, particularly under U.S. leadership, will be hobbled by the fact that the country where the problem is the greatest is the United States, and its counterefforts are nascent and poorly resourced, particularly in prevention and intervention of the radicalization of at-risk individuals. An effective counter-REMVE strategy requires the United States to engage in countering xenophobic and racist sentiment at home at a scale that is well beyond current measures.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security, *Final Report of the Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, October 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Exact numbers of foreign fighters who joined ISIS are understandably difficult to determine, but research frequently draws on numbers compiled by the Soufan Group in 2014, 2015, and 2017. Around 72 percent of those were from the former Soviet republics, the Middle East, or the Maghreb, with the three most common countries of origin being Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. (See Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, New York: Soufan Center and the Global Strategy Network, October 2017; Richard Barrett, Jack Berger, Lila Ghosh, Daniel Schoenfeld, Mohamed el-Shawesh, Patrick M. Skinner, Susan Sim, and Ali Soufan, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, New York: Soufan Group, December 2015; and Richard Barrett, Robert McFadden, Patrick M. Skinner, and Lila Ghosh, *Foreign Fighters in Syria*, New York: Soufan Center, June 2014.) While al-Qaeda generally relied on external donations, ISIS sought to be self-sufficient financially, drawing revenue from its territory in Iraq and Syria. (See Patrick B. Johnston, Mona Alami, Colin P. Clarke, and Howard J. Shatz, *Return and Expand? The Finances and Prospects of the Islamic State After the Caliphate*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3046, 2019.)

<sup>7</sup> Seth G. Jones, James Dobbins, Daniel Byman, Christopher S. Chivvis, Ben Connable, Jeffrey Martini, Eric Robinson, and Nathan Chandler, *Rolling Back the Islamic State*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1912, 2017.



## Overview

Racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) and extremists (REMVEs) present some of the most pressing threats to the United States.<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Intelligence Community, REMVEs are among the most lethal domestic violent extremists, and they are the “most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians.”<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Department of State has defined *REMVEs* as individuals or groups motivated to commit violence in the name of defending against perceived threats to their racial or ethnic identity.<sup>3</sup> Those motivated by REMVE believe in the superiority of their own race or ethnicity, and, in reaction, might target racial minorities; Jewish people; Muslims; other religious minorities; immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) individuals; or other perceived enemies. Although states throughout the world can perpetrate organized violence against particular ethnic groups, members of religious faiths, or groups on the basis of other characteristics or biases, the term *REMVE*—like the term *terrorism*—is focused on violence carried out by nonstate actors.<sup>4</sup> In particular, our study focused on this phenom-

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<sup>1</sup> Racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism also can be abbreviated as RMVE.

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Domestic Violent Extremism Posts Heightened Threat in 2021*, Washington, D.C., March 1, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> The definition of REMVE might vary slightly throughout its use by the U.S. government. For example, the Intelligence Community defined *REMVEs* as those with “ideological agendas derived from bias, often related to race or ethnicity, held by the actor against others, including a given population group.” The Intelligence Community also defined those with beliefs rooted in bias related to religion, gender, or social orientation as other domestic terrorist threats and not REMVEs (see Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021). These definitions are generally new, having been recently introduced by the U.S. government, and they could continue to change slightly during this nascent period of use. U.S. government definitions of REMVE currently do not include violent misogynists or involuntary celibates who are also known as *incels*; however, we would note the important history of misogyny in the REMVE movement and potential overlap in these movements (see, e.g., Sara Kamali, *Homegrown Hate: Why White Nationalists and Militant Islamists Are Waging War Against the United States*, Oakland, Calif.: University of California Press, 2021, pp. 4–5).

<sup>4</sup> The term *REMVE* also excludes violence carried out by members of one ethnic or national group against another in conflicts motivated primarily by land or sovereignty (e.g., such historical ethnonationalist groups as Basque, Tamil, or Irish nationalists; participants in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

enon in European countries, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States.<sup>5</sup> REMVE movements are rooted in classical fascism, but over time, their ideological orientation has broadened, and anti-immigrant narratives—even using anti-Nazi rhetoric—are increasingly pervasive. These movements generally are characterized by xenophobic, anti-Semitic, racist, misogynistic, and homophobic sentiment.

The majority of REMVE actors are motivated by White supremacy—beliefs that Caucasian or Aryan peoples represent superior races, and that “White culture” is superior to other cultures. Many REMVE actors are also motivated by White nationalism, which overlaps with White supremacy insofar as adherents espouse the belief that the White race is superior to others, and also emphasizes defining a country or region by White racial identity and promoting the interests of Whites exclusively at the expense of non-White populations.<sup>6</sup> Individuals motivated by these beliefs have also been referred to by the U.S. government as the *White Identity Terrorist Movement* (WITM), although use of this term is relatively uncommon and it is no longer used in government. More-common terms related to REMVE are *far-right extremism*, *right-wing terrorism*, *radical right*, or *extreme right*, which are more frequently used in literature and by foreign countries.<sup>7</sup> *Alt right*, short for *alternative right*, has been used by some who seek to mainstream REMVE ideology.<sup>8</sup> Although these terms are not synonymous, they are used somewhat interchangeably and often without precise definitions.<sup>9</sup> These terms can also be applied to political parties and movements that participate in political systems and do not engage in violence directly, particularly in Europe, where many parliamentary systems have formal far-right parties that participate in elections. In this report, when we use the term *REMVE*, we mean it in the definition that we initially established, but

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<sup>5</sup> These are countries where REMVE is known to have been of historic concern or, in such countries as New Zealand, where there have been recent REMVE attacks. This scope was determined in consultation with the project sponsor.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Anti-Defamation League (ADL), “White Nationalism,” webpage, undated-c; Southern Poverty Law Center, “White Nationalist,” webpage, undated; and Kamali, 2021, pp. 2, 23–24. *White separatism* emphasizes the idea that White people should exist separately from all “inferior, non-white races,” either by establishing an all-White community or removing non-Whites from an area (see ADL, “White Separatism,” webpage, undated-d). *White nationalism* has been conceptualized as distinct from White separatism insofar as the former advocates not only for White separatism (the call for the White race to live apart from people of color) but also for the eradication of people of color (Kamali, 2021, p. 25).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of what is encompassed in the term *far-right*, including differences between the extreme right and the radical right, see Cas Mudde, *The Far Right in America*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017, pp. 1–3.

<sup>8</sup> ADL, “Alt Right: A Primer on the New White Supremacy,” webpage, undated-b; and Mudde, 2017, pp. 61–62.

<sup>9</sup> In some usage, these alternative terms may encompass anti-government activists and militant, violent extremists, who are not racially or ethnically motivated. Some foreign governments also use the term *racially or ethnically motivated* in a narrower context—this is typically used in relation to hate crime, and it may be separate from anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim violence.

we sometimes use alternative terms if we are drawing from specific literature or data sets that used those terms because they vary slightly in definition.

This study was commissioned by the U.S. Department of State in response to direction in the fiscal year (FY) 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The NDAA called for a research institute, such as the RAND Corporation, to provide a comprehensive social network analysis of the global WITM. This report was commissioned to “identify key actors, organizations, and supporting infrastructure” and “the relationships and interactions between”<sup>10</sup> them with the intent of informing a U.S. government strategy to counter REMVE. To meet these Congressional requirements, we reviewed existing literature on WITM and REMVE movements, and we collected and analyzed social media data to produce a network map of the digital space related to these movements. We also chose, in coordination with the U.S. Department of State, ten countries to examine in greater depth for reasons that will be discussed in more detail in that section. In the subsequent chapters, we discuss our specific methodology for each of these tasks, but it is important to note some overarching caveats about our network analysis.

We included data in our network analysis from the social media platforms Twitter, Reddit, Gab, Ruqqus, Telegram, and Stormfront, for reasons that we will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three. Our data do not include the most popular social media platform, Facebook.<sup>11</sup> Facebook has more than 2.91 billion monthly active users,<sup>12</sup> and is the most popular social media platform in most of the countries of interest in our study.<sup>13</sup> Facebook generally does not allow its data to be readily accessed for public research, particularly data that would include network connections, and it has hidden internal research on such topics as extremism.<sup>14</sup> This is despite the fact that Facebook’s algorithms, according to the company’s

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Code, Title 22, Chapter 38, Subsection 2656j, Countering White Identity Terrorism Globally.

<sup>11</sup> Statista Research Department, “Most Popular Social Networks Worldwide as of October 2021, Ranked by Number of Active Users (in Millions),” webpage, October 2021b.

<sup>12</sup> Meta, “Facebook Reports Third Quarter 2021 Results,” press release, Menlo Park, Calif., October 25, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> There is no definitive source of information on social media networks. Work by Vincenzo Cosenza, who has been cited by the World Economic Forum on this topic, shows that Facebook is the most popular platform for the countries in our scope with the exception of Russia, where VKontakte (VK), is the predominant platform (see Vincenzo Cosenza, “World Map of Social Networks,” blog post, *Vincos*, updated January 2022). Other sources, such as Statista, have identified WhatsApp as the most popular social media platform in such countries as Germany; however, WhatsApp is often used as a replacement for SMS for person-to-person text messaging and not necessarily for broad social communication. In the United States, however, research suggests that seven in ten U.S. adults use Facebook, with the same proportion of those—seven in ten—using the platform daily. See John Gramlich, “10 Facts About Americans and Facebook,” blog post, Pew Research Center, June 1, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Dwoskin, Cat Zakrzewski, and Tyler Pager, “Only Facebook Knows the Extent of Its Misinformation Problem. And It’s Not Sharing, Even with the White House,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 2021; K. Bell, “The Fight to Study What Happens on Facebook,” *Engadget*, September 7, 2021; Kate Kaye, “Princeton Researchers Ditch Facebook Political Ad Project After the Platform Used a Debunked FTC Pri-



own research, often have directed users to extreme content, and that Facebook has failed to remove known extremist movements or extremist content from its platforms.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, although we know that REMVE movements actively use Facebook and that Facebook brings unparalleled global reach, we cannot account for this activity when building a global network map. In addition to the gap created by omitting Facebook, we also are unable to collect material for analysis from VK, which is a Facebook-like platform and the most used social media platform in Russia. In Chapter Three, we will discuss in greater detail what data was collected from the platforms that we analyzed and how they were collected.

This report also is intended to provide a global network map to help understand strategic trends in the WITM/REMVE movement; we do not present a tactical picture of a network that could be used actively by law enforcement or intelligence organizations to act directly in response to REMVE organizations. We have analyzed only data that were posted publicly. We have made no effort to investigate any individual's offline identity, nor have we provided any individual-level data to the U.S. government as part of this research. Our research is intended to describe where REMVE networks are most present, the extent of transnational connections, potential connections between platforms, and other dynamics related to network analysis. We would highlight that this is an aggregate approach to this problem: It is important to recognize that terrorist threats can exist at an individual level and would not necessarily be apparent from a global network map. Such a study is not intended to and indeed cannot illustrate who could become the next lone actor that commits a mass-casualty attack, such as those in Oslo and Utøya, Norway, and Christchurch, New Zealand. Nor can it reveal small cells that might be actively engaged in criminal or terrorist activity. Network analysis for these counterterrorism purposes is a dynamic, resource-intensive process that is generally useful only if paired with actors set to intervene to neutralize threats, given that such an individual-level network picture is almost immediately dated.

It is also important to note that, although our literature review includes information about WITM/REMVE activity online and offline, our original network analysis focuses on online activity. As we will discuss further in this report, there are reasons why REMVE actors in some countries might be less inclined to use online spaces to recruit, organize, and propagandize, as well as reasons why they might go to greater lengths to mask their geographic locations. There are many gaps in understanding REMVE activity worldwide that obscure our understanding of these trends within states—such as limited information on REMVE crimes in most countries—and when attempting to integrate this information—such as differences between countries' definitions of extremist activity—to provide a comprehensive global pic-

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vacy Defense," *Digiday*, August 12, 2021; and New York Times, "The Facebook Papers and Their Fallout," October 25, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Horwitz and Deepa Seetharaman, "Facebook Executives Shut Down Efforts to Make the Site Less Divisive," *Wall Street Journal*, May 26, 2020; Tech Transparency Project, "Facebook's Boogaloo Problem: A Record of Failure," blog post, August 12, 2020; Center for Countering Digital Hate, *Failure to Protect: How Tech Giants Fail to Act on User Reports of Antisemitism*, July 30, 2021; and Jemima McEvoy, "ADL Says Facebook Won't Crack Down on Anti-Semitic Hate," *Forbes*, June 2, 2021.



ture. A review of classified information and law enforcement–privileged information also might provide a more nuanced picture of transnational activity.

In Chapter Two, we present results from our review of literature on REMVE at a macro level. In Chapter Three, we provide the results of our network analysis. In Chapter Four, we draw on material from both sources to provide greater specifics on ten individual countries. In Chapter Five, we provide a brief conclusion. Appendixes to this report relate to material provided in Chapter Three and cover our search terms related to White genocide and religion (Appendix A), an alternative measure that we developed to corroborate the dark triad scores presented (Appendix B), further analysis of how dark triad scores change over time across platforms (Appendix C), further results from our simulations on interventions in REMVE online communities (Appendixes D and E), and a dendrogram of lexical similarities by location (Appendix F).

## Warning Concerning Objectionable Content

This publication quotes and includes references to objectionable content, including hate speech and material that is offensive or obscene. Because this content is integral to the research and our findings, it is presented verbatim and unedited.



# Literature Review

## Introduction

### Objectives

The objective of this literature review was twofold. First, we sought to draw on established knowledge to provide a strategic-level overview of the WITM and REMVE. We paid special attention to how new members are recruited and trained and how actors are collecting and moving funds, which were of particular importance to the U.S. Department of State.

Second, in this literature review, we sought to better inform and guide this project's second task, a network analysis of global WITM/REMVE movements, which is presented in the subsequent chapters. Therefore, we focused on identifying gaps that potentially could be filled by additional data collection and analysis.

### Methodology

#### Scope

Our study of REMVE is focused on movements pertinent to the U.S. context, including international linkages. We therefore focused on material related to European countries, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, and excluded literature that focused on instances of ethnosectarian violence that are parochial to other geographical locations (e.g., violent extremism linked to the Kurdish separatist movement).<sup>1</sup> Because we were interested in present-day WITM/REMVE dynamics, we focused on literature that was published between 2016 and 2021 that addresses *contemporary* trends, which we defined as occurring in the past ten years.

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of sources included in our literature review address country-specific trends around the evolution of WITM/REMVE dynamics that are germane to the U.S. context. Ninety-eight sources addressed dynamics that are specific to the United States, while 25 focused on dynamics that concern a single European country (most frequently Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden, although there was also a handful of other countries). In addition, ten sources focused on WITM/REMVE dynamics in Canada and an additional five focused on Australia. Our review also included 42 sources that explicitly covered transnational dynamics; of these, 11 sources had a regional, European focus.

## Keyword Searches and Information Sources

We identified potential literature to include in the review using two-part search strings, which we applied to searches across various academic and nonacademic databases.<sup>2</sup> We used these search strings to identify relevant peer-reviewed academic articles, as well as U.S. and foreign government reports, reports from think tanks and nongovernment organizations (NGOs), U.S. government testimony, and investigative journalism accounts that fell within the scope of the literature review. The first part of the search string consisted of words, phrases, and stems identifying WITM or REMVE groups.<sup>3</sup> The second part identified dynamics of interest that are related specifically to movement beliefs, structures, goals, and both online and offline activities.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of our literature searches, the research team found that the literature discussing dynamics related to funding and financing often focused on specific individuals or groups. Therefore, the original search strings that we specify were not effective when it came to identifying relevant literature in this area. We thus ran a separate search to pull resources that were specifically related to fundraising and financing.<sup>5</sup>

Although our findings do draw on some material from books in the field, and we did not explicitly exclude book-length material known to be relevant, we did not apply our structured inclusion criteria to book-length sources because of the time constraints for this study and the challenges in identifying and accessing relevant material in existing databases. We also limited our focus to English-language sources because of the same constraints and to unclassified sources to produce a publicly releasable report.

In addition, we searched historical records from a RAND-curated list of extremism-related media sources. This list provided additional material from think tanks, blogs, panels that were broadcast online, podcasts, investigative journalism, and freelance journalism. Our initial search reviewed sources published between January 1, 2016, and April 2021, but we updated these searches on a regular basis to include new material through early September 2021.

Data on far-right violence were drawn from a diverse set of sources. These sources included research centers, such as the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses

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<sup>2</sup> We applied these search strings to the titles, keywords, and abstracts of all sources in several databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest's Military Database, PolicyFile, LexisNexis CRS [Congressional Research Service] Reports, LexisNexis CQ Transcriptions, and Google Scholar.

<sup>3</sup> We used the following search terms to identify WITM and REMVE groups: white extremis\*, white nationalis\*, white supremac\*, rac\* and/ ethnic\* motivat\*, right-wing, alt-right, far right, radical right, extreme right, neo-fascis\*, neo-nazi, neonazi, domestic extremis\*.

<sup>4</sup> We used the following search terms to identify dynamics: ideology, gender, misogyny, incel, nationalis\*, separatism\*, goal, goals, global network, cooperat\*, organi\*, transnational, formal coordination, information coordination, loosely coordinated, terrori\*, targeted violence, recruit\*, milita\*, paramilitary, para-military, law enforcement, police, structure\*, racial\*, REMVE.

<sup>5</sup> The fundraising search string added the following terms to the WITM and REMVE search terms listed: aryan nation\*, proud boys, boogaloo, American identity movement, oath keeper\*; as well as adding to the second part of the search string the following search terms: fund, funds, fundrais\*, money, financ\*, crowd-fund\*, crypto\*.

to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland and the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP); and U.S.-based think tanks and NGOs, such as New America, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and the ADL. Also included were data initiatives, such as the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) data sets.

### Screening Process and Results

Our initial search, conducted between late March 2021 and early June 2021, returned more than 6,000 distinct sources from various academic and nonacademic databases. To narrow down the list of sources to those germane to this project, we conducted an initial scan of article abstracts. The abstract review eliminated articles that were too narrow in scope to be valuable to the literature review and those in cases in which wild card search terms had returned sources that were unrelated to REMVE. This step narrowed the list down to slightly more than 600 sources. The team conducted full-text reviews of this shorter set of sources to further narrow down results to only those that would eventually be included in the literature review. Any sources that exclusively addressed pre-2011 trends or dynamics fell outside the project scope (e.g., the far-right in the context of electoral politics, drivers of extremism, White supremacy and racism as a structural condition) and were eliminated. The process resulted in a total of 277 sources for inclusion in the literature review. We updated these results as new material was published, through September 2, 2021.<sup>6</sup> Figure 2.1 summarizes our literature review search process.

## Overview of the Evolution of WITM and REMVE

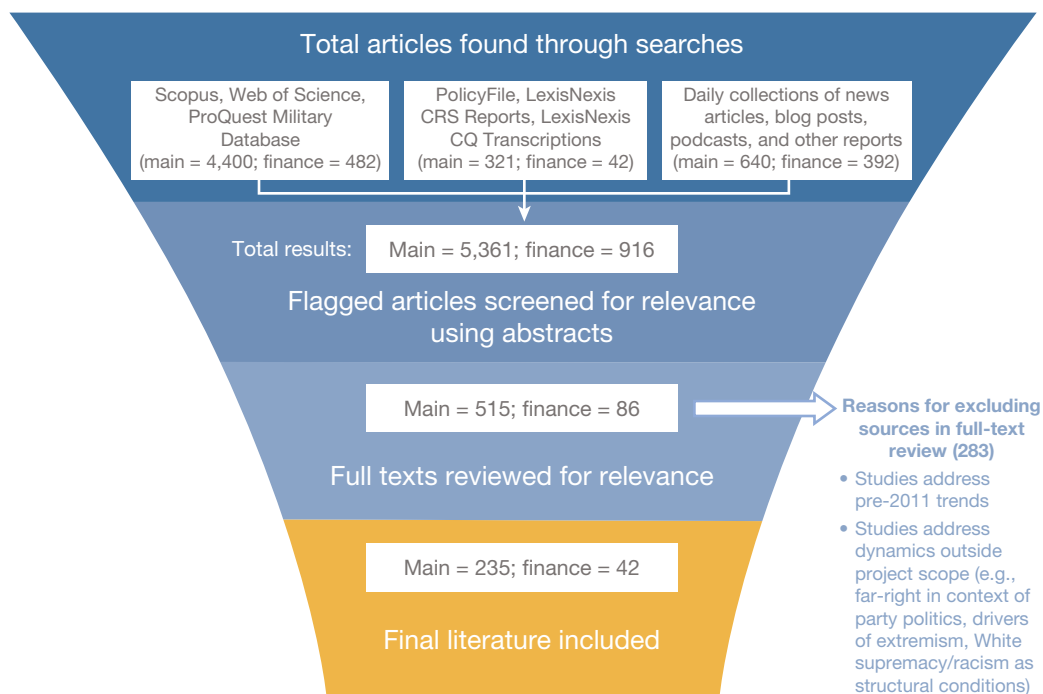
Multiple data sources agree on a trend of increasing attacks and plots from WITM and REMVE-motivated individuals and groups and their actions, especially within the past five years, although an increasing number of attacks in the United States are predominantly responsible for this trend.<sup>7</sup> According to data from CSIS, there were 893 terror attacks and plots in the United States between 1994 and 2020; right-wing groups were responsible for

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<sup>6</sup> Our additional search captured relevant material published between May 21, 2021, and September 2, 2021. Using the same search strings previously specified, we identified an additional 325 articles for potential inclusion; a scan of article abstracts and reviews of full text narrowed the list down to seven relevant articles, which we added to our included sources. In addition, a RAND-curated list of extremism-related media sources identified 17 more sources that fit into the scope of our literature review.

<sup>7</sup> Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington, *The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020; Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, Nicholas Harrington, Grace Hwang, and James Suber, *The War Comes Home: The Evolution of Domestic Terrorism in the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020; and Mark Pitcavage, *Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2020*, New York: ADL, 2021.

**FIGURE 2.1**  
**Flow Diagram of Literature Review Search**

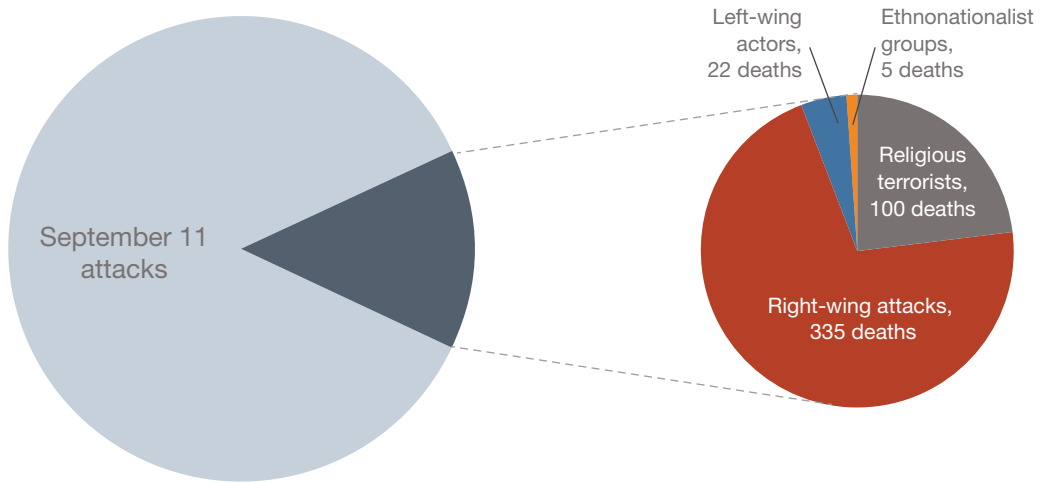


57 percent of these attacks or plots.<sup>8</sup> Although religious terrorism has caused the most fatalities in the United States during this time period—primarily because of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks—right-wing attacks have caused 335 deaths. After separating out the September 11 attacks, religious terrorists, left-wing actors, and ethnonationalist groups have caused 109, 22, and 5 deaths in the United States, respectively, between 1994 and 2020 (see Figure 2.2).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> CSIS data on right-wing extremism are compiled by the CSIS Transnational Threats Project and draw on the START Global Terrorism Database; Janes Terrorism and Insurgency Events database; ADL's Hate, Extremism, Anti-Semitism, and Terrorism (H.E.A.T) map; and annual reports and publications released by the ADL and Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Terrorist incidents* are defined as those in which “non-state actors used or threatened violence to achieve a political goal and produce broad psychological impact” (see Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> In the CSIS data, *ethnonationalist terrorists* are defined as those “motivated by ethnic and/or national goals, including self-determination” (Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington, 2020). Issues driving incidents of ethnonationalist terrorism included in the U.S. data included political divisions within Haitian and Cuban exile communities and Puerto Rican independence. Anti-Semitic motives were classified as right-wing unless they led to attacks on Jewish individuals or institutions and were intended as responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which case they were coded as ethnonationalist terrorism.

FIGURE 2.2

**Fatalities from Terrorism in the United States, 1994–2020, by Ideological Source**

SOURCE: Data from Jones, Dooxsee, and Harrington, 2020.

According to the RTV data set, there were 116 severe right-wing violent events in Western Europe in 2019, four of which were fatal events that caused a total of five deaths.<sup>10</sup> The second-most deadly year of the past six was 2019; it was surpassed only by 2016, which had nine fatal attacks that resulted in 17 deaths.<sup>11</sup> Most attacks in 2019 occurred in Germany, followed by Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Greece. Attacks most often targeted immigrants (52 attacks),<sup>12</sup> and Muslims (14). Of the 149 right-wing terror and violence attacks that occurred in 2020, half targeted immigrants (74 attacks), followed by left-wing activists (16), Muslims (6), and Jewish people (5).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Attacks included in the RTV data set must meet two inclusion criteria: The target selection must be premised on right-wing beliefs, and the severity of the attack must satisfy at least one of three severity criteria. “Those who regard social inequality as inevitable, natural, or even desirable” are said to have *right-wing beliefs* (Center for Research on Extremism, “About the Dataset on Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence,” webpage, updated May 27, 2020). These ideological constructs produce a set of political and social groups who are considered enemies of and legitimate targets for the far right. These groups include ethnic and religious minorities, sexual minorities, political opponents, state institutions, and vulnerable groups (see Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV Dataset,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 3, June 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Aasland Ravndal, Sofia Lygren, Anders Ravis Jupskås, and Tore Bjørgo, *RTV Trend Report 2020: Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990–2019*, Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo, No. 1, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> In the RTV data, *immigrants* includes immigrants, foreigners, asylum-seekers, and refugees.

<sup>13</sup> Ravndal et al., 2020.

## Salient Ideologies and Unifying Factors

According to the literature, today's global REMVE movement attracts adherents by striking a new unease with changing demographics and cultivating nostalgia for a time when White governments dominated various geographical regions.<sup>14</sup> The common emphasis is on the importance of preserving and protecting idealized European and American identities.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, White identity terrorism is grounded in the *White genocide* conspiracy theory, which warns that changing demographic landscapes that are caused by immigration and interracial relationships are endangering the White race.<sup>16</sup> Such beliefs are also in line with *Great Replacement* conspiracy theories, which purport that Whites are being replaced by non-White races, also through immigration and interracial relationships.

Despite this underlying theme running across the contemporary WITM/REMVE movement, there is also diversity within the movement, which includes neo-Nazis; Christian identity adherents; and those who espouse anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and/or anti-Semitic beliefs or align with anti-government activists and self-organized militias.<sup>17</sup> Individuals adhering to various extreme right ideologies also find common ground with various QAnon conspiracy theories, such as those maintaining that the 2020 U.S. presidential election was stolen by the Democratic Party, that Satan-worshipping socialists are attempting to take over the country, and that a potentially violent confrontation will be necessary to reclaim the United States if Democrats and other "leftists" remain in power.<sup>18</sup> Figure 2.3 provides a con-

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<sup>14</sup> R. Joseph Parrot, "How White Supremacy Went Global," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Counter Extremism Project, *Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism—Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasure*, Berlin, November 2020b.

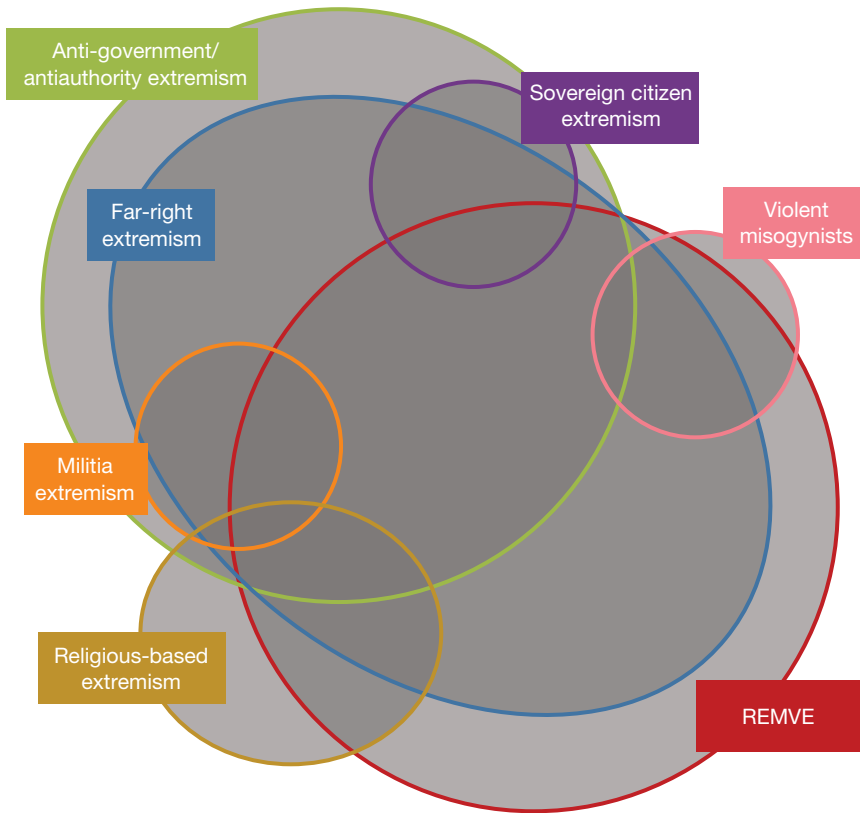
<sup>16</sup> J. M. Berger, *Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter: A Comparative Study of White Nationalist and ISIS Online Social Media Networks*, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University Program on Extremism, September 2016.

<sup>17</sup> William Allchorn, *Tackling Hate in the Homeland: U.S. Radical Right Narratives and Counter-Narratives at a Time of Renewed Threat*, Abu Dhabi: Hedayah Center for Analysis of the Radical Right, 2021; Jeffrey Treistman, "Revisiting Reactionary Terrorism: Definitions, Causes, and Consequences," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2021; Reem Ahmed and Daniela Pisoiu, "Uniting the Far Right: How the Far-Right Extremist, New Right, and Populist Frames Overlap on Twitter—A German Case Study," *European Societies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2021; Vincent A. Auger, "Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 3, June 2020; Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, September 2019; Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington, 2020; Brian Hughes and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Uniting for Total Collapse: The January 6 Boost to Accelerationism," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 14, No. 4, April/May 2021; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021; Cassie Miller and Hannah Gais, "Capitol Insurrection Shows How Trends on the Far-Right's Fringe Have Become Mainstream," blog post, Southern Poverty Law Center, January 22, 2021; and Kiril Avramov and Ruslan Trad, "Self-Appointed Defenders of 'Fortress Europe': Analyzing Bulgarian Border Patrols," *Bellingcat*, May 17, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> QAnon is an umbrella term for a set of largely internet-based conspiracy theories that falsely allege that the world is run by a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles. The theory echoes centuries-old false claims that Jewish people secretly dominated the world and murdered Christian children, and many adherents use anti-Semitic rhetoric on online platforms. See, e.g., Kevin Roose, "What Is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump



FIGURE 2.3

**Overlap and Contradictions Across Extremist Movements**

NOTE: This graph is conceptual and circles are not measured but are hypotheses for consideration.

ceptual look at how various extremist ideologies, including far-right ideologies, may overlap and contradict.

Diverse extremist milieus have also coalesced around *accelerationism*, a strategic orientation that has emerged in support of the growing belief that total collapse of the current system is a necessary precursor to any new social or political project that is based on the extreme right's preferred mode of hierarchic organization.<sup>19</sup> This orientation has fostered an operational alliance among otherwise ideologically diverse far-right adherents, making such events as the January 6, 2021, attacks on the U.S. Capitol—which brought together a collec-

Conspiracy Theory," *New York Times*, updated September 3, 2021; and Rachel E. Greenspan, "QAnon Builds on Centuries of Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories That Put Jewish People at Risk," *Insider*, October 24, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes and Miller-Idriss, 2021; and J. M. Berger, *A Paler Shade of White: Identity and In-Group Critique in James Mason's Siege*, Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021.

tion of unaligned individuals and groups—possible. Various recent studies link new organizational tactics—such as informal online networking and the encouragement of individual lone actor–style violence—to accelerationist calls for action against the government, politicians, and minorities.<sup>20</sup> Other sources that we reviewed suggest that because accelerationist networks believe that a single act of violence carried out by a lone individual is sufficient to trigger a race war, some groups and individuals have formed small, geographically dispersed cells to train and coordinate their attacks.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of accelerationist chatter appearing on such platforms as Telegram remains inspirational in nature rather than organized, working first and foremost to encourage individuals to take whatever actions are necessary to hasten violence and the collapse of the status quo.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, such concepts as *race* or *identity* predominate across the REMVE movement and act as unifying concepts in an environment that is otherwise disunited from an organizational and structural standpoint. REMVE actors are typically far from homogenous; they have disparate networks, political parties, and groups active within national borders. Recent analyses have characterized this as a *divided we stand* attitude that is ultimately the expression of a diversified approach that is united by narratives using the idea that an influx of non-White foreigners, immigrants, or refugees will inevitably be the downfall of the White race.<sup>23</sup>

## Organizational Forms

Contemporary right-wing extremism–related violence is, in large part, orchestrated and carried out by lone-wolf actors, many of whom are inspired by previous terrorist attacks (e.g., the Christchurch shooter left a manifesto citing the Norwegian terrorist responsible for the Oslo

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<sup>20</sup> Arie Perliger, *Deciphering the Second Wave of the American Militia Movement*, CARR Policy Insight Series 2021.1, London: Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right, January 2021; and Meilie Criezis and Kesa White, “Insurrection Snapshot: Emerging Narrative Themes Following the January 6 Storming of the U.S. Capitol,” blog post, Global Network on Extremism and Technology, August 13, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> On modern-day accelerationist groups, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Samuel Hodgson, *Skinheads, Saints, and (National) Socialists: An Overview of the Transnational White Supremacist Extremist Movement*, Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Center on Economic and Financial Power, June 2021; and Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Samuel Hodgson, and Colin P. Clarke, “The Growing Threat Posed by Accelerationism and Accelerationist Groups Worldwide,” blog post, Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 20, 2020. These trends, to some extent, also resemble organizational structures and tactics adopted by far-left terrorist groups active in the United States and Europe during the 1970s and 1980s (see, for example, Matteo Re, “The Red Brigades’ Communiqués: An Analysis of the Terrorist Group’s Propaganda,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2020; and Jennifer Varriale Carson, Gary LaFree, and Laura Dugan, “Terrorist and Non-Terrorist Criminal Acts by Radical Environmental and Animal Rights Groups in the United States, 1970–2007,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Criezis and White, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Counter Extremism Project, 2020b.

and Utøya attacks as his inspiration).<sup>24</sup> Analysis from the IEP shows that nearly 60 percent of far-right attacks that took place between 1970 and 2019 were carried out by unaffiliated individuals, compared with under 10 percent for both far-left and separatist terror groups.<sup>25</sup> Data on recent right-wing attacks tracked by social scientist Arie Perliger also show that 58 percent of attacks between 1990 and 2017 were committed by a single person, and 18 percent of attacks were committed by only two individuals; groups perpetrated fewer than one-quarter of all right-wing attacks committed during this same period.<sup>26</sup>

Recent trends suggest that we are moving toward what some call a *post-organizational* landscape or paradigm: Individuals are radicalizing toward far-right extremism through exposure to extremist content without being part of an organized group, largely as they come across propaganda, misinformation, and extremist ideas online.<sup>27</sup> The shift toward a post-organizational landscape makes connections across extremist cultures and ideologies that are forming online especially important; the literature suggests that virtual connections among right-wing extremists could be as important as any connections that exist between on-the-ground groups. Our review shows that individuals who committed high-profile attacks in New Zealand, the United States, Germany, and Norway were not members of organized groups but connected to loose, extreme-right networks operating primarily online.<sup>28</sup> As the next sections of this chapter describe in more detail, these decentralized virtual networks use a variety of mainstream social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube, and such fringe platforms as 4Chan and Gab, to organize and grow their support bases.

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<sup>24</sup> Graham Macklin and Tore Bjørgo, “Breivik’s Long Shadow? The Impact of the July 22, 2011 Attacks on the Modus Operandi of Extreme-Right Lone Actor Terrorists,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2021; Christina Schori Liang and Matthew John Cross, *White Crusade: How to Prevent Right-Wing Extremists from Exploiting the Internet*, Strategic Security Analysis No. 11, Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Policy, July 2020; Bjørgo and Ravndal, 2019; and Jones et al., 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Sydney, November 2019. The IEP uses data from the Global Terrorist Database, which is maintained by START, a Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence led by the University of Maryland.

<sup>26</sup> Arie Perliger, *American Zealots*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. Of note, various sources that we reviewed reported that right-wing extremists regularly engage in lower levels of violence relative to other types of terrorism; some of this violence does not meet the threshold for terrorism that is used by many prominent terrorism databases and is therefore not typically recorded as such. This has fostered debate over the reliability of right-wing terrorism data (see, for example, Benjamin V. Allison, “The Devil’s in the Details—or Is He? The Ethics and Politics of Terrorism Data,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 15, No. 2, April 2021).

<sup>27</sup> Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Brian Hughes, “Blurry Ideologies and Strange Coalitions: The Evolving Landscape of Domestic Extremism,” blog post, *Lawfare*, December 19, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Jakob Guhl and Jacob Davey, *A Safe Space to Hate: White Supremacist Mobilisation on Telegram*, London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, June 26, 2020.

Notably, a commonly cited tactic noted in the literature and embraced by far-right extremists is so-called leaderless resistance.<sup>29</sup> This mode of operating aims to make extremists less vulnerable to disruption and infiltration, but decentralization also has reduced the impact of attacks when diverse individuals attack a wide range of targets with different goals in mind.<sup>30</sup> Decentralization has also reduced the extent to which right-wing extremists have been able to successfully plot and carry out complex attacks, such as those against well-guarded targets.<sup>31</sup>

## Findings: Transnational Dynamics

In recent years, both the ease of communication found in online platforms and the political mainstreaming of ideas promoted by the REMVE movement across the West have accelerated the internationalization of the movement.<sup>32</sup> Similar technological innovations that influenced the spread of ideology that was promoted by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are prompting the global surge in far-right violence. The increased use of livestreaming technology, English-language manifestos, and social media-based messaging platforms all have contributed to globalizing REMVE.<sup>33</sup> Far-right terrorist attacks are also the result of inspiration that individuals find in past attacks; in 2019, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security noted that manifestos left by past attackers were inspiring subsequent attacks.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, recent studies have shown that the growing tendency of attackers to publish manifestos has worked to inspire new, ideologically aligned attackers and is testament to the far right's growing transnational connections.<sup>35</sup> Despite the emphasis on informal online movements and radicalization toward violence outside the bounds of organized groups, however, the main actors transnationalizing far-right discourse are far-right political parties and political leaders that push xenophobic rhetoric.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Miller and Gais, 2021; and Daniel Byman, "Counterterrorism and Modern White Supremacy," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Byman, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Perliger, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Clark, Karuna Nandkumar, and James Lamond, *4 First Steps for Congress to Address White Supremacist Terrorism*, Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, October 30, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Joshua A. Geltzer, "Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part III): Addressing the Transnational Terrorist Threat," testimony presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Subcommittee on National Security, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, September 20, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, Washington, D.C., September 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob Ware, *Testament to Murder: The Violent Far-Right's Increasing Use of Terrorist Manifestos*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, ICCT Policy Brief, March 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Caterina Froio and Bharath Ganesh, "The Transnationalisation of Far-Right Discourse on Twitter," *European Societies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2019. A 2020 study by the Counter Extremism Project highlights several

Much of the far-right discourse in online conversations stays within national boundaries, and far-right extremism likely is advancing at different paces across different parts of the world.<sup>37</sup> For example, studies that address trends across Europe underscore the diversity of REMVE movements across the continent; each movement attracts distinct adherents that promote a correspondingly wide array of political, social, and other objectives depending on the country in which they are active.<sup>38</sup> In other words, local concerns often are distinguishable features of far-right extremist movements.<sup>39</sup> For instance, members of the Canadian right-wing extremist movement have produced more content on Facebook and have been more actively engaged with that content relative to Australian right-wing groups, suggesting that followers of Australian right-wing groups perceive themselves in a more sociopolitically supportive context.<sup>40</sup> According to Hutchinson and colleagues, Canadian extremists' higher levels of online engagement therefore might be a response to greater social stigmatization at home; in contexts that are perceived as resistant to certain movement objectives, adherents feel a heightened need to participate in social mobilization, both online and offline. This parallels Ravndal's finding that individuals on the fringe are less likely to mobilize toward violent extremism when they have what they perceive to be a legitimate political outlet for this discontent.<sup>41</sup>

That said, a handful of sources that we reviewed suggest that individual right-wing extremists engage online with ideological support networks across the world to converse about shared grievances and what they consider to be common sociohistorical circumstanc-

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right-wing extremist organizations that have served as points of reference for the transnational movement. For example, violent right-wing extremist groups in such countries as Finland, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom perceive foreign political parties, such as Greece's Golden Dawn party, as role models (Counter Extremism Project, 2020b). The Finnish branch of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) has held support rallies for jailed Golden Dawn members, and leading White supremacists in the United States have referenced Golden Dawn and NRM in their own discourses. (See Vice News, "Watch VICE News Tonight's Full Episode 'Charlottesville: Race and Terror,'" August 17, 2017.)

<sup>37</sup> Mattia Caniglia, Linda Winkler, and Solène Métais, *The Rise of the Right-Wing Violent Extremism Threat in Germany and Its Transnational Character*, Brussels: European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, February 27, 2020; and Froio and Ganesh, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Soufan Center, *White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement*, New York, September 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Jade Hutchinson, Amarnath Amarasingam, Ryan Scrivens, and Brian Ballsun-Stanton, "Mobilizing Extremism Online: Comparing Australian and Canadian Right-Wing Extremist Groups on Facebook," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 2021, online ahead of print. On the evolution of right-wing vigilantism against migrant and immigrant populations and the extent to which local acceptance and popular support, including explicit and implicit government support, contribute to their rise, see Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš, eds., *Vigilantism Against Migrants and Minorities*, London: Routledge, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Hutchinson et al., 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Explaining Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Grievances, Opportunities and Polarization," *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 57, No. 4, November 2018b.

es.<sup>42</sup> Only a handful of issues tend to garner transnational far-right audiences on social media; these include the White genocide narrative and other anti-immigrant tropes and nativist interpretations of the economy.<sup>43</sup>

Modern-day violent White supremacy, in particular, is a transnational ideology that draws on writings and theories of far-right activists and thinkers from France, Russia, the United States, and elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> Novels such as *The Turner Diaries* (1978) and *Siege* (1992) are common references in the manifestos of recent violent White supremacists who have committed mass attacks. Violent actors in Europe also frequently have based their narratives on Viking or Nordic sagas and national socialist or fascist ideology or imagery.<sup>45</sup> As noted earlier, violent right-wing extremists commonly imitate one another, publish manifestos, and call for others to stage follow-up attacks, suggesting a copycat movement that transcends national borders.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, although the literature seems to reach consensus that a global guidebook related to right-wing extremism exists (if not a global strategy), and that, of the loosely connected network of individuals on a variety of right-wing online forums,<sup>47</sup> there is no organized effort or movement that benefits from any centralized authority or nationality. Issues of concern to REMVE actors typically are also domestic grievances.

## Gaps in Research

Relative to past trends in far-right extremism, such as the movement that existed in the 1980s and 1990s and even later into the 20th century, today's far-right terrorism boasts a greater number of globally diffuse connections between its adherents, even if the connections that exist are weaker than those that characterized past White power movements.<sup>48</sup> Although the contemporary movement has experienced internal fissures and infighting because of the complex array of objectives that motivate those with neo-Nazi, White nationalist, and

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<sup>42</sup> Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, *The Fringe Insurgency: Connectivity, Convergence, and Mainstreaming of the Extreme Right*, London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, October 2017; and Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Berger, 2016; and Froio and Ganesh, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Clark, *How White Supremacy Returned to Mainstream Politics*, Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, July 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Counter Extremism Project, 2020b.

<sup>46</sup> Clark, Nandkumar, and Lamond, 2020; and Counter Extremism Project, 2020b.

<sup>47</sup> These include messaging platforms, such as Telegram, Twitter, and others, and such gaming platforms as Discord, Steam, Twitch, DLive, PlayStation, and those of other consoles (see Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020; and Linda Schlegel, *Extremists' Use of Gaming (Adjacent) Platforms: Insight Regarding Primary and Secondary Prevention Measures*, Luxembourg: Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Commission, 2021. Note that there is no clear definition of what constitutes a *gaming platform*, a *gaming-adjacent platform*, and *platforms containing gaming-related content*.

<sup>48</sup> Hughes and Miller-Idriss, 2021.

White supremacist tendencies, a reorientation toward accelerationism has worked to lessen the otherwise disorganized and fractured nature of the movement. That is not to say, however, that internal divisions no longer exist, especially as we consider the transnational movement. Although a handful of sources published in the wake of the January 6 attacks on the U.S. Capitol seek to improve our understanding of accelerationism—especially insofar as this reorientation has affected right-wing extremist trends in the United States—there is still a relative paucity of research that explicitly explores fissures within the global REMVE movement. Indeed, a handful of sources that we reviewed suggested that diversity continues to weaken the movement: Far-right violent extremists across the world attack a wide range of targets, which makes it difficult for them to prioritize and focus what limited resources they have.<sup>49</sup> Because the movement unites a wider range of communities (or attempts to do so), disparate communities do not all see one another as natural allies.<sup>50</sup> Further exploring such fissures and the extent to which they disrupt the cohesion of the movement and its ability to achieve stated objectives could improve our understanding of how to best combat WITM/REMVE.

Moreover, our review of the literature discussing transnational dynamics also points to a lack of attention and analysis around who is producing versus consuming WITM/REMVE propaganda; future research could contribute to clarifying trends around these dynamics.

## Findings: Recruitment

### Online Recruitment

The internet provides unfettered access to extremist content and to a network of like-minded individuals and is proving to be an unparalleled recruitment tool for the WITM and REMVE more broadly.<sup>51</sup> Online radicalization and recruitment happens on conventional social media and messaging platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), less-conventional platforms (e.g., Telegram, Gab, 8Chan), and on gaming platforms, on such video-sharing sites

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<sup>49</sup> Berger, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel L. Byman and Mark Pitcavage, *Identifying and Exploiting the Weaknesses of the White Supremacist Movement*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, April 2021. At a 2018 White supremacist festival in Germany, for instance, participants found the presence of skinheads from Poland baffling, given the xenophobia that undergirds the German neo-Nazi movement; some fear the movement is becoming too “cosmopolitan” (see Tim Hume, “German Neo-Nazis Are Trying to Go Mainstream with MMA and Music Festivals,” *Vice News*, April 24, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Anne Aly, Stuart Macdonald, Lee Jarvis, and Thomas M. Chen, “Introduction to the Special Issue: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2017; and Luke Bertram, “Terrorism, the Internet, and the Social Media Advantage: Exploring How Terrorist Organizations Exploit Aspects of the Internet, Social Media and How These Same Platforms Could Be Used to Counter-Violent Extremism,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 7, Summer 2016.



as YouTube, on such messaging-only platforms as Snapchat, and on websites.<sup>52</sup> Recruitment into right-wing extremist networks that occurs through these platforms can be either private or public, and the online environment is particularly appealing to far-right extremists because of the low cost associated with online activity and the geographically dispersed and diffuse nature of the movement.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to its aim of provoking, threatening, and inspiring violence, REMVE virtual content also is designed to spark the curiosity of fringe users or individuals who hold right-wing political views and are on the fence about engaging with more-extreme positions.<sup>54</sup> Research has discovered that algorithms within certain online platforms, such as YouTube, work to automatically promote radical ideologies by encouraging individuals to view progressively more-extreme content, which drives a so-called radicalization spiral.<sup>55</sup> An individual's offline interactions with extremists can also set the conditions that then lead to the exploration of extremist material online; some individuals are encouraged by friends or acquaintances to visit websites, while others receive digital materials directly from a contact.<sup>56</sup>

Most analyses of online recruitment dynamics draw on data from Twitter to better understand how right-wing extremists reach a broader audience because Twitter data's public access and structure makes them particularly easy to obtain and process. It is important to note that the focus on studying trends across certain widely used and available social platforms, relative to encrypted or account-based communications platforms, likely biases results.<sup>57</sup> With that constraint, the literature suggests that right-wing extremists avidly use Twitter to reach mainstream audiences, using specific tactics to normalize their messaging in ways that will

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<sup>52</sup> Ben Pierce, "MPA Summary: Right-Wing Extremist Online Activity in October 2020," *Janes Militant Propaganda Analysis*, November 16, 2020; and Raphael Cohen-Almagor, "Taking North American White Supremacist Groups Seriously: The Scope and Challenge of Hate Speech on the Internet," *International Journal for Crime, Justice, and Social Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2018. As we discuss later in this chapter, websites in particular are an important source of fundraising for extremist groups (see Amy Brittain and David Willman, "'A Place to Fund Hope': How Proud Boys and Other Fringe Groups Found Refuge on a Christian Fundraising Website," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2021).

<sup>53</sup> Bertram, 2016; Bjørgo and Ravndal, 2021; and Michael H. Becker, Scott H. Decker, Gary LaFree, David C. Pyrooz, Kyle Ernest, and Patrick A. James, "A Comparative Study of Initial Involvement in Gangs and Political Extremism," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, October 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Soufan Center, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Rebecca Lewis, *Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube*, New York: Data and Society Institute, September 18, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Tiana Gaudette, Ryan Scrivens, and Vivek Venkatesh, "The Role of the Internet in Facilitating Violent Extremism: Insights from Former Right-Wing Extremists," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020, online ahead of print.

<sup>57</sup> Facebook also is widely used by and available to REMVEs, but it is not as well studied, in part because of closed user groups and Facebook's reluctance to increase transparency on its platform. Twitter data are arguably also the most easily studied relative to data from other social media platforms; not only are the data widely accessible and easy to purchase and sample, they are also structured in a way that makes them easy to analyze.



draw in broad audiences.<sup>58</sup> For example, neo-Nazi groups in Sweden couch propaganda in light-hearted entertainment, humor, and satire to reach broader target populations online; their objective is to “catch people and slowly but steadily lead them” toward more-intense radicalization.<sup>59</sup> Another analysis of far-right extremism on Twitter in Germany traces how groups use rhetoric and imagery to formulate and twist certain frames or stories to present an impending threat to the White race.<sup>60</sup> Extremist groups and individuals also tend to mingle their messaging with mainstream messages through the use of Twitter’s hashtag function to infiltrate their content into otherwise homophilous, nonextremist Twitter networks.<sup>61</sup> Similar dynamics occur across other mainstream platforms, such as Reddit, where such features as upvoting work to promote and normalize otherwise socially unacceptable views against outgroups and ultimately elevate one-sided narratives that reinforce extremist views.<sup>62</sup>

Studies about recruitment patterns across so-called alternative communications or alt-tech platforms primarily focus on Telegram.<sup>63</sup> As Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube enhance content moderation, many extremist communities have made the move to Telegram and other platforms, such as 8Chan, Gab, Ruqqus, and others, to avoid restrictions on hate speech and carry on discussing and disseminating various conspiracy theories, posting content, spreading false narratives, and raising money.<sup>64</sup> Research on alternative communications platforms highlights their hospitable nature to extremists and their evolution into havens for alt-right extremist content because of these platforms’ purported focus on free speech.<sup>65</sup> However, because of the challenges involved in obtaining data from these encrypted commu-

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<sup>58</sup> Carolyn Gallaher, “Mainstreaming White Supremacy: A Twitter Analysis of the American ‘Alt-Right,’” *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2021; and Mark Davis, “The Online Anti-Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Tina Askanius, “On Frogs, Monkeys, and Execution Memes: Exploring the Humor-Hate Nexus at the Intersection of Neo-Nazi and Alt-Right Movements in Sweden,” *Television and New Media*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Ahmed and Pisoiu, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Roderick Graham, “Inter-Ideological Mingling: White Extremist Ideology Entering the Mainstream on Twitter,” *Sociological Spectrum*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2016. For example, right-wing extremists have piggybacked hashtags, such as #whitegenocide, onto trending threads that include otherwise mainstream hashtags that might be completely unrelated.

<sup>62</sup> Tiana Gaudette, Ryan Scrivens, Garth Davies, and Richard Frank, “Upvoting Extremism: Collective Identity Formation and the Extreme Right on Reddit,” *New Media and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 12, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> See Bennett Clifford, *Migration Moments: Extremist Adoption of Text-Based Instant Messaging Applications*, London: Global Network on Extremism and Technology, 2020; and Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Jessie Blackbourn, Nicola Garrity, and Kent Roach, “Understanding and Responding to Right Wing Terrorism,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2019; and Edwin Hodge and Helga Hallgrímsdóttir, “Networks of Hate: The Alt-Right, ‘Troll Culture’, and the Cultural Geography of Social Movement Spaces Online,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Ryan Kor-Sins, “The Alt-Right Digital Migration: A Heterogeneous Engineering Approach to Social Media Platform Branding,” *New Media and Society*, 2021, online ahead of print.

nications platforms, there is, to date, no systematic analysis of recruitment or other dynamics that resembles what we have found using Twitter data; this report helps fill this gap.

Finally, some sources included in our review speak to the role of online gaming platforms in WITM/REMVE recruitment. On the whole, existing research and case studies of gaming environments do not find that video games and other gaming aspects function as major forces of recruitment or radicalization toward violent extremism. That said, those who participate in gaming are vulnerable to exploitation; this falls within the scope of broader efforts by violent extremists to target new technologies and components of popular culture to widen their support base.<sup>66</sup> Using gaming communities for targeted harassment was made popular by a campaign started in 2014 targeting women, men of color, and male allies of those groups; this campaign was known as Gamergate.<sup>67</sup> These networks and tactics are used by extremists to leverage video game-adjacent chat applications to propagate violent misogyny and other extremist beliefs, and as a tool for harassment.<sup>68</sup> As we discuss in later sections of this chapter, gaming platforms also have helped White supremacists and other extremists raise funds.<sup>69</sup> We also will address targeted recruitment of individuals in the military in our section on training.

## In-Person and Offline Recruitment

Recruitment into WITM/REMVE is not limited to the virtual environment; in fact, studies suggest that local organizing remains a powerful recruitment tool for far-right extremists, and the physical presence of hate groups significantly increases the probability of radicalization.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, sources included in our review provide less evidence about the dynamics of in-person (offline) recruitment relative to online dynamics. Some studies suggest that personal interactions can prompt an individual to pursue exploration of extremist content online,<sup>71</sup> while others point out that the reverse can also be true: Some White supremacist groups, for instance, use online platforms—even such conventional ones as Twitter or Facebook—to

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<sup>66</sup> Aaron Tielemans, “A Survey of Violent Extremist and Terrorist Activities Across the Gaming Environment,” blog post, Global Network on Terrorism and Technology, June 28, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Heather J. Williams, Alexandra T. Evans, Jamie Ryan, Erik E. Mueller, and Bryce Downing, *The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-A1458-1, 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Soufan Center, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Hannah Gais and Michael Edison Hayden, “Extremists Are Cashing In on a Youth-Targeted Gaming Website,” blog post, Southern Poverty Law Center, November 17, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Mason Youngblood, “Extremist Ideology As a Complex Contagion: The Spread of Far-Right Radicalization in the United States Between 2005 and 2017,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, Vol. 7, 2020, article 49.

<sup>71</sup> Gaudette, Scrivens, and Venkatesh, 2020.

recruit activists into offline direct action.<sup>72</sup> In other words, rather than highlighting a specific, unidirectional path toward extremism, recent publications instead highlight that the recruitment process is complex and multidimensional and often includes exposure to content and/or individuals in both the online and offline contexts.<sup>73</sup>

Studies of White supremacist groups, in particular, show that extremists incite adherents to action through festivals and other types of in-person gatherings.<sup>74</sup> At least five sources included in our review discuss how White supremacists spread propaganda and connect extremists from other countries during such events. For the most part, the literature has focused on events in Germany, although some also reference similar events that have taken place in the United States.<sup>75</sup> Events, such as the Shield and Sword Festival, held in Ostritz, Germany, every April to celebrate the birthday of Adolf Hitler, promise attendees a lineup of far-right attractions, including political speeches, rock concerts, martial arts tournaments, and more.<sup>76</sup> In 2018, the festival attracted individuals from 15 countries, including various European countries and the United States. Music also plays an essential role in the recruitment of individuals into White supremacy extremism. White power rock bands associated with various ideological groups attract followers to their racist, neo-Nazi, and White supremacist beliefs via song lyrics. Many of these followers then convene at White supremacist rock concerts throughout the world.<sup>77</sup>

At least six sources that were included in our review also spoke specifically to the significance of the mixed martial arts (MMA) scene contributing to the spread and growth of WITM/REMVE. Right-wing extremists' forays into MMA globally allow them to reach well beyond traditional far-right youth subcultures and into new youth populations. The literature suggests that this is a strategic move, in large part because the sport is in the public sphere—people can explore or experiment with engagement without having to immediately signal strong commitment to an idea or cause.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the rapid growth of the sport across the globe offers right-wing extremists a steady stream of potential recruits and a built-in system to network nationally and internationally through tournaments and festivals. Sources suggest that MMA is an especially important connective tissue linking far-right groups in the United

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Gill, Emily Corner, Amy McKee, Paul Hitchen, and Paul Betley, "What Do Closed Source Data Tell Us About Lone Actor Terrorist Behavior? A Research Note," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2019, online ahead of print.

<sup>73</sup> Gaudette, Scrivens, and Venkatesh, 2020.

<sup>74</sup> Tim Lister, "The Nexus Between Far-Right Extremists in the United States and Ukraine," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 13, No. 4, April 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Cohen-Almagor, 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Hume, 2018.

<sup>77</sup> Soufan Center, 2019; Gaudette, Scrivens, and Venkatesh, 2020; and Bethan Johnson, *Financing Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism*, London: Project CRAFT, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, Research Briefing No. 5, 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020, p. 109.

States and Europe: Members of the U.S.-based Rise Above Movement have visited Europe to attend MMA events in Germany and Ukraine.<sup>79</sup> Many of the aforementioned far-right festivals that are held in Germany, among other locations, often host MMA tournaments that bring together participants from Germany, France, Russia, Ukraine, Canada, and the United States.<sup>80</sup> European governments—particularly the German government—have been paying close attention to MMA’s links to WITM/REMVE since 2018,<sup>81</sup> as have international law enforcement organizations, such as Europol. However, the literature suggests that the U.S. government has devoted far less attention to identifying and understanding any links that might exist between the growing MMA scene and far-right extremism.

Finally, a handful of sources that focus on offline recruitment speak specifically to the draw of some foreign fighters to the former Azov Battalion in Ukraine, a neo-Nazi Ukrainian National Guard unit, which we will discuss in this chapter’s section on training; the battalion’s role was of particular concern in the mid-2010s.

## Gaps in Research

To highlight the gaps to which we alluded in the previous section, while the literature on WITM/REMVE recruitment identifies important trends around online recruitment, fewer studies address offline recruitment and the links that exist between online and offline activity. Of the sources that do address in-person events, most concentrate on recurring festivals in Germany, or on dynamics related to foreign fighting in Ukraine. We know, for example, that Facebook has proven critical to drawing recruits from the United States and Europe to Ukraine.<sup>82</sup> We do not know, however, whether participation on conventional versus unconventional social media and messaging platforms is more likely to lead to participation in in-person extremist events and whether there are systematic patterns linking virtual activity to overt violence.

Relatedly, while we found that there is a robust body of evidence highlighting how the movement uses Twitter to recruit individuals into far-right extremism, research on the role that less-conventional platforms play is sparse in comparison. This is somewhat unsurprising because of the challenges inherent to accessing data from less-conventional platforms, such as Telegram, Gab, and others. Nevertheless, improving our understanding of the effects of migration to less-conventional platforms is important: Are extremists still reaching broad audiences despite the efforts of conventional social media and other messaging platforms to restrict hate speech online? Is this migration making it more difficult to combat extremism, given that communications and connections are now occurring across less-visible platforms?

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<sup>79</sup> Lister, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Miller-Idriss, 2021, p. 97; Hume, 2018; and Counter Extremism Project, 2020b.

<sup>81</sup> Miller-Idriss, 2021, p. 98.

<sup>82</sup> Simon Shuster and Billy Perrigo, “Like, Share, Recruit: How a White-Supremacist Militia Uses Facebook to Radicalize and Train New Members,” *Time*, January 2, 2021.

## Findings: Training

More than ten sources included in our review addressed dynamics related to WITM/REMVE training. Six of these spoke to dynamics around foreign fighting, i.e., individuals traveling abroad to participate in civil conflicts or other forms of political violence outside their home country. These focused almost exclusively on the former Azov Battalion in Ukraine, and two sources also drew attention to White nationalist proto-militias that are active in Bulgaria, which have attracted members of the European radical far right as volunteers, as well as local Bulgarians.<sup>83</sup> The remaining sources discussed trainings organized by groups, such as the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) and its armed wing, the Imperial Legion, and right-wing paramilitary training activities in the United States.

### United States–Based Training

ACLED and MilitiaWatch have created databases to track right-wing extremist groups' training activities in the United States. However, given the secrecy in which these events are shrouded, the lengths that groups and individuals go to evade detection, and the fact that many events such as rifle training are likely often indistinguishable from small gatherings not tied to extremism, both databases likely underestimate the frequency of training. *Training* has included traditional activities, such as field training exercises, fitness exercises, target practice, and pistol training, and urban-environment training, such as propaganda strategizing, public relations training, and online security operations.<sup>84</sup>

The literature highlights that right-wing extremist groups are diverse in how they train. For example, right-wing militia groups—some of which also adhere to White supremacist beliefs—are more likely to conduct traditional field exercises. Groups, such as Atomwaffen Division (AWD), on the other hand, are more likely to engage in online security training.<sup>85</sup> Accelerationists—who embrace a diversity of extremist ideologies and commonly apply the tactic of leaderless resistance—tend to engage in training that is designed to support lone-wolf attacks; to this end, they form small, geographically dispersed training cells that meet periodically for fitness exercises or paramilitary training to minimize the chances of infiltration from law enforcement.<sup>86</sup> According to an ACLED report published in 2020, most right-wing extremist training events in the United States occur under the radar and accommodate small groups in an effort to minimize the potential for violence at the training events

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<sup>83</sup> Avramov and Trad, 2019; and Gartenstein-Ross and Hodgson, 2021. Self-styled, anti-immigrant proto-militias that are active in Bulgaria include the Shipka Bulgarian National Movement and the Vasil Levski Military Union.

<sup>84</sup> Hampton Stall, Roudabeh Kishi, and Clionadh Raleigh, *Standing By: Right-Wing Militia Groups and the US Election*, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, October 2020.

<sup>85</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, Hodgson, and Clarke, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, Hodgson, and Clarke, 2020.

themselves, given that right-wing groups tend to be highly competitive (even against one another).<sup>87</sup> Although some individuals occasionally unite for group events—for example, in the context of staging counter-demonstrations during periods of intense political or social polarization—the preference of REMVE groups, in general, is to limit the visibility of training and other events.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to hosting their own training exercises, right-wing extremist groups in the United States also encourage their members to seek organized, professional training; many sources indicate that groups urge their members to join the U.S. military. Groups also have a reputation of deliberately recruiting individuals with prior or current affiliation with the military. The special skills in which armed forces train and that extremist groups consider valuable include close combat, tactical formations, use of surveillance techniques, handling explosives, counterintelligence, and more.<sup>89</sup> As an example, leaders from the White Aryan Resistance, AWD, the National Alliance, the Imperial Klans of America, the National Socialist Movement (NSM), and other groups openly admit to seeking out recruits with prior military experience, elaborating that they view military training as a way to prepare for the coming race war.<sup>90</sup> According to a former leader of the NSM, efforts to make these groups more appealing to individuals with military experience have been fruitful for these groups and has led to significant improvements in recruitment.<sup>91</sup> Studies show that over 29 percent of far-right extremists have prior or current backgrounds with the U.S. military, compared with 10 percent of Islamist extremists and 11 percent of far-left extremists.<sup>92</sup> Evidence from the January 6 attacks is consistent with these trends: Among the 357 individuals charged as of March 31, 2021, 43 (12 percent) have some form of military experience. Furthermore, among the perpetrators with military experience, 37 percent were known affiliates or leaders of domestic violent extremist groups.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Stall, Kishi, and Raleigh, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Stall, Kishi, and Raleigh, 2020.

<sup>89</sup> Daniel Koehler, *A Threat from Within? Exploring the Link Between the Extreme Right and the Military*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, September 2019b.

<sup>90</sup> Todd C. Helmus, Ryan Andrew Brown, and Rajeev Ramchand, “Bum-Rushing Extremists from the Military Might Not Help,” *DefenseOne*, March 17, 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Helmus, Brown, and Ramchand, 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Jensen, Patrick James, Gary LaFree, and Aaron Safer-Lichtensteing, “Pre-Radicalization Criminal Activity of United States Extremists,” research brief, College Park, Md.: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Milton and Andrew Mines, “*This is War*”: *Examining Military Experience Among the Capitol Hill Siege Participants*, Washington, D.C.: Program on Extremism at the George Washington University and the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, April 12, 2021.

## Russia- and Ukraine-Based Training

As noted previously, many sources that we included in our review that discussed WITM/REMVE training focused on the Ukrainian context, often in reference to foreign combatants traveling to the region to train and fight with the former Azov Battalion and the movement's subgroups. Most of these foreigners hailed from Russia, although at least 35 American right-wing extremists have also trained with the group.<sup>94</sup> Foreigners travel to Ukraine to fight at their own expense in search of professional military training and connections with right-wing extremists from around the world.<sup>95</sup> Sources included in our review reported that Americans who embedded with the Azov Battalion and the movement's subgroups gained what they perceived to be invaluable combat experience from fighting in the high-conflict Donbas region.<sup>96</sup>

According to one source, "battle-hardened" foreign fighters who return home "probably more radicalized than before they left" pose potentially significant security risks.<sup>97</sup> These individuals will have gained professional-grade military training through a global network of like-minded radicals, suggesting that they might be easily inspired to commit attacks at home and also have the savvy to organize, coordinate, and resource such attacks. Indeed, just months after two Swedish neo-Nazis completed paramilitary training with RIM in Russia in 2016, they bombed a refugee center in Gothenburg, Sweden. The prosecutor assigned to the case referred to the training that they received in Russia as a key step in the attackers' path to radicalization, and also likely where they learned how to build the bombs that they used.<sup>98</sup> Authorities also have foiled right-wing terrorist plots in Italy and France, arresting individuals with prior fighting experience gained in Ukraine and who returned to Western Europe with massive caches of military-grade weapons.<sup>99</sup> The United States is not immune to similar risks: There is no process in place to systematically track U.S. citizens who join right-wing terrorist groups abroad, and it is difficult to know exactly how many have gone, how many have returned, and what threat they might pose. Given that such groups have not been designated as terrorist movements—unlike jihadist groups—it also could be more difficult to retain information about these individuals in terrorist databases, unless they were subject to an active domestic terrorism investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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<sup>94</sup> Soufan Center, 2019; Alex MacKenzie and Christian Kaunert, "Radicalisation, Foreign Fighters, and the Ukraine Conflict: A Playground for the Far-Right?" *Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2021.

<sup>95</sup> Lister, 2020.

<sup>96</sup> Sebastian Rotella, "Global Right-Wing Extremism Networks Are Growing. The U.S. Is Just Now Catching Up," *ProPublica*, January 22, 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Tim Hume, "Far-Right Extremists Have Been Using Ukraine's War as a Training Ground. They're Returning Home," *Vice News*, July 31, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault and Joseph Stabile, "Confronting Russia's Role in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism," *JustSecurity*, February 6, 2020.

<sup>99</sup> Hume, 2019.



Sources that we reviewed also suggest that the Russian government reportedly has used its relationships with right-wing extremists to both provoke instability in the United States and bolster pro-Russian-separatist militias fighting in the Donbas region.<sup>100</sup> One such militia is the Imperial Legion, the paramilitary wing of the right-wing extremist political organization, RIM. In 2014, RIM began hosting domestic and foreign volunteers, some of whom were from the United States, to train with the Imperial Legion. Members of the Russian armed forces led the training event, known as Partisan, which took place in St. Petersburg and lasted two weeks; the training included lessons on tactical formations and operating firearms.<sup>101</sup> The objective was to ultimately send Partisan graduates to Ukraine to fight against Ukrainian nationalist forces.<sup>102</sup> A spokesperson for the group said that RIM aims to “continue to establish contacts with right-wing, traditionalist and conservative organizations around the world . . . to share the experience of political [and] information warfare and joint squad tactics training.”<sup>103</sup> RIM and another conservative Russian political party, Rodina, cohost the World National-Conservative Movement conference, whose organizers have openly stated that they seek to build “joint camps for military and athletic instruction.”<sup>104</sup>

## Gaps in Research

The literature on WITM/REMVE training is not as well developed as literature that focuses on recruitment and radicalization dynamics. As noted earlier, data on the frequency and types of training that take place in the United States are very limited because of difficulties in confirming the timing and location of events that are deliberately organized to defend against infiltration by law enforcement. Therefore, any analysis or event database that is focused on training is likely to severely underrepresent the extent to which training is taking place.

Moreover, the scale and reach of WITM/REMVE training events around the world is difficult to capture. The literature on foreign fighting—particularly in the context of right-wing extremism—is still nascent, and patterns regarding the movement of fighters, their effects on domestic conflicts, and the security threat that foreign fighter returnees might pose to their home countries are difficult to discern. Most of the evidence contained in sources that we reviewed that spoke to transnational connections between groups, such as RIM and right-wing extremist groups in the United States, comes from disparate anecdotes, investigative reporting, and shared intelligence; it is far from comprehensive. Finally, sources that we reviewed did not discuss the quality of training, particularly in the U.S. context; we do not yet understand well whether certain types of training events, such as organized counter-

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<sup>100</sup> Grimm Arsenault and Stabile, 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Mapping Militant Organizations, “Russian Imperial Movement,” webpage, Stanford University, updated February 2021.

<sup>102</sup> Mapping Militant Organizations, 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Grimm Arsenault and Stabile, 2020.

<sup>104</sup> Grimm Arsenault and Stabile, 2020.



demonstrations, have different effects on WITM/REMVE outcomes of interest (such as the size of the movement, recruitment potential, or the prevalence of attacks) compared with other types of events, such as training camps.

## Findings: Financing and Fundraising

### Sources of Funding

REMVE groups raise funds through a variety of platforms and activities, although individual groups might focus on just one or a few sources of revenue. Major funding sources (both in dollar amount and in terms of the number of organizations and transactions involved) include crowdfunding, private donations, and commercial activities. Other, less-significant sources of revenue include illicit activities, membership dues, indirect government support, and real estate investment. Nevertheless, given that many REMVE violent attacks are staged by individuals or very small groups, self-financing remains perhaps the most important source of revenue for REMVEs in terms of funding violent activities.

Self-funding is difficult—if not impossible—to observe; therefore, few studies actually mention this type of financing. However, a 2021 Financial Action Task Force report on REMVE activities across 13 countries found that REMVE attacks are “mainly perpetrated by self-funded lone actors.”<sup>105</sup> Other sources agree that self-funding is a particularly important source of money for lone-wolf terrorists:<sup>106</sup> Because lone-wolf actors do not require large amounts of money to undertake acts of violence, self-funding probably does not top other funding sources in terms of total dollars.<sup>107</sup> However, the nature of self-financing means that there might be no financial flows that could alert authorities prior to an attack, and lone actors exhibit heterogeneous financial behaviors that cannot be monitored easily.<sup>108</sup> Thus, such funding poses a particular hurdle for agencies seeking to monitor and counter terrorist financing.

It is clear that self-financing has been behind several REMVE attacks and has been particularly useful when it comes to procuring weapons.<sup>109</sup> Some REMVE groups, such as AWD

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<sup>105</sup> Financial Action Task Force (FATF), *Ethnically or Racially Motivated Terrorism Financing*, Paris, June 2021, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Financial Services Subcommittee on Terrorism and Illicit Finance, *Low Cost, High Impact: Combating the Financing of Lone-Wolf and Small-Scale Terrorist Attacks*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, September 6, 2017; and Tom Keatinge and Florence Keen, *Lone-Actor and Small Cell Terrorist Attacks: A New Front in CTF?* London: Royal United Services Institute, January 2017.

<sup>107</sup> ADL, *Funding Hate: How White Supremacists Get Their Money*, New York, 2017; and Tom Keatinge, Florence Keen, and Kayla Izenman, “Fundraising for Right-Wing Extremist Movements,” *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 164, No. 2, March 2019.

<sup>108</sup> FATF, 2021; and Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units, *Public Summary: Counter Terrorist Financing Project: Lone Actors and Small Cells*, Toronto: International Exchange Working Group, July 2019.

<sup>109</sup> FATF, 2021.

and the National Christian Resistance Movement in South Africa, also use self-financing to support a broader variety of activities.<sup>110</sup> In some cases, pooling collective resources allows groups to buy land and build compounds in rural areas in ways that anti-government groups have done in the past.<sup>111</sup> Using compounds for recruiting, meeting, and training is not a new phenomenon: During the 1980s and 1990s, the Aryan Nations hosted events at a compound that it had built in Idaho.<sup>112</sup>

When REMVEs receive money from third parties, the vast majority is through legal if not completely observable transactions. This is largely because REMVE groups are not labeled as terrorist organizations, particularly in the United States, and therefore are not sanctioned under most domestic or international laws.<sup>113</sup> Thus, they can and do solicit donations openly on public social media platforms, sell merchandise online, and host public ticketed events.

Of all the legal revenue-generating activities that REMVEs use, the consensus among experts is that crowdfunding is the most common. Most recently, media stories have spotlighted the use of livestream and peer-to-peer donation platforms by some individuals who participated in the January 6 attacks.<sup>114</sup> REMVEs have used such platforms for years but are constantly evolving their behaviors in response to deplatforming and government monitoring. As an example, the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, prompted several online crowdsourcing and social networking platforms to block or remove certain individuals or groups from using their services. In response, REMVEs have moved to other providers, such as the livestream platform DLive, or developed their own platforms, for example, the creation of the short-lived Hatreon platform after being deplatformed by Patreon.<sup>115</sup>

Besides crowdfunding, some REMVEs also raise money through membership dues or tax-exempt donations. Of these two funding mechanisms, donations are more common than membership dues. For donations to be tax-exempt, an organization must maintain a status as a 501(c)(3) charity (in this case, usually as a religious organization) or 501(c)(4) social welfare organization. One 2020 study identified 73 U.S.-based hate groups and found that 32

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<sup>110</sup> FATF, 2021; and Soufan Center, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> A. C. Thompson, Ali Winston, and Jake Hanrahan, “Inside Atomwaffen as It Celebrates a Member for Allegedly Killing a Gay Jewish College Student,” *ProPublica*, February 23, 2018.

<sup>112</sup> Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Lisa N. Sacco, *Domestic Terrorism and the Attack on the U.S. Capitol*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, IN11573, January 13, 2021. Other countries, notably Canada, have added REMVEs to lists of terrorist entities; see Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada, *Special Bulletin on Ideologically Motivated Extremism: A Terrorist Activity Financing Profile*, Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2021-SIRA-001, June 2021.

<sup>114</sup> Kellen Browning and Taylor Lorenz, “Pro-Trump Mob Livestreamed Its Rampage, and Made Money Doing It,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2021; and Will Carless, “Crowdfunding Hate: How White Supremacists and Other Extremists Raise Money from Legions of Online Followers,” *USA Today*, February 5, 2021.

<sup>115</sup> Gais and Hayden, 2020.

REMVE groups had tax-exempt status.<sup>116</sup> A separate analysis by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) of tax-exempt organizations designated as hate groups found over \$50 million in donations from 2013 to 2018.<sup>117</sup> The potential for not-for-profit organizations to support terrorist activities has been known for decades and spans the globe.<sup>118</sup> However, it is not just direct funding of terrorist activities that is a problem. Organizations might not directly participate in or encourage acts of violent extremism, but they can use their funds to propagandize, recruit new adherents, and disseminate hateful rhetoric. Therefore, groups and individuals receiving funding and salaries from private donations are a critical part of the infrastructure supporting REMVE activities. Moreover, such tax-exempt organizations offer a way for wealthier individuals to support the spread of hateful ideas under the auspices of the charity system without actually creating or spreading hateful content themselves.<sup>119</sup> For these reasons, some reports have labeled the existence of tax-exempt hate groups as an abuse of not-for-profit status.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to soliciting funds directly from individual supporters, REMVE groups also raise money through commercial transactions. As is the case for peer-to-peer transaction platforms, these groups engage in a wide variety of commerce. Common sources of revenue include merchandise, such as clothing, books, and event tickets. Merchandise is sold on many platforms, from traditional online sites (e.g., Amazon and eBay) to subscription sites (e.g., Patreon). REMVE groups also accept cryptocurrency payments through their own subscription and merchandising websites.<sup>121</sup>

Existing research places an especially heavy emphasis on heavy metal concerts as a way for REMVE groups to raise money, particularly in Europe and the United Kingdom.<sup>122</sup> In addition to selling tickets, groups also sell merchandise at these in-person events. Conferences—

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<sup>116</sup> Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Global Disinformation Index, *Bankrolling Bigotry: An Overview of the Online Funding Strategies of American Hate Groups*, Washington, D.C., October 2020.

<sup>117</sup> Michael Theis, “‘Hate Groups’ Received Millions from 351 Charities and Foundations, Chronicle Review Finds,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, February 3, 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Samantha Bricknell, “Misuse of the Non-Profit Sector for Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing,” *Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 424, September 2011.

<sup>119</sup> Sarah Jones, “This Obscure Foundation Helped Fund the Alt-Right,” blog post, *New York*, February 18, 2020; and Aram Roston and Joel Anderson, “The Moneyman Behind the Alt-Right,” *BuzzFeed*, July 23, 2017.

<sup>120</sup> FATF, 2021.

<sup>121</sup> Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Global Disinformation Index, 2020; and Alex Kotch, *Funding Hate: How Online Merchants and Payment Processors Help White Nationalists Raise Money*, Madison, Wisc.: Center for Media and Democracy, April 24, 2020.

<sup>122</sup> Keatinge, Keen, and Izenman, 2019; and Johnson, 2020.

set up as though they are academic meetings in which participants can exchange ideas—are another way to host in-person events and raise money for REMVE groups and activities.<sup>123</sup>

Membership dues appear to be unusual among current REMVE groups and less common than the aforementioned donations. The ADL reported that the NSM collects \$10 per month per person in membership fees, and the League of the South, a neo-Confederate hate group, charges an annual fee.<sup>124</sup> In Europe, at least two groups, both in the Czech Republic, use membership fees as their main source of financing.<sup>125</sup>

As REMVEs face increasing difficulty transacting in fiat currencies, they are migrating to cryptocurrencies, particularly Bitcoin. Cryptocurrencies allow REMVEs to bypass regulatory restrictions imposed by traditional platforms or international banking laws; they also appeal to some REMVEs for ideological reasons, particularly conspiracy theorists who see global financial institutions as a Jewish conspiracy.<sup>126</sup> Most cryptocurrency holdings among REMVEs appear to come from donations; only in extremely rare instances, if ever, have groups actually mined cryptocurrency as a source of revenue.<sup>127</sup>

The risks of cryptocurrencies when it comes to fostering REMVE are clear: Although cryptocurrency donations have not yet financed an attack on U.S. soil, they have been used to fund attacks in Germany and New Zealand.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, many experts agree that cryptocurrencies are one of the key funding sources to monitor in the future; the additional anonymity that these currencies provide via privacy coins is likely to make cryptocurrencies increasingly attractive.<sup>129</sup> The appeal of cryptocurrency will only increase if cryptocurrency purchases become more common—for example, if weapons or other goods can be purchased using Bitcoin rather than by first exchanging to U.S. dollars or another fiat currency (including purchases on the dark web). Despite these trends, the growth of cryptocurrencies among REMVEs is far from certain. At the moment, the need to exchange to fiat presents one of the biggest opportunities for hindering the practical appeal of cryptocurrency.<sup>130</sup> Drawing les-

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<sup>123</sup> ADL, 2017.

<sup>124</sup> ADL, 2017.

<sup>125</sup> The two Czech groups are the National and Social Front and the Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve (FATF, 2021).

<sup>126</sup> Keatinge, Keen, and Izenman, 2019.

<sup>127</sup> The Order of Dawn encourages website visitors to mine Monero directly on behalf of the group, using a tool embedded in the website (Shahed Warreth, “Crowdfunding and Cryptocurrency Use by Far-Right and Jihadi Groups,” blog post, *VoxPo!*, November 21, 2019).

<sup>128</sup> Soufan Center, 2019; and Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020.

<sup>129</sup> Stephanie Dobitsch, “Statement of Stephanie Dobitsch, Deputy Under Secretary for Intelligence Enterprise Operations, Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security Before the U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism,” Washington, D.C., July 22, 2021.

<sup>130</sup> Jeremy Sheridan, “Prepared Testimony,” testimony presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism, Washington,

sons from jihadi terrorism, one study concludes that “rather than looking to [virtual currencies] as methods of ongoing, sustained finance, terrorist groups may therefore find greater utility in them for occasional and ad hoc international transfers.”<sup>131</sup> Illicit activities appear to be a less significant source of revenue for REMVEs relative to the sources of financing discussed previously. Some studies and court cases have shed light on black market activities by REMVE groups, such as drug trafficking operations that involve members of the Aryan Brotherhood.<sup>132</sup> REMVE groups in Canada also have trafficked weapons in addition to drugs.<sup>133</sup> Other studies have noted that some REMVEs indirectly accrue revenue through tax fraud.<sup>134</sup> Despite this body of evidence, criminal activities still appear to be more ad hoc or tangential to the core activities of a REMVE group. The ADL concludes that “criminal activity is designed primarily to benefit the person(s) engaging in the crime rather than a White supremacist group . . . as a whole.”<sup>135</sup> The lack of reliance on criminal activity is partly attributable to REMVEs being able to raise funds more openly and legally than other types of terrorist organizations, and also because, as the FATF report notes, REMVE groups “do not have the ability to generate funds stemming from control of territory, such as extorting fees from population or business.”<sup>136</sup>

Less-important sources of revenue include real estate and indirect government support. Real estate can help groups raise funds through commercial activities; for example, by operating a restaurant on their premises.<sup>137</sup> Groups also benefit from real estate appreciation, although this is an illiquid asset so could not be used to fund a group’s activities on a regular basis. Real estate also can be a significant cost to groups, which makes it a less attractive option for raising funds compared with other mechanisms.<sup>138</sup>

Finally, the literature suggests that some REMVE groups benefit from indirect government support, which can take several forms. Numerous sources point to RIM as an example of a group that reportedly receives arms-length support from the Russian government for

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D.C., July 22, 2021.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas Keatinge, David Carlisle, and Florence Keen, *Virtual Currencies and Terrorist Financing: Assessing the Risks and Evaluating Responses*, Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, PE 604.970, May 2018, p. 28.

<sup>132</sup> Soufan Center, 2019.

<sup>133</sup> Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada, 2021.

<sup>134</sup> Brandon A. Sullivan, Joshua D. Freilich, and Steven M. Chermak, “An Examination of the American Far-Right’s Anti-Tax Financial Crimes,” *Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2019; and Ashmini G. Kerodal, Joshua D. Freilich, and Steven M. Chermak, “Commitment to Extremist Ideology: Using Factor Analysis to Move Beyond Binary Measures of Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 39, Nos. 7–8, 2019.

<sup>135</sup> ADL, 2017, p. 9.

<sup>136</sup> FATF, 2021, p. 18.

<sup>137</sup> FATF, 2021.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson, 2020.

foreign REMVE activities. As noted earlier in this chapter, RIM runs paramilitary training camps in Russia and Eastern European countries, including one event in St. Petersburg that trained individuals who later bombed a refugee center in Gothenburg, Sweden, in January 2017.<sup>139</sup> According to media reports and other sources that we consulted, the Russian government offers RIM tacit support, perhaps because the group helps recruit Russian citizens to fight in Ukraine. The Russian government also reportedly coordinates more directly with Eastern European groups, such as the Hungarian National Front and Slovak Conscripts, by providing military training through covert state-sponsored actors.<sup>140</sup> More broadly, the fact that most REMVE groups are not designated as terrorist organizations allows them to operate relatively openly and on traditional fundraising platforms, thereby indirectly enabling their fundraising activities.<sup>141</sup> For groups based in the United States, designations by foreign governments will have no effect on their ability to raise funds or coordinate their activities domestically.

## Size of Financial Transactions

Compared with the research on sources of REMVE financing, the literature provides much less detail around the size of financial flows to and from REMVE groups. Most revenue streams (crowdfunding, merchandise, ticket sales, donations) typically involve many small transactions that are carried out in cash or with cryptocurrency. These transactions can add up to sizeable amounts of funding for an individual or group. For example, German far-right activist group and self-described citizen network Ein Prozent spent at least \$425,000 in 2018, using money from tens of thousands of donations; the average donation was just \$22.<sup>142</sup> The ADL also calculated that, given the size of the NSM's membership, its monthly \$10 membership fee likely generates approximately \$40,000 in annual revenue for the group.<sup>143</sup> Of note, cryptocurrency donations also appear to consist of smaller individual transactions: Chainalysis, a cryptocurrency research organization, reports that extremists in the United States have received a fairly steady stream of cryptocurrency donations since at least 2016, usually totaling a few thousand dollars each month from between 100 and 200 transactions.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Grimm Arsenault and Stabile, 2020.

<sup>140</sup> Shelby Butt and Daniel Byman, "Right-Wing Extremism: The Russian Connection," *Survival*, Vol. 62, No. 2, April–May 2020.

<sup>141</sup> Daniel Byman, "Understanding, and Misunderstanding, State Sponsorship of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2020a.

<sup>142</sup> Maik Fielitz, "Uniting Germany's Radical Right," *Fair Observer*, September 27, 2018; and Heidi Beirch and Wendy Via, *Generation Identity: International White Supremacist Movement Spreading on Twitter and YouTube*, Montgomery, Ala.: Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, 2020.

<sup>143</sup> ADL, 2017.

<sup>144</sup> Because of the appreciation of many cryptocurrencies in dollar terms, the current value of a REMVE group's cryptocurrency holdings might be much higher than the original donation amount if they held onto the currency rather than exchanging for dollars (Kim Grauer and Henry Updegrave, *The 2021 Crypto*

One exception on both counts was a single large cryptocurrency transaction, worth about \$522,000, that occurred about a month before the January 6 attacks; nearly half of it went to one of the event's main promoters.<sup>145</sup>

In-person events can raise more money for REMVE groups. Reports from Germany suggest that a single concert might raise approximately €180,000 (over \$210,000) in gross revenue from ticket sales alone; another source reports that concerts earn groups between \$100,000 and \$250,000 per concert.<sup>146</sup> Private donations, particularly “charitable” donations, can also be large. A single individual has donated over \$100,000 to the National Policy Institute, a tax-exempt organization run by neo-Nazi Richard Spencer.<sup>147</sup> In other cases, individuals might donate hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars to many groups over a period of time, supporting organizations that promote hate-filled ideologies.<sup>148</sup>

Finally, the literature also shows that revenues large or small are not evenly spread across REMVE groups; it appears that few groups earn over \$100,000 per year.<sup>149</sup> SPLC found that during a seven-month period in 2020, most of the more than \$465,000 earned by REMVE groups on DLive went to just a few individuals (again, the result of tens of thousands of small donations).<sup>150</sup>

## Links Between Funding and Recruitment

Fundraising and recruiting go hand in hand for REMVE groups. Online forums provide a way to exchange ideas, recruit new members, promote events, and raise money all at the same time. For example, prior to the 2017 Charlottesville Unite the Right rally, participants used various online channels to discuss logistical and tactical plans (including how to engage in violence) and shared crowdfunding pages.<sup>151</sup> A content analysis of White supremacists’ mes-

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*Crime Report: Everything You Need to Know About Ransomware, Darknet Markets, and More*, Chainalysis, February 16, 2021).

<sup>145</sup> Grauer and Updegrave, 2021; and Danny Nelson, “Alt-Right Groups Received \$500K in BTC Month Before Capitol Riot: Chainalysis,” *Yahoo!* January 14, 2021.

<sup>146</sup> FATF, 2021; and Johnson, 2020.

<sup>147</sup> Jones, 2020.

<sup>148</sup> Roston and Anderson, 2017.

<sup>149</sup> Alex Newhouse, *From Classifieds to Crypto: How White Supremacist Groups Have Embraced Crowdfunding*, Monterey, Calif.: Middlebury Institute for International Studies at Monterey Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism, 2019.

<sup>150</sup> Gais and Hayden, 2020.

<sup>151</sup> Emily Blout and Patrick Burkart, “White Supremacist Terrorism in Charlottesville: Reconstructing ‘Unite the Right,’” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2020.



sages in online forums found that conversations were split between recruitment, interpersonal networking, spreading ideas, and soliciting funding.<sup>152</sup>

Of course, funding also enables further recruitment. Groups, more so than individuals, require funding to maintain an internet presence and spread propaganda. They can then use these chat forums, YouTube channels, and other online activities to solicit even more funds.<sup>153</sup>

## Gaps in Research

Future research on REMVE financing should focus on two primary questions: How much revenue are groups raising, and what portion of those revenues—and from what sources—go toward violent activities? Existing research characterizes methods for raising revenue but often fails to inform the more difficult question of how much revenue REMVE groups generate. Better estimates of revenue flows could indicate to policymakers which activities are most important for generating revenue, which groups will be most affected by losing access to certain revenue streams, and whether outside revenue versus self-funding appears to be more critical for REMVE activities.

We know that most REMVE attacks are perpetrated by small cells or lone-wolf actors that require only small amounts of money to succeed.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, we do know that some funding goes toward preparing for and undertaking acts of violence, and some groups have raised sufficient funds to stage high-profile attacks. Distinguishing spending on violent versus nonviolent activities could enable policies that target the former but not the latter, given that legal, nonviolent activities are often afforded First Amendment protections. If researchers can determine which revenue-generating activities directly fund illegal and/or violent activities, policymakers will make headway in understanding how legal tools can most effectively target specific groups and revenue sources.

In fact, much media attention has been directed at revenue streams that clearly do not support violent activities in a direct way. Certain prominent White supremacists provide examples: According to reports, some prominent White supremacist public figures earn upward of \$100,000 per year from various sources; they treat most of these funds as salary. Although both figures proliferate REMVE propaganda and have enabled events that turned violent, their activities are not illegal.<sup>155</sup> Among REMVE groups more generally, it is likely

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<sup>152</sup> Meghan A. Wong, Richard Frank, and Russell Allsup, “The Supremacy of Online White Supremacists—An Analysis of Online Discussions by White Supremacists,” *Information and Communications Technology Law*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Soufan Center, 2019; and FATF, 2021.

<sup>154</sup> Keatinge, Keen, and Izenman, 2019; and FATF, 2021.

<sup>155</sup> Spencer’s National Policy Institute, however, was held liable for \$2.4 million in damages to a man who was hit by a car at the Unite the Right rally (Andrew Welsh-Huggins, “Right-Wing Think Tank Led by White Nationalist Ordered to Pay Man Hurt at Virginia Rally \$2.4 Million,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 2021).



that a large portion of raised funds goes to activities other than attacks: For example, groups host events and training camps, purchase weapons, post online content, spread propaganda, recruit new members, and engage in other types of presumably legal activities.<sup>156</sup> Given our current legal framework regarding REMVE activity, research should focus on better understanding funding streams that can lead to interdiction and response.<sup>157</sup>

## Summary

Overall, the literature on REMVE published between 2016 and 2021 provides important insights into recent dynamics. It shows that, although the REMVE movement has spread to many countries throughout the world, its followers adhere to diverse ideologies and beliefs that call for attacks on diverse targets. If there is one underlying theme that brings this conglomeration of adherents closer together, it is the belief that non-White populations pose an existential threat to the White race and White “homelands.” In preparation for what they perceive to be an inevitable race war, REMVEs operate in a post-organizational landscape, where individuals are exposed to extremist content and radicalized into ideologies and ultimately violence outside the bounds of organized groups. The shift toward post-organizational forms of engagement relies heavily on the virtual environment to spread messaging to a broad audience and recruit new adherents. In-person events, such as festivals, concerts, and MMA tournaments, are important networking events and further help to spread far-right extremist propaganda. Extremists are also prioritizing leaderless resistance tactics and encouraging so-called lone wolf attacks. REMVE individuals and groups use myriad mechanisms to raise funds and support the movement, including the use of cryptocurrencies, collecting group membership fees, and selling merchandise online and at in-person events.

This body of existing work, however, leaves several questions unanswered. Specifically, there is little synthesis of transnational connections between individuals and groups that fall under the scope of WITM/REMVE, and we lack a clear understanding of how parochial trends and local issues influence the evolution of movements at the national and transnational levels. To address these gaps, future research could focus more on identifying the major producers of REMVE propaganda—both online and offline—and on the mechanisms through which this propaganda spreads to consumers. There is also a need to better understand how local movements are influenced by foreign movements, issues, and actors; do personal connections between extremists across borders matter in this regard, or are local contextual conditions more important in explaining the spread of extremist ideas and move-

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<sup>156</sup> Johnson, 2020; and FATF, 2021.

<sup>157</sup> The timing of donations is also informative. In the aftermath of the January 6 attacks, there were a large number of crowdfund donations to REMVE groups and individuals. These funds, however, generally were meant to help with legal fees for those who had been charged with crimes as a result of their participation in the attacks. This influx of money should not be seen as indicative of a pending event or violent activity, and interdiction of this revenue stream would not necessarily affect future REMVEs’ criminal activities.

ments across borders? Another critical point for study is to understand the transnational spread of REMVE ideas specific to acts of violence—are actors truly motivated to an act of violence that they would not have otherwise conducted by REMVE rhetoric, or do they simply seek to justify their actions with grandiose language of a struggle for the White race?

Moreover, although the literature speaks to the diversity that exists within the WITM/REMVE community—particularly in terms of ideologies, targets, and tactics—few studies actually examine how these characteristics create fissures within the movement at a national or international level and open up vulnerabilities. Better understanding these dynamics, including how they might continue to exist in spite of the unifying effect of accelerationism, will be especially important when designing effective counter-radicalization, counterterrorism, and violence prevention initiatives that address WITM and REMVE.

Future research also can improve our understanding of how WITM/REMVE actors operate in the virtual environment and what links may exist between online and offline activity—specifically, how online platforms can prompt radicalization. For example, most existing research examines trends in single online environments without seeking to understand how extremists might exploit different platforms simultaneously to communicate and spread their messages and recruit additional followers. We also do not know whether migration from conventional platforms, such as Twitter, to unconventional and more secretive platforms, such as Telegram, is linked to offline activity and violence. Our knowledge of in-person activities is also limited, particularly as concerns training activities. Although several examples of investigative journalism and some data collection efforts show that there is some attention paid to WITM/REMVE training events, we do not know how these events—at home and abroad—are influencing the evolution of the movement and potentially posing heightened risks to national security.

Finally, the literature does not yet present a clear picture of the total amount of funds being transacted in support of global WITM and REMVE. Although we know that movement adherents are raising funds using a variety of different mechanisms, we have little information about how individuals and groups are using these funds and where they are directing the money that they raise. Given that most REMVE groups are not labeled as terrorist organizations, these groups can often move money through legal, if not completely observable, transactions. They can and do solicit donations openly and engage in commerce, and there are limited means for governments to interdict these funds, particularly within national boundaries.

## Network Analysis of WITM and REMVE

With the information from our findings in the literature review, we collected online material from multiple social media platforms tied to WITM/REMVE sentiment, and we analyzed this material to produce a picture of online networks on each of these platforms. Using data from six social media platforms, we evaluated network communities using geolocation data,<sup>1</sup> potentially violent sentiment, and mentions of White supremacist organizations. We also sought to refine our network analysis by parsing xenophobic rhetoric from explicitly racist speech, identifying communities using multiple platforms for discourse, and inferring missing location data using machine learning. Together, these analyses provide a picture of the evolving global WITM/REMVE ecosystem that exists on these social media platforms.

### Data Sampling Process and Descriptive Statistics

Our social network analysis included multiple social media platforms to provide a cross-cutting picture of the WITM/REMVE movements and to address concerns that WITM/REMVE individuals and groups engage in *platform shifting*; that is, moving to new platforms after being censored by others or using multiple platforms simultaneously to engage in varying levels of WITM/REMVE discourse. We selected platforms for study from the total set of possible platforms by applying the following criteria: (1) Data could be pulled through some type of automated process such that we could gather more data than would be acquired by a single user's typical interactions with the platform, and (2) we could stay within the restrictions of the use agreements for each platform. Given these two criteria, ultimately, we were able to acquire data for six social media platforms (Table 3.1). Ideally, we would be able to compare across platforms for the same period. However, technical constraints limited our

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<sup>1</sup> We use *geolocation* as an inclusive term for all of the methods that we applied to identify physical locations of individuals on Twitter. These methods would include very little *geotagging*, in which a mobile device's GPS records the precise location of an individual user. Less than 1 percent of all tweets are geotagged via mobile device GPS. The geolocations reported in this report mostly derive from self-reported locations in individuals' user profile text field; location enhancements provided by our Twitter vendor, Brandwatch; and our own machine learning processes.

TABLE 3.1

**Primary Data Collected from Social Media Platforms**

Platform	General Classification	Years Sampled	Includes Deleted or Banned Accounts?	Number of Messages Sampled
Reddit (archive) <sup>a</sup>	Mainstream	2005–2019	Yes	1.6 million
Twitter	Mainstream	2018–2020	No	19.6 million
Gab (archive) <sup>b</sup>	Fringe	2016–2018	Yes	165,000
Ruqqus	Fringe	Current as of July 2021	No*	38,000
Stormfront	Niche	Current as of June 2021	No*	14,000
Telegram	Fringe	2015–2021	No*	5.7 million

\* Although banned accounts are not included in the sampled data, these platforms engage in very little—if any—banning of accounts.

<sup>a</sup> Jason Baumgartner, “Reddit Files—Directory Contents,” Pushshift, webpage, undated-b.

<sup>b</sup> Jason Baumgartner, “Directory Contents,” Pushshift, webpage, undated-a.

NOTE: *Mainstream* platforms have a broad user base, and that both articulates and at least partially enforces content-moderation policies. *Fringe* platforms have a more limited user base and little to no content moderation, and they host significant quantities of extreme content. *Niche* platforms openly and purposefully cater to an extreme audience. For further discussion of these definitions, see Williams et al., 2021.

ability to select the years sampled for each platform,<sup>2</sup> and we have sought to maximize our sample while focusing on recent activity.

We acquired data from each platform through two distinct methods, both chosen on the basis of the available method of accessing the data and the structure of the data sets. First, when possible, we applied a set of keyword filters related to REMVE sentiment and speech to acquire all messages that hit any of the identified keywords. We applied this process to three platforms: Twitter, Reddit, and Gab. The keyword-based query was implemented in different ways for each platform. For Twitter, we implemented the keyword query through the functionality of our Twitter vendor, Brandwatch. For Reddit and Gab, we built our own scraping code that filtered the archives by the keywords.

The keywords included terms to index both concerns about White racial identity and concerns about immigration because content relating to both concerns are considered within the scope of REMVE as defined in Chapter One. We iterated through a set of possible terms—using the Brandwatch interactive functionality—with Twitter data that returned the most-relevant tweets for the keywords submitted. Our manual review of these terms enabled us to reduce the initial term set to a final set that consistently returned mostly anti-minority and/or anti-immigrant tweets among the most relevant set (Box 3.1). Some of the terms, such as

<sup>2</sup> Comparing across platforms is complicated not only because of the different periods of data pulled for each platform, but because platforms adopt different content-moderation policies and can sometimes be uneven in the timing of enforcement of those policies. For this reason, we have analyzed platforms individually rather than aggregating data.

BOX 3.1

**Keyword Combinations Used for Data Query**

**White Identity Terms**

“white” NEAR/3 “genocide” NOT “racism” NOT “racist” NOT “racists”

whitelivesmatter OR WLM OR “white lives” NOT “Black Lives Matter” NOT “women”

“anti-white” NOT “anti-white supremacy”

“nigger” OR “niggers”

stopwhitehate

“white race”

**Illegal Immigrants Terms**

“illegal immigrant” OR “illegal immigrants” OR “illegals”

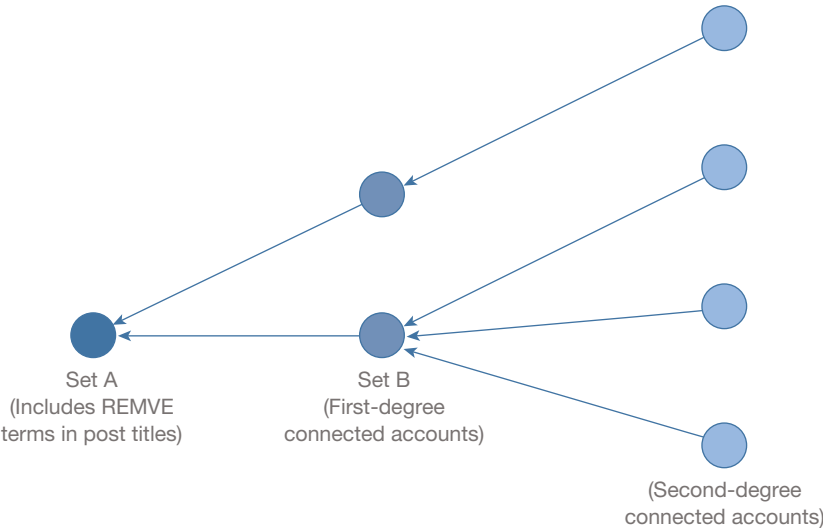
NOTE: NEAR/3 indicates that the two words had to occur with two or fewer intervening words between them.

the N-word, either do not translate well into all of the sampled languages or lost their contextual meaning in other languages. However, manual review suggested that the term *White genocide* has been translated into many other languages. Given the specific concerns about WITM that motivated this study, we translated the phrase *White genocide* into 20 other languages that are common in Europe (Appendix A).

We were not able to query Ruqqus and Telegram as described previously because, to our knowledge, no archive of these platforms is available, and the platform use agreements prohibit mass scraping of the information on each site. As an alternative, we identified seed accounts (set A) that used the keywords, and then we acquired all of the data from those seed accounts and from all accounts with connections to those seed accounts (set B). We also acquired data from all accounts connected to those in set B but not directly connected to set A (i.e., second-degree connections of set A; see Figure 3.1). We acquired the entire content of Stormfront without applying any keywords because the platform is well known to be dedicated explicitly to the White supremacy movement. As of November 6, 2021, Ruqqus has closed and is now a static site, and all of its content was scheduled to be deleted on February 3, 2022.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ruqqus administrators’ stated reason for the platform’s closure was that they no longer had the time to dedicate to the platform’s operation, but a popular user faulted the platform’s increase in extreme racist content (Ruqqus, “End of an Era,” Ruqqus post, October 7, 2021, in the Internet Archive, October 13, 2021).

**FIGURE 3.1**  
**Method of Identifying Material via Seed Accounts**



## Network Construction

Next, we constructed base-layer network structures for each of the six sampled platforms for further analysis. Social networks comprise nodes and edges. *Nodes* are the actors within the network. Depending on the analysis, these might be individual people, organizations, or individual discussion threads or discussion groups. *Edges* are the relationships that exist between nodes. Edges could include direct mentions of one node by another, a node receiving and repeating the content of another, and many other forms of relationship that can exist between individual people or groups.<sup>4</sup>

In four of the six networks that we studied, *network nodes* represent individual users, and *network edges* (or connections between nodes) represent direct interactions between users (e.g., tweet @ and retweet). In two networks (Telegram and Reddit), *nodes* represent channels of discussion (subreddits on Reddit), and *edges* between these nodes represent users who contributed to multiple such threaded discussions. We applied this approach to Telegram because individuals within channels are not always consistently identifiable in the scraped data. In the case of Reddit, we first attempted a user-to-user network (i.e., treating users as nodes) with *edges* representing subreddits that connect users, but the structure of the data resulted in an analytically uninformative picture.<sup>5</sup> Given these empirical patterns for Reddit,

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> We found that among the 969,500 Reddit users in our original Reddit data, 59 percent only ever contributed to a single subreddit (there were 9,578 subreddits). The mean number of users per subreddit was 200. Of

we chose to treat its data the same way that we treated the Telegram data, and subsequently analyzed the subreddits themselves as the meaningful nodes. These were connected among each other using the 41 percent of users who contributed to more than one subreddit (as users that contributed to only one subreddit cannot inform about connections among the subreddits). In this manner, we were able to construct a connected network of 8,192 of the original 9,578 subreddits (86 percent of subreddits) that captured 94 percent of Reddit users in our sample (911,040 users).

Social network analysis often must balance the competing goals of maximally including data while efficiently focusing on the main drivers of the network structure.<sup>6</sup> With this in mind, we empirically examined each data set to identify thresholding procedures for reducing nodes and edges that might better identify meaningful patterns while retaining valuable data. Across all platforms, we retained the largest connected component of the network, i.e., the largest set of nodes that can be reached from any node to any other within that set. These sets represent the core networks for discussion of the terms queried. We applied few additional thresholding procedures on most networks (Table 3.2).<sup>7</sup> In the case of Twitter, we removed users who had only a single connection and thus did not cross-connect with any

**TABLE 3.2**  
**Number of Nodes and Communities by Platform**

Platform	Thresholding Applied	Final Number of Nodes	Number of Communities
Gab	Keywords	4,881	22
Reddit <sup>a</sup>	Keywords	8,192 <sup>a</sup>	5
Ruqqus	none	2,435	5
Stormfront	none	6,603	7
Telegram	none	1,423	6
Twitter	Keywords; users with only one connection removed	2,028,495	19

NOTE: Results shown are for all communities with greater than 50 nodes, except for Twitter where results are for communities with greater than 1000 nodes.

<sup>a</sup> Reddit nodes are subreddits. 911,400 users contributed across these subreddits.

the subreddits, 273 had more than 1,000 users and some had as many as 129,200 users. Thus, a user-to-user graph would have created many completely separate but connected sets, each with thousands of individuals.

<sup>6</sup> Michael L. Barnett, Bruce E. Landon, A. James O'Malley, Nancy L. Keating, and Nicholas A. Christakis, "Mapping Physician Networks with Self-Reported and Administrative Data," *Health Services Research*, Vol. 46, No. 5, October 2011.

<sup>7</sup> *Thresholding* network data involves applying criteria that eliminate particular nodes or connections between nodes because they are deemed not meaningful. Most commonly used thresholds apply a minimum strength of relationship (e.g., number of retweets, reciprocity of connection) below which the connections are removed.



other nodes; these users comprised half of the original data pull but did not contribute to a network picture.

We then identified groups of nodes that shared a high density of connections within groups and a low density of connections between groups. Identifying these groups, or *communities* in social network analysis, is a common technique for understanding the social structure of large-scale networks. We inferred communities using the Louvain algorithm, which is the fastest-known algorithm for detecting communities in large-scale network data.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Twitter, for example, the 19 communities that we identified capture 99 percent of nodes, e.g., individual users. During the community inference, we treated the edges as undirected and unweighted: An edge was either present or absent between two nodes.

Applying this community algorithm produced network maps where the observed quantity of connections among nodes within the same communities was substantially larger than the quantity of connections between communities. This is an empirical finding and not a necessary mathematical outcome of the community inference algorithm; it reflects that many communities are insular and might function largely as echo chambers. This finding implies that some policy interventions might need to address communities individually. The extent to which communities are isolated varies on each platform. We will go into further detail of the social structures on each platform in the “Identification of Most–Potentially Violent Platforms” section.

## Distribution of Users by Country

We also analyzed the location of users by country using Twitter. An important question about the WITM/REMVE movement is the prevalence of online users per country. As another window into these dynamics, we analyzed location data to identify patterns of network connectivity within and between countries on Twitter, which was the only social media platform for which users directly supplied location data. Most of the location data on Twitter comes from user-supplied place names for location in the profile section of users’ Twitter accounts, and the vendor from which we purchased the data, Brandwatch, layers additional analytics onto this user-supplied data to further enrich the location data. Some of these analytics are a matter of reconciling the various equivalent ways in which users can refer to their location in the free-text of the user profile; for example, “the big apple,” “NYC,” and “New York City” all reference the same location. Because the original source of Twitter locations mostly is user supplied, caution must be used in interpretation because user location can be outdated or knowingly incorrect. Also, about half of the users tracked in our data did not have any location information, even after the Brandwatch enrichment process. In a later section, we applied our own machine learning techniques to fill some of these data gaps.

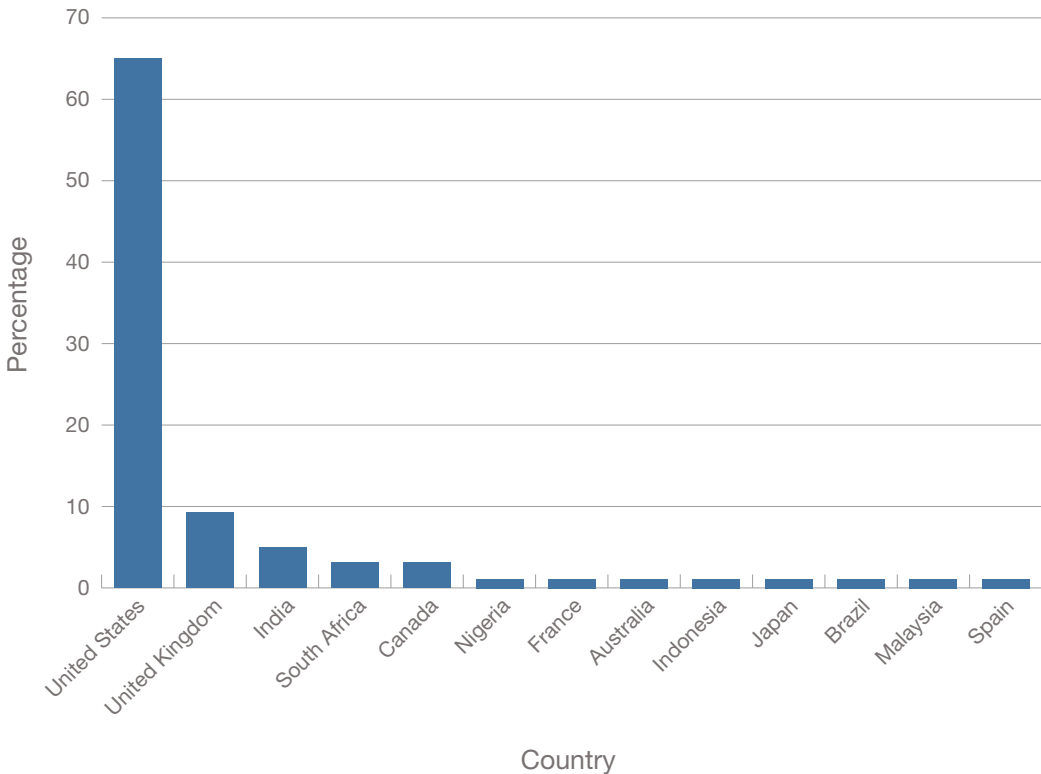
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<sup>8</sup> Vincent D. Blondel, Jean-Loup Guillaume, Renaud Lambiotte, and Etienne Lefebvre, “Fast Unfolding of Communities in Large Networks,” *Journal of Statistical Mechanics: Theory and Experiment*, October 2008.

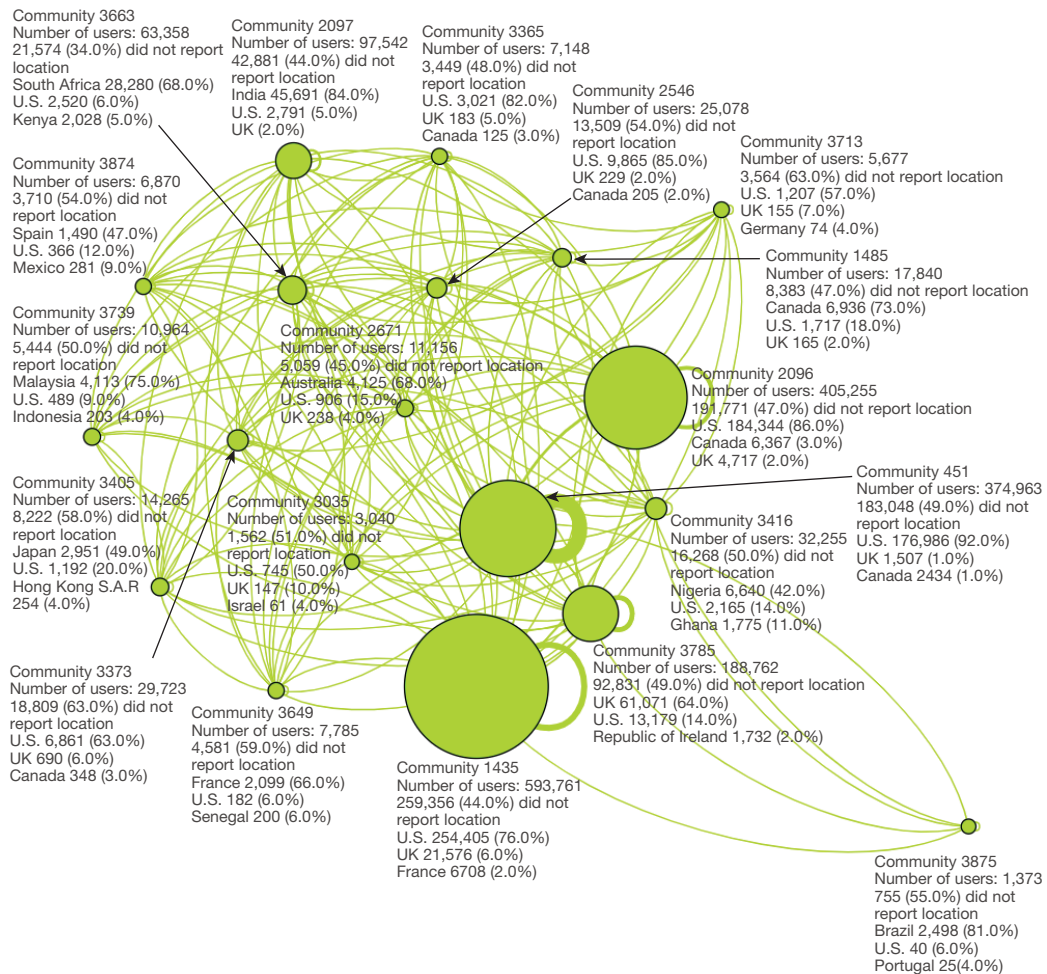
With these caveats in mind, more than two-thirds of the WITM/REMVE users in the Twitter data that we sampled were tagged as located in the United States. The distribution of user locations shows a sharp cliff after the United States, with a significant number of users located in the United Kingdom (9 percent) and other countries each at 5 percent or less. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of Twitter users by country for countries that accounted for 1 percent or more of the sample.

Figure 3.3 shows the location of each of the 19 communities that we identified on Twitter, with their total number of users and the most common user locations identified. Communities are assigned numbers arbitrarily. There are a few notable points about this network picture. First, three communities dwarf the others in terms of size: Communities 2096, 1435, and 451. Each of these communities is predominately in the United States: 86 percent, 76 percent, and 92 percent, respectively, of users with reported locations were in the United States. Community 451 was particularly insular, with most of the user connections being within the network. We identified large communities predominately in the United Kingdom (Community 3785) and Canada (Community 1485), and smaller communities in France (Commu-

**FIGURE 3.2**  
**Distribution of Twitter Users by Country**



**FIGURE 3.3**  
**Geolocation of Twitter Network Communities**



nity 3649), Spain (Community 3874), and Australia (Community 2671). We also identified several communities where xenophobic language was used that were outside of our focus of study. These communities were predominately in India (2097), Malaysia (3739), Japan (3405), South Africa (3663), Nigeria (3416), and Brazil (3875).

At this top level of analysis, however, we were surprised at the relative lack of evidence of activity from European countries. We sought to better understand the extent to which users in non-native English-speaking countries were conversing about REMVE trends in English versus their native languages—and whether we might be failing to capture activity in foreign languages—versus the extent to which users might not be active on social networks in these countries or might be masking their location. As we will discuss in greater detail in the

“Machine Learning to Identify Missing Locations” section, legal prohibitions on hate speech in some European states could cause users in those countries to behave differently online.

To assess the quantity of WITM/REMVE foreign-language content across the social media platforms, we first examined the frequency of the translated renderings of the phrase “White genocide.” Including all the translated languages in which we searched, there were only 5,611 instances of White genocide in a non-English European language on Twitter, 18 instances on Telegram, three instances on Reddit, and no instances on the other platforms. The specific frequency for each use of this search term by language can be found in Appendix A.

As a more general assessment of the quantity of foreign language content, we quantified the percentages of stopwords that belonged to English or to the various European languages of interest. *Stopwords* are commonly occurring linking words in a language that serve primarily to orient the reader in the sentence. Examples from English would include articles, such as *a* and *the*; conjunctions, such as *and*; and basic verbs, such as *can*. We applied published dictionaries of stopwords that we were able to find for 19 of the 20 foreign languages that were of interest.<sup>9</sup> Because stopwords are used in an instrumental way to facilitate speech about any topic, we reasoned that they would provide a good estimate for the overall quantity of each language on each platform.

The results indicated that Telegram had a substantial portion of German-language content as indicated by stopword percentages. A small majority (58 percent) of Telegram stopwords were English. The other platforms, however, exhibited over 99 percent of stopwords in English. This suggests that, regardless of their country of residence, most individuals in these networks are conversing in English (Table 3.3).

## International Connectivity on Twitter

An important question about the WITM/REMVE movement is the extent of international linkages among WITM/REMVE groups. As we discussed in Chapter Two’s “Transnational Dynamics” section, the literature suggests that most REMVE stays within national boundaries and is focused on more parochial agendas. Furthermore, WITM/REMVE ideology often focuses on strong national borders, and some WITM/REMVE organizations have anarchist ideological leanings that cut against efforts at transnational levels of organization. Transnational connections potentially can fill critical gaps in the movement between countries, however, and these connections also give potential new tools for enforcement agencies at the national and federal levels. As another window into these dynamics, we identified patterns of network connectivity among countries on Twitter.

We found most of the U.S. REMVE activity on Twitter is not transnational (see Figure 3.4). Across users in self-described U.S.-based locations, 85 percent of connections via Twitter *mentions* (e.g., tweet @, retweet) are with other users who are also located in the United States.

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<sup>9</sup> Gene Diaz, Jr., “stopwords-iso / stopwords-iso,” webpage, GitHub, undated.

TABLE 3.3

**Percentage of Stopwords Used by Language on Each Social Media Platform**

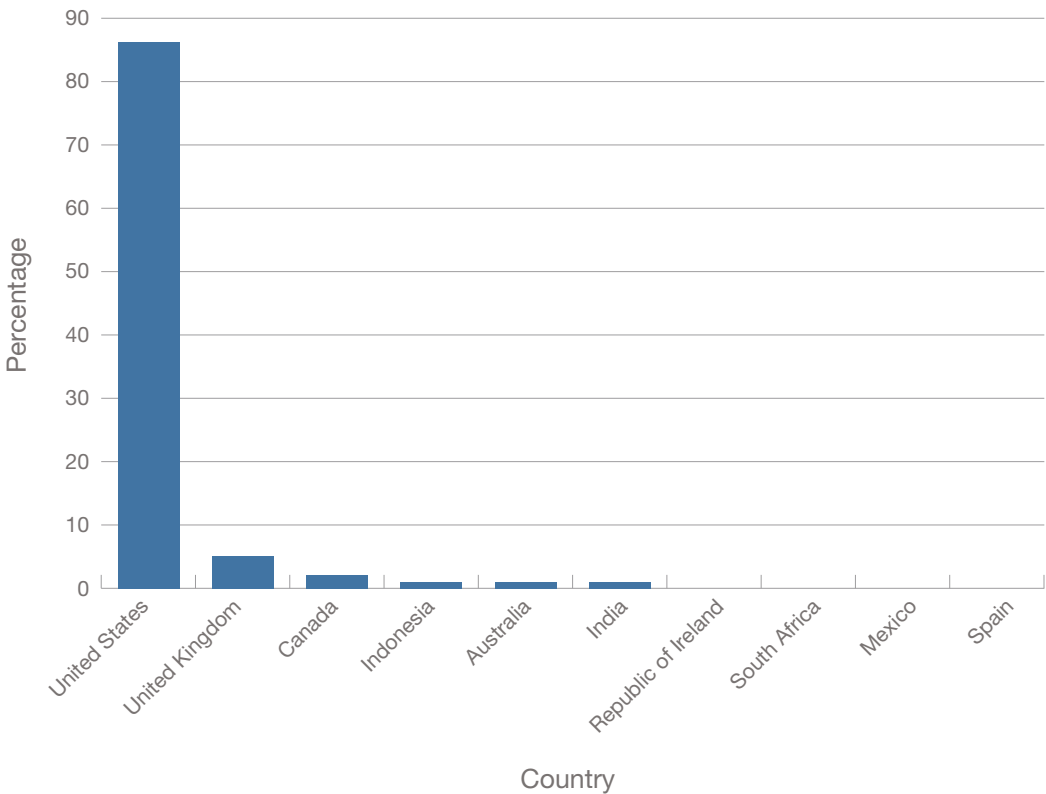
Language	Gab	Reddit	Ruqqus	Stormfront	Telegram	Twitter
Bulgarian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Catalan	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.6	0.1
Czech	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0
Danish	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	1.0	0.1
Dutch	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	4.4	0.1
English	<b>99.6</b>	<b>99.6</b>	<b>99.5</b>	<b>99.4</b>	<b>58.6</b>	<b>99.3</b>
Finnish	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
French	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.2
German	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	<b>28.7</b>	0.1
Greek	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hungarian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Italian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Norwegian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Polish	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Portuguese	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0
Romanian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Russian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Spanish	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0
Swedish	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Ukrainian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

NOTE: Percentages greater than 5 percent are bolded.

Connections to any other countries represent less than 5 percent of total connections, and a majority of those are less than 1 percent of total connections (Figure 3.4).

We further examine connectivity between specific countries of interest in Chapter Four, but we wanted to further probe the data to identify whether these geographic patterns on Twitter might reflect patterns for any topic on Twitter; that is, whether potentially almost any discussion topic on Twitter dominated by U.S. users. On the one hand, this might not matter for policy. Even if the United States dominates Twitter discussions equally for REMVE and other topics, such as pacifism and desegregation, interventions to respond to REMVE on Twitter still would need to focus on the United States because of the large set of actors and connections in the United States.

**FIGURE 3.4**  
**Country Locations of Social Connections of U.S.-Based REMVE Twitter Users**



NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 308,579 pairs.

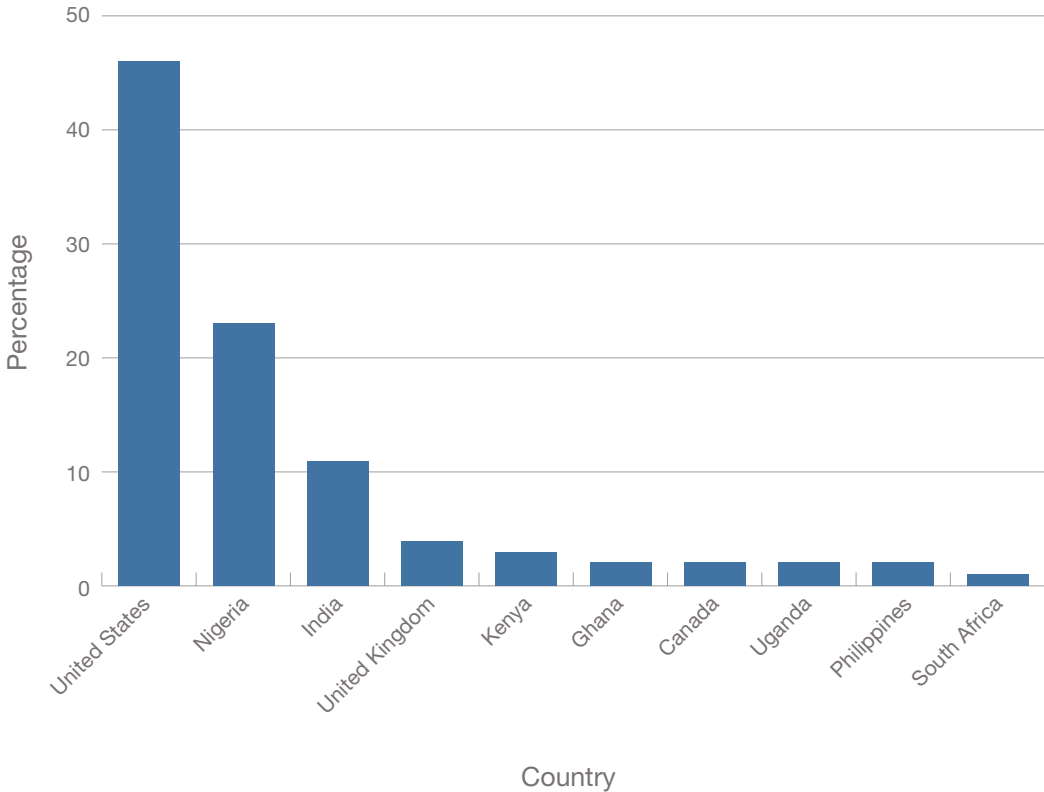
It might still be relevant, however, to consider whether REMVE/WITM is substantially more U.S.-centric than relevant comparative topics because this speaks to whether the *fundamental social dynamics* of REMVE/WITM are particularly parochial and U.S.-centric compared with other topics of discussion on Twitter. If the topic were more parochial and U.S.-centric, then this might further support that online anti-REMVE interventions, to include deplatforming of individuals, need to focus here in the United States rather than abroad.

We chose two topics to examine in comparison with our REMVE/WITM sample: a sample of Twitter users who generally discuss topics of religion and the subset of those users who specifically discuss Christianity. These samples had the advantage of being a somewhat similar size as the REMVE data: They included 22.3 million tweets by 4.5 million individuals who discussed religion generally, and 476,291 individuals who used keywords specific to concepts from Christianity. The full set of keywords that we used for these queries appear in Appendix E.

We found that both the religion Twitter network and the Christianity Twitter network are substantially less U.S.-centric than the REMVE/WITM Twitter network. Although Figure 3.2 shows that over 60 percent of the REMVE/WITM nodes have U.S. locations, less than 45 percent of both the religion and Christianity nodes are located in the United States (Figures 3.5 and 3.6). The distributions of these graphs also show a less-steep drop-off in country frequency, because the second-most-common location for religion and Christianity data (Nigeria) is about 20 percent of the sample, whereas the second-most-common location for the WITM/REMVE data (United Kingdom) is less than 10 percent of the sample (Figure 3.2).

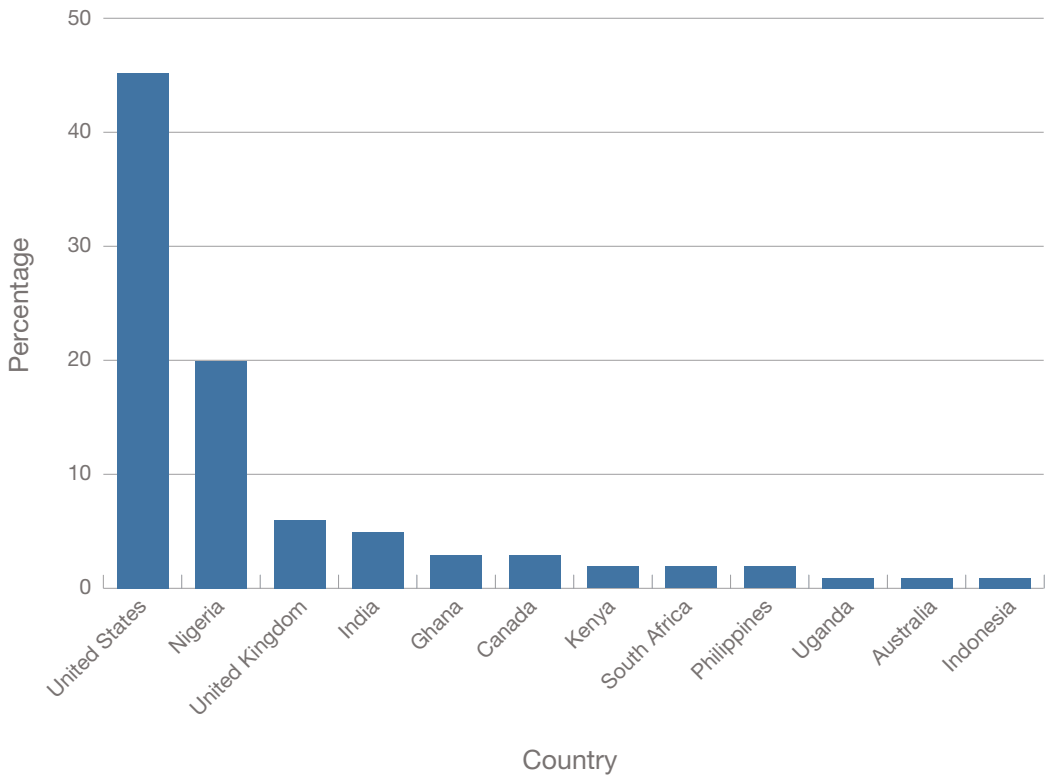
The connections of U.S.-based nodes in the religion and Christianity networks were also less U.S.-centric than in the REMVE/WITM network. Over 85 percent of the social connections of U.S.-based Twitter users in the REMVE network were also based in the United States (as seen in Figure 3.4). In contrast, 63 percent of social connections of U.S.-based users were also U.S.-based in the religion network, and this same number was 62 percent for the Christianity network.

**FIGURE 3.5**  
**Distribution of Twitter Users by Country for Religion Keywords**





**FIGURE 3.6**  
**Distribution of Twitter Users by Country for Christianity Keywords**



In summary, in comparison with networks of religious and Christianity conversations on Twitter, the REMVE/WITM Twitter network appears substantially more U.S.-centric and parochial in both the user locations and their patterns of connectivity to other users. This is consistent with findings of others that, although there might be some transnational ideas in modern-day violent White supremacy, discourse and networks within the current WITM/REMVE movement are generally oriented at the national level.

## Identification of Most-Potentially Violent Platforms

A persistent challenge in countering violent movements and preventing extremist violence is identifying individuals who will go on to commit an act of violence. Although a body of literature examines individual factors that put someone at risk of radicalization to violent extremism, we ultimately do not know who will go on to commit an act of violence and who will not. Therefore, any national or global strategy that is aimed at prevention or intervention with individuals at risk of violence must consider extremist actors broadly. Moreover, successful counterterrorism efforts have focused on more than simply the individuals who will

fire a gun or plant a bomb; these efforts focus on the networks that recruit, propagandize, fund, and validate violent actors. Therefore, an analysis of an extremist movement needs to extend well beyond individual potentially violent actors to those that stoke sympathies for REMVE or offer moral support for it online. However, differentiating between sets of individuals who seem more rather than less inclined toward violent activity, even if they are not actively planning to commit a specific violent act, can help best direct counterextremism resources.

Fortunately, an existing body of psychological literature has established a set of personality traits that are linked to violent behaviors. These personality traits are

1. *narcissism*: an inflated and grandiose view of self
2. *Machiavellianism*: a tendency to exploit others as a means to selfish ends
3. *psychopathy*: enduring antisocial behavior.

Collectively, these traits are termed the *dark triad* in the literature.<sup>10</sup> Aggregate dark triad scores (summed across the three traits) from psychometric surveys have been shown to correlate with actual violent behavior, such as having punched someone to obtain something the subject wanted or the subject having threatened another person with a knife.<sup>11</sup> An individual's dark triad score can be measured through survey questions but also via online activity because those presenting a high dark triad score use keywords in distinctive patterns in their online activity.<sup>12</sup> Many of these keyword usages, noted in Table 3.4, betray aggression and impulsive sexual and driving activity (i.e., "road rage"). They do not merely reflect the use of profane or offensive language, but are instead evidence of empirically derived patterns that reflect the underlying psychological tendencies of the dark triad.

In our analysis, we applied these correlations as weights to extrapolate dark triad scores for the network communities in each of the six platforms in our study (see Table 3.5).<sup>13</sup> The results showed several expected patterns and a few unexpected ones.

Among the expected patterns, the most mainstream platform and the one that arguably engages in the most content censoring, Twitter, exhibited the lowest dark triad scores among the communities surveyed. Fringe (Gab, Ruqqus, Telegram) and niche (Stormfront) plat-

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<sup>10</sup> Andrea Pailing, Julian Boon, and Vincent Egan, "Personality, the Dark Triad and Violence," *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 67, September 2014; Ahmad Sa'ad Alsheikh Ali, "Delinquency as Predicted by Dark Triad Factors and Demographic Variables," *International Journals of Adolescence and Youth*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2020; and Kagan Kircaburun and Mark D. Griffiths, "The Dark Side of Internet: Preliminary Evidence for the Associations of Dark Personality Traits with Specific Online Activities and Problematic Internet Use," *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, Vol. 7, No. 4, December 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Pailing, Boon, and Egan, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Preoțiu-Pietro, Jordan Carpenter, Salvatore Giorgi, and Lyle Ungar, "Studying the Dark Triad of Personality Through Twitter Behavior," *Proceedings of the 25th ACM International Conference on Information and Knowledge Management*, October 2016; and Kircaburun and Griffiths, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Preoțiu-Pietro et al., 2016.

**TABLE 3.4**  
**Correlations of Twitter Keyword Usage**  
**and Dark Triad Personality Scores from**  
**Survey Data**

Word	Pearson Correlation with Dark Triad Score
adult	0.152
air	0.126
anal	0.152
ass	0.127
bad	0.122
black	0.108
butt	0.127
car	0.126
crap	0.127
cut	0.123
damn	0.122
dang	0.127
dick	0.127
doing	0.126
done	0.126
door	0.126
drive	0.126
feeling	0.122
finally	0.122
foreplay	0.152
fuck	0.127
full	0.126
gas	0.126
hard	0.126
hate	0.123
heck	0.127
hell	0.127
horn	0.126

**Table 3.4—Continued**

Word	Pearson Correlation with Dark Triad Score
hot	0.152
lose	0.122
mad	0.123
making	0.126
naked	0.152
petite	0.152
porn	0.152
ride	0.126
rob	0.122
seat	0.126
sex	0.152
shit	0.122
sick	0.122
stuff	0.126
sucks	0.127
taking	0.126
teen	0.152
thinking	0.126
tits	0.152
vote	0.108
wait	0.108
war	0.123
window	0.126
work	0.126

SOURCE: Preotjuc-Pietro et al., 2016.

TABLE 3.5

**Platform Numbers of Users, Communities, and Dark Triad Characteristics**

Platform	Total Nodes	Number of Communities	Minimum DT Score	Mean DT Score	Maximum DT Score
Gab <sup>F</sup>	4,881	22	0.41	1.25	2.64
Reddit <sup>M</sup>	8,192	5	10	17.86	27
Ruqqus <sup>F</sup>	2,435	5	0.04	0.27	0.44
Stormfront <sup>N</sup>	6,603	7	0.12	0.58	1.2
Telegram <sup>F</sup>	1,423	6	0.29	7.49	31
Twitter <sup>M</sup>	2,028,495	19	0.01	0.23	1.1

F = Fringe platform, limited user base, little to no content moderation, not expressly dedicated to WITM.

M = Mainstream platform, broad user base, content-moderation policies in place.

N = Niche platform, expressly dedicated to WITM.

NOTE: DT = dark triad. Results shown are for all communities with more than 50 nodes, except for Twitter, where results are for communities with more than 1,000 nodes.

forms typically showed higher average dark triad scores across their communities, although Ruqqus was an exception to this pattern. In later sections of this chapter (see the “Overt Mentions of White Supremacy” section), we discuss evidence that suggests Ruqqus’ lower dark triad scores are likely real; that is, Ruqqus has a set of users who are less committed to violent forms of WITM/REMVE relative to other platforms. An unexpected finding was that Reddit, which has explicit content-moderation policies and ostensibly upholds them, exhibited high dark triad scores across several of its network communities. Several factors might have contributed to this result. First, unlike for Twitter, our Reddit data source included all posts that had been subsequently deleted by the users or censored by the platform; therefore, it might have included some material that was posted in violation of hate or violent speech policies. However, this effect is negligible because in the data we sampled, we found that only 50 out of 8,192 subreddits (0.061 percent) were censored. Thus, the inclusion of a very small proportion of censored content is unlikely to account for the dark triad scores that we observed on Reddit. Second, Reddit has important structural distinctions relative to Twitter, which might account for its higher dark triad score. The nodes that we analyzed on Reddit are subreddits rather than users. This might result in elevated dark triad scores if high-scoring dark triad individuals post a great deal of content on an individual subreddit, washing out the relative effect of other users. Third, Reddit might have a greater culture of sexualized language or casual use of sexualized language compared with Twitter. For example, multiple popular subreddits use the word “porn” in their titles for completely nonsexual content (e.g., r/carporn [pictures of cars], r/foodporn [pictures of food]). Preoțiuc-Pietro et al.’s (2016) research was conducted on Twitter, and so it essentially calibrated the method to the level of sex-associated language on Twitter. Frequent use of this group of sex-related terms for a different connotation on Reddit compared with Twitter does not invalidate the dark triad scoring method, but it might mean that the absolute value of the scores are calibrated too high.

Even if these factors cause our method to overestimate Reddit dark triad scores above the level of actual violent tendencies for the users whom we sampled, these users still might rightfully rank higher than those on Twitter for dark triad scores and violent inclinations. Despite being a mainstream and popular platform, Reddit's structure—whereby a user must find a subreddit in which to comment—presents a higher barrier to entry. On Twitter, a user can comment on any topic at any time. Those engaged in a subreddit that demonstrates pro-REMVE sentiment might be more deeply committed to this topic than the set of all REMVE tweeters. In the following section, we provide evidence that is consistent with the interpretation that Reddit does comprise a more concerning set of high dark triad WITM/REMVE individuals (see the “Overt Mentions of White Supremacy” section).

## Network Community Analysis

We can also use dark triad scoring as a method to identify the most violent communities within a platform. This also avoids any differences in calibration between dark triad scores that could result from the potential differences in the nature of discourse and structure between platforms, as discussed previously. This section provides a network picture for the community structure for each platform that we analyzed, similar to that introduced earlier for Twitter. For each community, we have included results from our dark triad analysis.

### Gab Community Structure

Gab exhibited two communities that were substantially larger than the others (one with 6,907 nodes and another with 9,635 nodes) and outside these largest two, the communities displayed a fairly even gradient from the low hundreds to dozens of members (see Figure 3.7).<sup>14</sup> The dark triad scores across these communities varied but were within an order of magnitude (tenfold) of variation, which is a lower variance in dark triad scores than observed on Telegram and Twitter.

### Reddit Community Structure

The Reddit network can be resolved into seven communities of subreddits (*nodes* are subreddits in this analysis, and *edges* are users who contributed to multiple threaded discussions). Two communities are smaller (less than 500 subreddits), four range in size from around 1,200 to around 1,500 subreddits, and one contains more than 2,000 subreddits (see Figure 3.8). All have high dark triad scores that exhibit little variance (within threefold of one another).

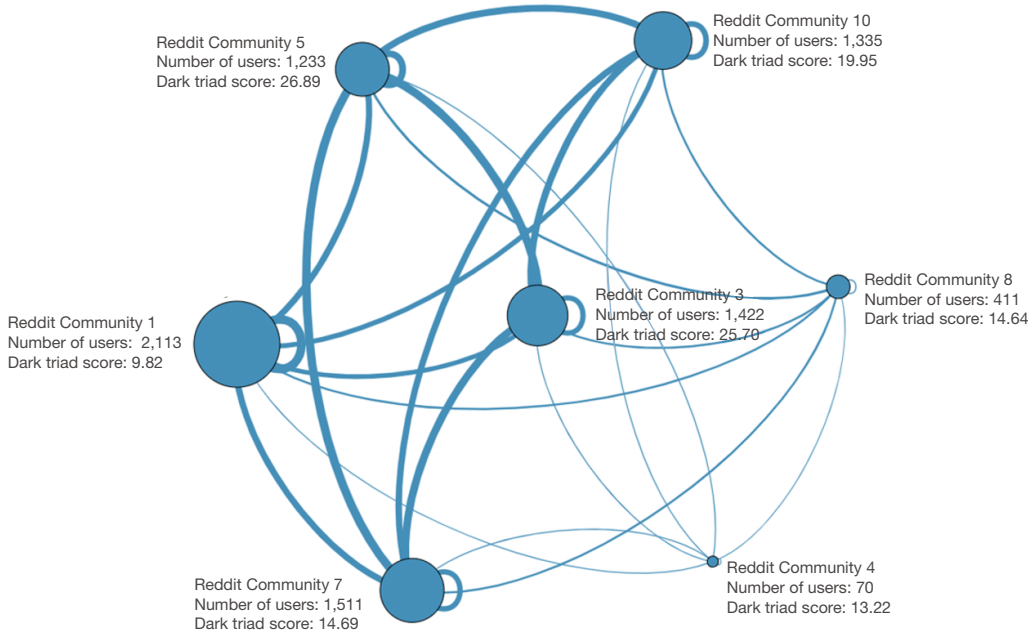
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<sup>14</sup> *Nodes*, in the case of Gab, are individual users and connections that represent direct interactions between users.





**FIGURE 3.8**  
**Reddit Network Communities: Connections and Characteristics**



NOTE: Node sizes are scaled to the number of individuals assigned to that community. Lines reflect connections between subreddits in different communities. Loops to a community reflect connections between subreddits within that community. Line and loop thicknesses are scaled to the number of connections. Community numbering is arbitrarily assigned.

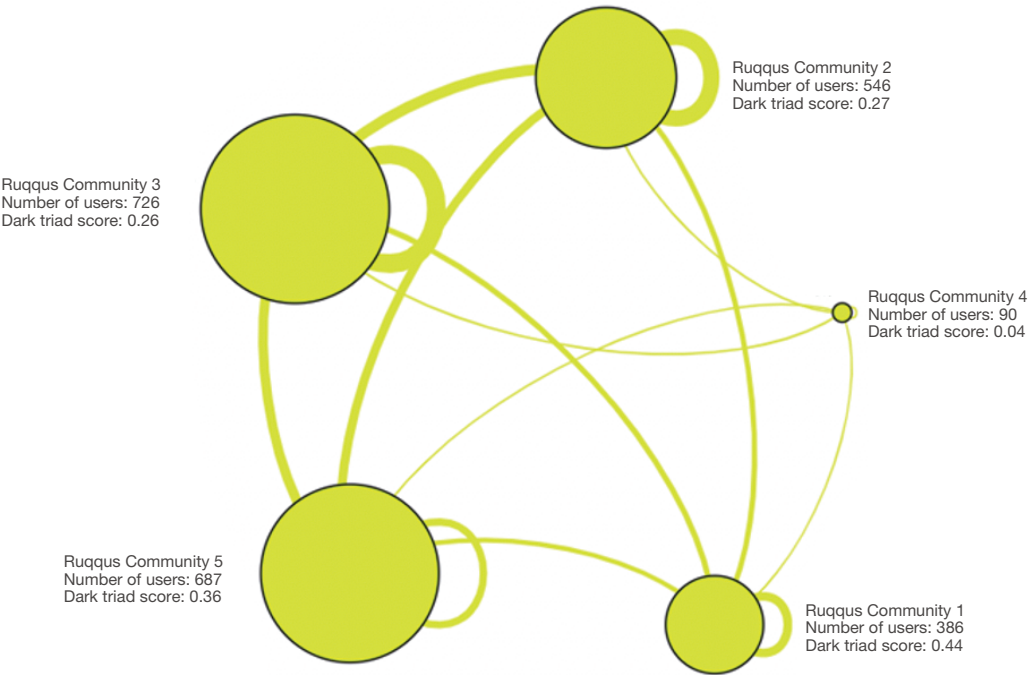
central connector among other, smaller communities.<sup>16</sup> (Telegram shares this pattern.) This central community of 2,966 individuals has the second-highest dark triad score on this platform (see Figure 3.10). The pattern suggests that a relatively more dedicated WITM/REMVE user core controls activity on Stormfront, while a less dedicated or hardcore set of peripheral actors connects to the core. This is a distinctive pattern from what we observed on most of the other platforms, where, overall, the communities were more evenly interconnected with each other.

## Telegram Community Structure

Telegram has a similar threaded structure to Reddit, such that communities in this network graph constitute ensembles of Telegram channels (the equivalent of subreddits on Reddit). Similar to Stormfront, Telegram displays a central community that acts as a connector between several other communities (see Figure 3.11). This central community of 235 chan-

<sup>16</sup> *Nodes*, in the case of Stormfront, are individual users and connections represent direct interactions between users.

**FIGURE 3.9**  
**Ruqqus Network Communities: Connections and Characteristics**



NOTE: Node sizes are scaled to the number of individuals assigned to that community. Lines reflect connections between users in different communities. Loops to a community reflect connections between users within that community. Line and loop thicknesses are scaled to the number of connections. Community numbering is arbitrarily assigned.

nels, plus the largest community of 378 channels, display the highest two dark triad scores on this platform. We think that the central connector structure is a substantive finding and not a result of our pulling the data from a set of starting seed channels with REMVE content because the central community of 235 channels contains only one of the original 24 seed channels. The largest community contains a mere seven of the original 24 seed channels.

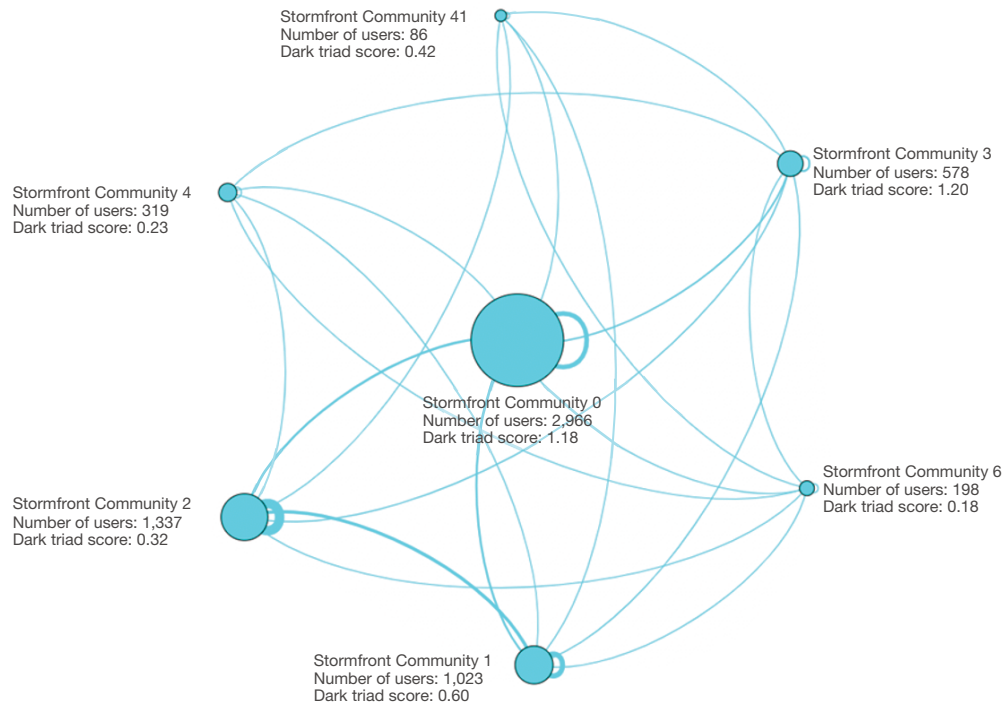
### Twitter Community Structure

Twitter displays a highly interconnected structure of communities; the larger communities all show a preponderance of connections within them rather than out to other communities.<sup>17</sup> In Figure 3.12, the thick loops going outward from the larger communities and back into these same communities represent these connections. This thick loop edge, indicative of a focus on within-community communication, is particularly prominent for Commu-

<sup>17</sup> *Nodes*, in the case of Twitter, are individual users and connections that represent direct interactions between users.

**FIGURE 3.10**

**Stormfront Network Communities: Connections and Characteristics**



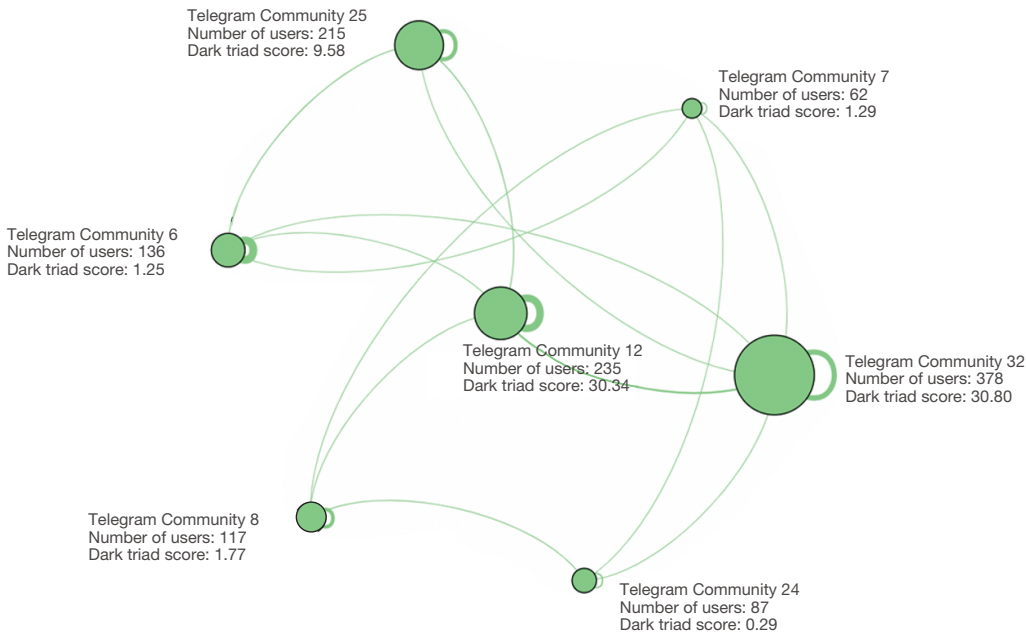
NOTE: Node sizes are scaled to the number of individuals assigned to that community. Lines reflect connections between users in different communities. Loops to a community reflect connections between users within that community. Line and loop thicknesses are scaled to the number of connections. Community numbering is arbitrarily assigned.

nity 451, which is also the community with the highest dark triad score. Although its dark triad score of 1.11 is small compared with some other platforms, this score is two to ten times larger than the dark triad scores for any other community on Twitter.

### The Dark Triad Scores over Time by Platform

Changes in content moderation and more-organic changes in online social dynamics, in principle, could create substantial shifts in violent language over time. To investigate this issue for the sampled text of each platform included in our analysis, we calculated the monthly dark triad scores of each community and plotted the data for all of the communities in each platform on one chart (Figure 3.13). With the exception of Ruqqus, all of the platforms had a distribution of monthly community dark triad scores that was near zero: This indicates that, for most months, at least some communities and at least some of the text is not markedly narcissistic, Machiavellian, and psychopathic, or not markedly negative. In addition, for all of the platforms except Ruqqus, there are regions of the graph in a range from a dark triad score of zero to a defined value in which the distribution of community dark triad scores is

**FIGURE 3.11**  
**Telegram Network Communities: Connections and Characteristics**



NOTE: Node sizes are scaled to the number of individuals assigned to that community. Lines reflect connections between channels in different communities. Loops to a community reflect connections between channels within that community. Line and loop thicknesses are scaled to the number of connections. Community numbering is arbitrarily assigned.

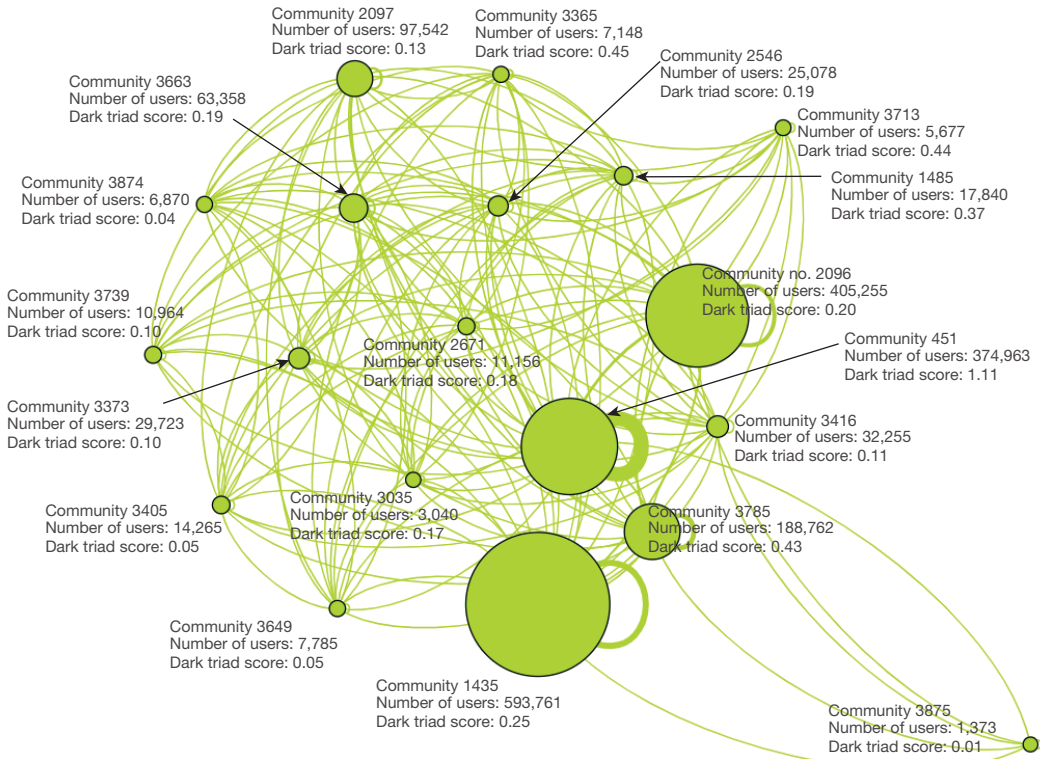
denser. We would note that, given that we have different time periods captured for different platforms, the number of months captured in our analysis varies.

For Gab, the highest dark triad scores show an increasing linear trend. This trend is stable over the sampled two-year period.

For the entire period, the Reddit dark triad scores do not markedly increase or decrease—indicating that the sampled content of these communities is not becoming markedly more negative with time. During the sampled time period, Reddit introduced content moderation that was intended to reduce hate and violent speech on its platform. In theory, the enacted content moderation should reduce at least some of the observed dark triad scores over time. Our analysis suggests that the form of content moderation enacted by Reddit did not decrease the aggregate dark triad language on the platform. Moderation by Reddit likely was simply insufficient in quantity to have any effect. In our data pull by keywords, there were only 0.061 percent (50 subreddits) that were banned; almost all of the content included in our analysis has not been considered to violate content policies and is still hosted on the platform.

Ruqqus shows low and generally stable levels of dark triad content over time. Ruqqus shuttered in November 2021, and a popular user—in explaining its closure—asserts that around mid-third quarter 2020, the platform began to be overrun by users sharing extreme racist

**FIGURE 3.12**  
**Twitter Network Communities: Connections and Characteristics**



NOTE: Node sizes are scaled to the number of individuals assigned to that community. Lines reflect connections between users in different communities. Loops to a community reflect connections between users within that community. Line and loop thicknesses are scaled to the number of connections. Community numbering is arbitrarily assigned.

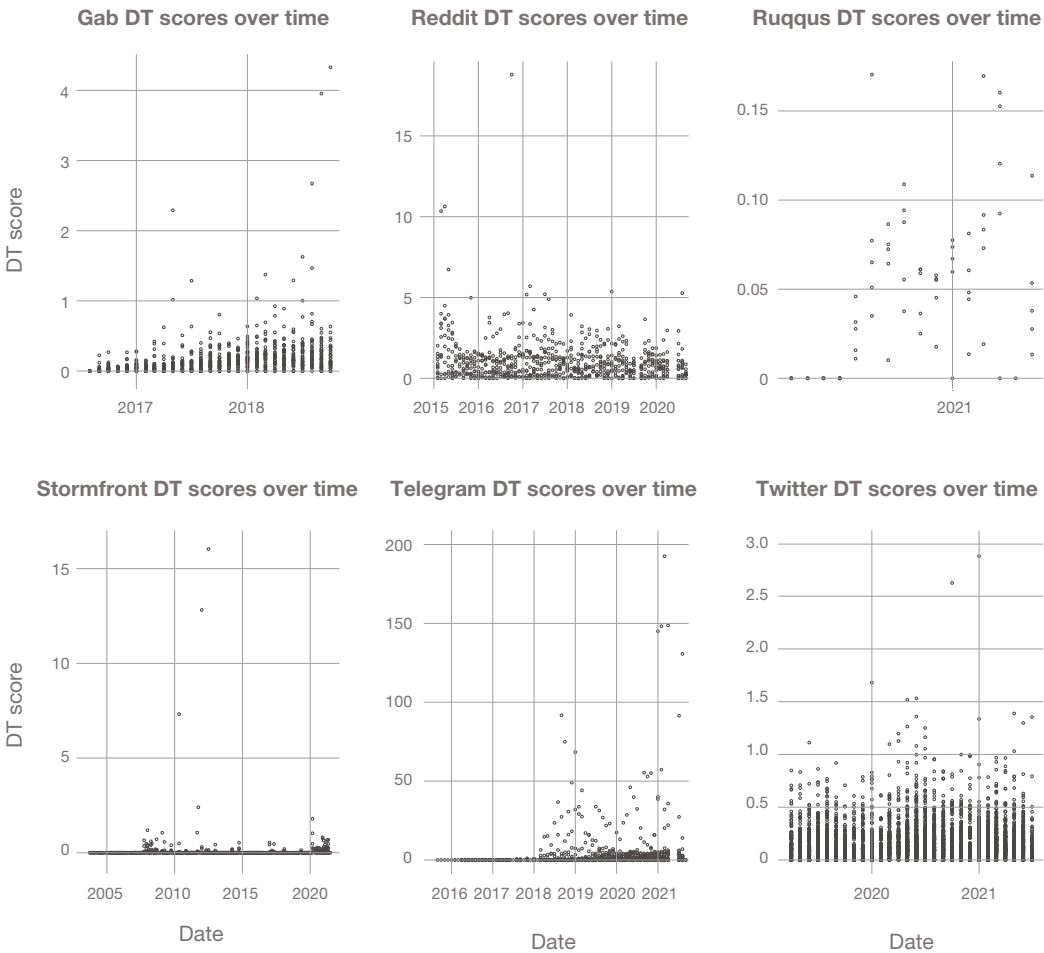
content, which caused more mainstream users to leave the platform.<sup>18</sup> Our analysis does not visualize this process explicitly, but the low dark triad scores on this platform could reflect the sensitivity to racist material by its main user base.

For most of the period between 2004 and 2021, the dark triad scores in Stormfront communities are low. After 2020, however, there is some noticeable increase in the monthly community dark triad scores.

As was the case for Gab, the highest dark triad scores in Telegram communities increase with time. The greatest increases are after 2018; this trend is consistent with the notion that as deplatforming occurred on more-mainstream platforms around this time, more-extreme users migrated to Telegram. As we found was true with the Gab data set, Telegram data

<sup>18</sup> Carpathianflorist, “Ruqqus: A Retrospective,” Ruqqus post, in the Internet Archive, November 30, 2021. Ruqqus stated that it would destroy all data on its website and database in early February 2022.

**FIGURE 3.13**  
**Dark Triad Scores over Time by Platform**



indicate that, for any given month, the discourse of these more-extreme communities was becoming increasingly more negative.

The dark triad scores on Twitter are stable over time, as was true of these scores on Reddit.

As a robustness check on the aggregate patterns just presented and to observe dynamics at the community level, we plotted the monthly dark triad scores of each of the two communities with the highest dark triad scores for each platform. The results of this analysis generally confirmed the same patterns of increase or stability that we describe in this section (see Appendix C).

An exception to this overall finding is Twitter. On Twitter, we found that the monthly dark triad scores for the two highest-scoring Twitter communities, 451 and 3365, both displayed decreasing trends; this indicates that the content of both communities was becoming less negative with time. One possible explanation for this trend could be increasingly strin-

gent content moderation by Twitter over time, which might have decreased the number of high-scoring messages in Twitter communities.

The direct effects of deplatforming, however, seem unlikely to explain the observed pattern of declining dark triad scores because Twitter removes content retrospectively. In other words, Twitter's policy makes it such that when an account is removed, all past records of its activity also are removed from the data accessible both to the public and to researchers (including retweeted content from the deplatformed account). For example, we confirmed that all historical content from and mentions of then-President Donald Trump (@realdonaldtrump) became unavailable after this account was deplatformed in January 2021. Because content is removed retrospectively, the past high dark triad behavior of accounts that are deplatformed is absent from the data that Twitter allowed us (and other researchers) to access. Therefore, the past behavior of removed accounts—in contrast to their present-day removal—cannot itself generate the observed decreasing trend in dark triad scores over time.

Nevertheless, deplatforming indirectly might generate the observed trend over time if individuals who are not deplatformed increasingly censor their own content to avoid having their own accounts removed when they see others being deplatformed. This self-censorship might prompt these individuals to simply shift more-offensive content to a platform other than Twitter. It is also possible that the decline in dark triad scores over time of these two Twitter communities is a product of their own natural social dynamics and is unrelated to deplatforming activities by Twitter. Twitter generally does not provide historical data on deplatformed accounts, such as their network connections, and so we were unable to empirically evaluate whether indirect deplatforming effects were involved in the observed declining trends in Figure 3.14.

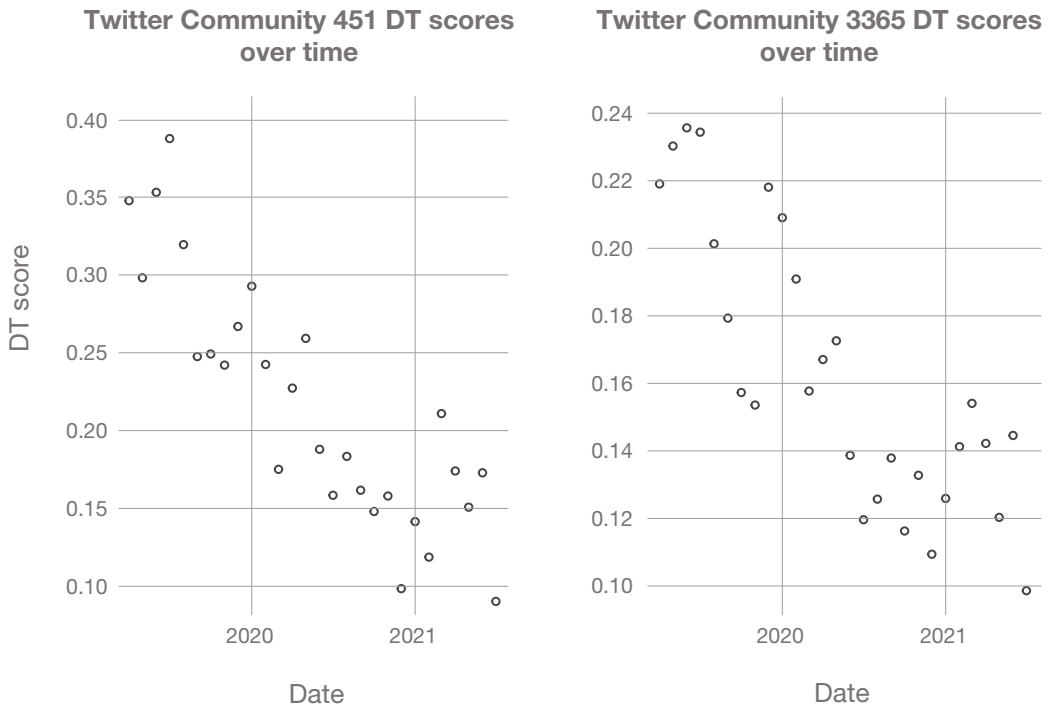
## Overt Mentions of White Supremacy Organizations

We sought to further understand these networks and contextualize their dark triad patterns by examining mentions of REMVE organizations. For example, if dark triad scores were indicating meaningful REMVE risk levels, then platforms and communities with higher dark triad scores might also exhibit greater mentions of organizations overtly dedicated to REMVE. Relatedly, mentioning REMVE organizations might be associated with fewer social connections (*network degree* in social network analysis jargon) on mainstream platforms but could be associated with greater social connectivity on more-extremist platforms, such as Stormfront, which itself is expressly dedicated to White supremacy.

Identifying mentions of REMVE organizations is complicated by the fact that no list of such organizations exists. To construct such a list, we drew on two sources: state designations of terrorist organizations and databases of terrorist and violent extremist attacks. Although



FIGURE 3.14

**Twitter Dark Triad Scores over Time for the Two Highest-Scoring Communities**

the United States has not designated any REMVE organizations other than RIM,<sup>19</sup> other countries have. We reviewed the terrorist designations of the European Union, Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom, and identified organizations that ascribed to WITM/REMVE ideals on each list.<sup>20</sup> Recognizing, however,

<sup>19</sup> RIM is designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) rather than as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

<sup>20</sup> Australian National Security, "Listed Terrorist Organisations," webpage, updated January 17, 2022; Public Safety Canada, "Currently Listed Entities," webpage, updated June 21, 2019; UK Home Office, "Proscribed Terrorist Groups or Organisations," webpage, updated November 26, 2021; New Zealand Police, "Lists Associated with Resolution 1373," webpage, undated; Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz [Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution], *Rechtsextremismus: Symbole, Zeichen und verbotene Organisationen* [Right-Wing Extremism: Symbols, Signs, and Prohibited Organizations], Berlin, October 2018; Council of the European Union, "Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/138," *Official Journal of the European Union*, Vol. 64, February 8, 2021, pp. L 43-1-4; Civil Service of Financial Monitoring of Ukraine [Державної служби фінансового моніторингу України], "List of Persons Involved in or in Connection with Terrorist Activities" ["Перелік осіб, пов'язаних із здійсненням терористичної діяльності або стосовно яких"], Government of Ukraine, October 7, 2010; and National Antiterrorism Committee, "Unified Federal List of Organizations, Including Foreign and International, Designated as Terrorist by the Courts of the Russian Federation," webpage, Government of Russia, undated.

that the use of terrorist designations is uneven across countries, we also examined data from Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS), RTV, and Janes, as well as ADL's Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism (H.E.A.T.) map, and we identified the number of violent events that have been associated with each REMVE group since 2016.<sup>21</sup> Because some designated groups were responsible for two or more violent incidents, we chose a threshold above the lowest already designated group and included any groups that were responsible for three or more violent events in our analysis. The complete list of groups and organizations is noted in Box 3.2.<sup>22</sup> We also included alternative names or submovements for each group on this list in our search.

We found that most platforms exhibited low rates of mentioning these groups. For the platforms where users are the nodes in the network, any mentions of these groups were by less than 5 percent of nodes. The highest among the platforms examined was Stormfront; 3.9 percent of its users mention one or more of these groups, which is an expected finding because Stormfront is a dedicated White supremacy platform. Among users who mention at least one organization, the average number of organizations mentioned on Stormfront is nine, which is more than twice the average number mentioned on the other platforms that had users as the nodes (Table 3.7).

Reddit and Telegram share a structural similarity of having highly threaded conversations that are partitioned by conversation thread (Reddit subreddits and Telegram channels), which were the nodes for our analyses of these platforms. This structural difference might account for their sharing substantially higher rates of mentioning these organizations on a per-node basis. On Reddit, 19.2 percent of subreddits in our data set mention at least one of these organizations and 36.3 percent of Telegram channels in our data set mention at least one.

Although this structural feature of conversation threads might account for the high percentage of REMVE organization mentions on Reddit, this percentage still is consistent with our findings that Reddit data that we sampled exhibited higher community dark triad scores than would be expected for a mainstream platform. A comparison of how social connectivity relates with REMVE organization mentions also supports that the high level of mentions of these groups on Reddit might be indicative of true REMVE sympathizers being operative on the platform. Among the platforms that we examined, Reddit has the highest correlation between the number of connections that a subreddit has and the number of mentions of

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<sup>21</sup> ADL, "ADL H.E.A.T. Map (Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism)," webpage, undated-a; START, "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States—PIRUS (Keshif)," webpage, undated; Center for Research on Extremism, "Right-Wing Terrorism Violence," data set, University of Oslo, updated August 20, 2021; and Janes Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, "Terrorism and Insurgency Global Events Database," undated. In each case, data were limited to after January 1, 2016. For ADL, data results were limited to those coded as "right-wing" and, in PIRUS, to those coded "far-right."

<sup>22</sup> We would note that some of the groups listed in Box 3.2, such as Boogaloo Bois and the Three Percenters, are very loosely organized and should not be considered formal organizations. The Three Percenters, for example, are designated by Canada as "a decentralized entity within the broader anti-government militia movement in the United States" (Public Safety Canada, 2019).

BOX 3.2

**REMVE Groups and Organizations Designated as Terrorist Groups or Responsible for Multiple Violent Events**

Aktionsfront Nationaler Sozialisten<sup>d</sup>  
 Aryan Brotherhood<sup>a</sup>  
 Aryan Circle<sup>a</sup>  
 Aryan Strikeforce<sup>b</sup>  
 Aryan Warriors<sup>a</sup>  
 Atomwaffen Division<sup>b</sup>  
 Bastion Social<sup>d</sup>  
 Besseres Hannover<sup>d</sup>  
 Blood & Honour<sup>d</sup>  
 Boogaloo Bois<sup>a</sup>  
 CasaPound<sup>a</sup>  
 Collegium Humanum with Bauernhilfe e.V.<sup>d</sup>  
 Combat 18<sup>b</sup>  
 Deutsche Alternative<sup>d</sup>  
 Elsass Korps<sup>d</sup>  
 Envie de rêver<sup>d</sup>  
 Forza Nuova<sup>a</sup>  
 Feuerkrieg Division<sup>b</sup>  
 Geeinte deutsche Völker und Stämme<sup>d</sup>  
 Generation Identity<sup>d</sup>  
 Ghost Face Gangsters<sup>a</sup>  
 Golden Dawn<sup>b</sup>  
 Hammerskins<sup>b</sup>  
 Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend<sup>d</sup>  
 Hilfsorganisation für nationale politische Gefangene und deren Angehörige<sup>d</sup>  
 Jeunesses nationalistes révolutionnaires<sup>d</sup>  
 KKK<sup>a</sup>  
 L'Oeuvre Francaise<sup>d</sup>  
 Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands<sup>a</sup>  
 Nationale Offensive<sup>d</sup>  
 Nationale Sammlung<sup>d</sup>  
 Nationalistische Front<sup>d</sup>  
 Nordadler<sup>d</sup>  
 Nordic Resistance Movement<sup>b</sup>  
 Osnabrücker Landmark<sup>d</sup>  
 Proud Boys<sup>b</sup>  
 Reichsbürgerbewegung<sup>a</sup>  
 Rise Above Movement<sup>a</sup>

## BOX 3.2—CONTINUED

Russian Imperial Movement<sup>d</sup>  
 Slavic Union<sup>d</sup>  
 Sonnenkrieg Division<sup>d</sup>  
 Sturm 18 e.V.<sup>d</sup>  
 Sturm-/Wolfsbrigade 44<sup>d</sup>  
 System Resistance Network<sup>b</sup>  
 The Base<sup>b</sup>  
 The Movement Against Illegal Migration<sup>d</sup>  
 Three Percenters<sup>b</sup>  
 Troisième Voie<sup>d</sup>  
 Unaligned Maeandrist Nationalists<sup>a</sup>  
 Unité Radicale<sup>d</sup>  
 Verein zur Rehabilitierung der wegen Bestreitens des Holocaust Verfolgten<sup>d</sup>  
 Volkssozialistische Bewegung Deutschlands<sup>d</sup>  
 Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann<sup>d</sup>  
 Weisse Wolf Terror Crew<sup>d</sup>  
 White Rabbit Three Percent Illinois Patriot Freedom Fighters Militia<sup>a</sup>  
 Wiking-Jugend<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Actively violent and responsible for three or more violent incidents since 2016.

<sup>b</sup> Both designated as a terrorist organization and responsible for two or more violent incidents since 2016.

<sup>d</sup> Designated as a terrorist organization by at least one country named in the “Overt Mentions of White Supremacy Organizations” section.

REMVE groups that it has. This is unlikely to result simply from communities with lots of content that also have lots of mentions (of anything) plus many social connections, because Telegram and Twitter both exhibit negative correlations between counts of REMVE organization mentions and number of connections of nodes (i.e., the network degree of each node) (Table 3.6 and Figure 3.15). If the volume of content were inherently related to the frequency of mentioning these organizations on Reddit, then this pattern logically should have played out across all of the platforms that we looked at because the process would apply equally to them as well. This argument vis-à-vis Reddit is especially true as it compares with Telegram, which shares the same threaded conversation structure (nodes are conversation threads on both Reddit and Telegram) and shares a similar raw percentage of threads that mention REMVE organizations but shows a slight negative relationship between mentions of these organizations and number of connections.

TABLE 3.6

**Statistical Characteristics of REMVE Organization Mentions Across Social Media Platforms**

Platform	Percentage of Nodes Mentioning at Least One Organization	Average Number of Organizations Mentioned by Nodes with at Least One Mention	Correlation of Network Degree with Number of Organization Mentions	<i>p</i> -value
Reddit	19.27	27	0.71	< 0.001
Ruqqus	0.41	3	0.15	< 0.001
Stormfront	3.94	9	0.05	< 0.001
Telegram	36.33	30	-0.05	0.07
Twitter	0.31	3	-0.004	< 0.001
Gab	3.08	4	-0.003	0.81

NOTE: Correlations are Pearson *r* estimates. Correlations and *p*-values were estimated with log-transformed data as needed to meet statistical assumptions for the Pearson *r* correlation measure.

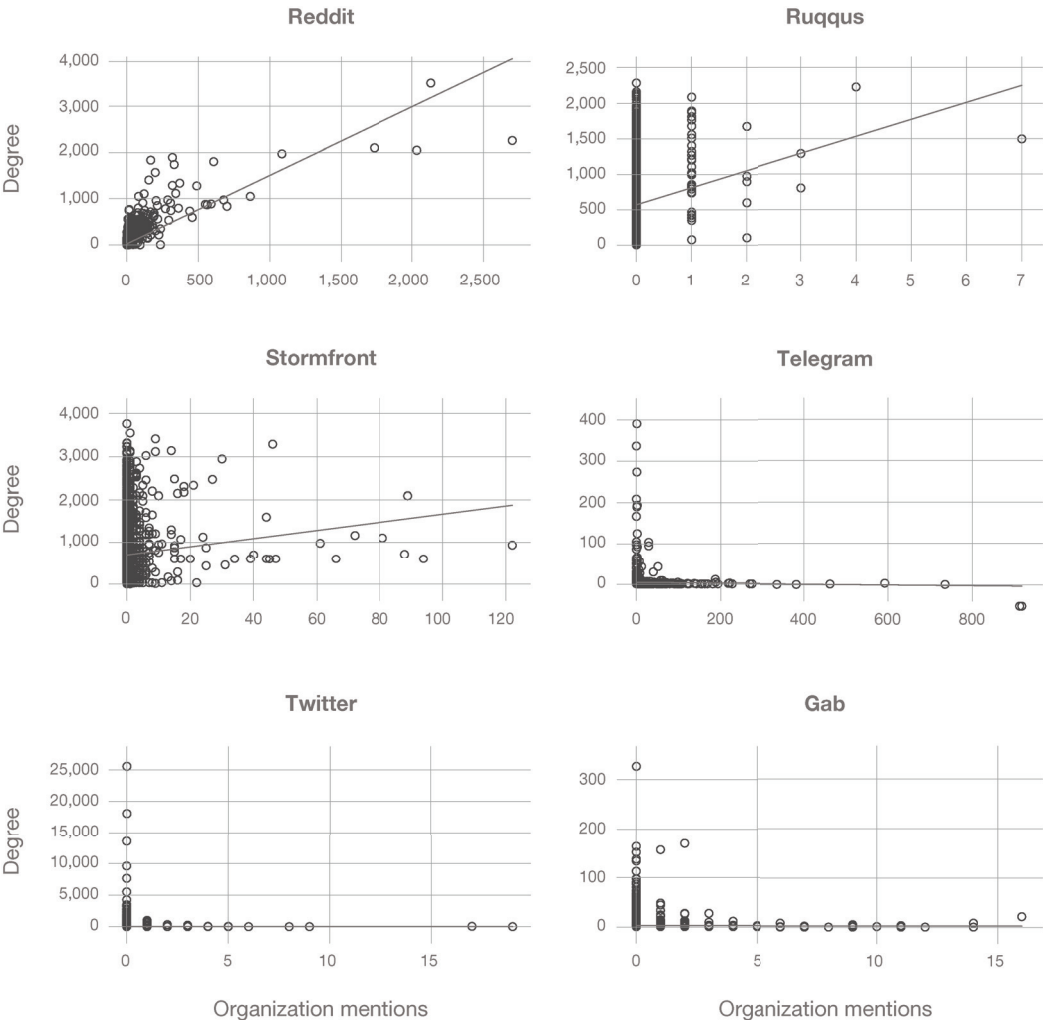
## Simulations of Network Interventions

In the previous sections within this chapter, we have presented evidence that the more-content moderated platform of Twitter exhibits less extremist material than the other platforms do. The longitudinal analysis of dark triad scores in the most-concerning Twitter communities suggests that indirect effects of deplatforming, whereby individuals censor themselves to avoid being deplatformed, might play a role in helping to maintain Twitter as a more mainstream platform. This type of indirect deplatforming effect might proceed through a network via network influence, which means that when someone's social connection is deplatformed, it induces the individual to censor their own content. Some limited research on deplatforming has suggested that it can reduce the level of toxicity on social media platforms, but this research area is still nascent.<sup>23</sup> Theoretically, *positive influence processes*, in which at-risk individuals are induced to opt out of REMVE online discourse, could spread to the individual's social connections via social influence. For example, social media platforms have been experimenting with prompts that encourage users to self-moderate before spreading extreme or false content.<sup>24</sup> Research has also examined methods to produce

<sup>23</sup> Shagun Jhaver, Christian Boylston, Diyi Yang, and Amy Bruckman, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Deplatforming as a Moderation Strategy on Twitter," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, Vol. 5, No. CSCW2, October 2021, article 381; Eshwar Chandrasekharan, Umashanthi Pavalanathan, Anirudh Srinivasan, Adam Glynn, Jacob Eisenstein, and Eric Gilbert, "You Can't Stay Here: The Efficacy of Reddit's 2015 Ban Examined Through Hate Speech," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, Vol. 1, November 2017; and Haji Mohammad Saleem and Derek Ruths, "The Aftermath of Disbanding an Online Hateful Community," *arXiv*, April 2018, 1804.07354.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Paul and Hilary Reininger, "Platforms Should Use Algorithms to Help Users Help Themselves," blog post, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 20, 2021.

**FIGURE 3.15**  
**Scatterplots of Network Degree (Number of Connections) and Number of REMVE Organization Mentions Across Social Media Platforms**



and disseminate narratives that counter violent extremism.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of whether an intervention relies on indirect deplatforming effects or some other form of positive intervention or effective counter-REMVE messaging, an effective network targeting strategy using these approaches must consider the complex social dynamics of how social influence propagates on

<sup>25</sup> Kurt Braddock and John Horgan, “Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2016.

an online network.<sup>26</sup> However, at a very preliminary level, we simulated how an intervention might be best targeted, given the various network structures that we identified in our previous analysis.

As a preliminary assessment of various targeting strategies, we conducted a set of simulations on the networks for each of the six social media platforms that we studied using an already published network influence simulator.<sup>27</sup> In this simulation, a set of nodes was effectively affected by an intervention to opt out of WITM/REMVE discourse (which could be in response to interventions that convinced individuals to use more-constructive and -positive language online or induced by the deplatforming of connected individuals to self-censor content). We simulated choosing the targets for the intervention through random selection, highest number of connections (*network degree*), greatest number of shortest paths (*betweenness*), and greatest connectivity to high-degree individuals (*eigenvector centrality*). These network centrality measures reflect how many connections an individual has and how their connections are interrelated with patterns of connections in the larger network. We have discussed some of these features in this report but have not overly emphasized them. Table 3.7 provides brief and accessible explanations for each of these commonly employed network centrality measures, and interested readers are recommended to Wasserman and Faust (1994) or the many other excellent social network analysis textbooks for more technical exposition.

The simulations we used specified that 50, 100, 500, or 1,000 individuals would be initially converted out of WITM/REMVE activity by the intervention. These individuals were chosen randomly or by maximizing one of the three network centrality measures. The simulation further specified a parameter for the proportion of an individual's social connections that would have to opt out of WITM/REMVE activity, at least on social media, for them to be

**TABLE 3.7**  
**Network Centrality Measures Used in Simulations**

Centrality Measure	Definition
Network degree	The number of social connections of an individual.
Betweenness	The extent to which an individual occupies a position through which a great many shortest paths must go. Shortest paths are the paths with the least social steps between individuals, as are used in the parlor game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon."
Eigenvector	The extent to which an individual has high network degree and is also connected to others with high degree, who are further connected to more individuals with high degree, recursively calculated out to the full network.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Th. A. J. Leenders, "Modeling Social Influence Through Network Autocorrelation: Constructing the Weight Matrix," *Social Networks*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas W. Valente and George G. Vega Yon, "Diffusion/Contagion Processes on Social Networks," *Health Education and Behavior*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2020; George G. Vega Yon and Thomas W. Valente, "netdiffuseR: Analysis of Diffusion and Contagion Processes on Networks," version 1.19.0, Zenodo, October 30, 2017; and George G. Vega Yon, Stephanie Pitts, and T. W. Valente, "USCCANA/netdiffuseR," webpage, GitHub, updated May 22, 2021.



induced to make the same decision. This parameter operationalizes the notion of *peer pressure*; that is, that individuals often will copy a behavior only when some sufficient proportion of their social group also engages in the behavior (also known as *conformity bias*).<sup>28</sup> The model was then allowed to run over a set of discrete simulated time steps that are akin to the turns in a board game or tricks in a card game, and the observed outcome was the percentage of the total nodes in the network at each time step that opt out of WITM/REMVE activity because of the spreading social influence initiated by the intervention on the 50–1,000 individuals who were the initial targets.

## Results

The most common finding from the simulations across platforms was that either degree centrality or betweenness centrality often were the more effective targeting approaches than selecting random individuals from within the REMVE online conversation for deplatforming or other intervention. Degree targeting or betweenness targeting of 500 individuals for deplatforming or other effective intervention was projected to reduce the number of REMVE actors on a platform by 15 to 30 percent of the total active REMVE individuals on that platform. In contrast, random targeting reduced the total number of REMVE actors on a platform by 5 to 10 percent. Random targeting produced reductions that were larger than the initial number of targets because of the indirect self-censorship effects of non-deplatformed individuals observing the deplatforming or counter-REMVE activity and opting out of REMVE, at least on that particular social media platform. This mechanism of the simulations replicated the empirical patterns that we observed for Twitter deplatforming activity (see text and Figure 3.12 in the “Dark Triad Scores over Time” section). Targeting the highest-betweenness individuals and/or highest-degree individuals for deplatforming or other effective intervention simply better optimizes the spread of these same indirect network effects that also operate when individuals are targeted randomly or through other non-network-based strategies. Further details of the simulation results for each platform are provided in Appendix D. Were network interventions to be pursued (for example, by companies that sought to minimize REMVE discourse on their platforms), considering the network structure could lead to more successful intervention strategies.

## Refining Results and Filling Gaps

We performed several analyses to address limitations of the aforementioned analyses that could limit those analyses’ validity and generalizability. One set of related concerns was whether the data contained high rates of people repeating WITM/REMVE language but who were doing so to *critique* racism and xenophobia rather than endorse it, and the relative balance of content

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richardson, *Culture and the Evolutionary Process*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

that focused solely on anti-illegal immigrant conversation without otherwise racist or White identity content. Another two related concerns were the extent to which users shifting between different platforms might affect our results and the significant limitation of the large percentage of missing data in the aforementioned analysis of user locations on Twitter.

## Sensitivity of Results to Non-WITM/REMVE Material in the Data

We conducted three analyses to better understand the extent of non-REMVE material within the data and how it might affect the findings. We first applied an inductive approach from corpus linguistics to characterize the main topics by platform, regardless of how those included or did not include our primary query keywords. Second, we applied manual thematic coding techniques, in which two coders read through hundreds of entries from Twitter and assigned codes using their interpretation of the content. Third, we analyzed quantitative patterns of anti-illegal immigrant versus White identity terms across all of the platforms to ascertain how these types of content were overlapping.

### Sensitivity Check 1: Inductive Characterization of Each Platform Through RAND-Lex

As part of our attempt to understand and characterize the discourse of each platform studied, we used RAND-Lex, RAND's proprietary text analysis platform, to characterize topics of discussion. This analysis addressed the potential that the sampled data might not primarily focus on REMVE because of the inclusion of other types of content, such as critiques of REMVE positions or non-REMVE racialized discussions. RAND-Lex served as one sensitivity check on this possible confound because it is an inductive computer-based corpus analysis that examines highly salient word usages regardless of whether they were conceived by researchers during the process of querying data.

To do this, we used two common text-mining methods: keyness analysis (testing) and collocate extraction. *Keyness analysis* finds conspicuously over- and/or under-present words in a text collection when compared with a baseline collection.<sup>29</sup> *Keyness testing* is a foundational method for empirically understanding what a large text collection is about and has been used extensively in RAND's policy work.<sup>30</sup> The second method, *collocate extraction*, identi-

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<sup>29</sup> Mike Scott, *WordSmith Tools Manual*, version 6.0, Stroud, UK: Lexical Analysis Software, 2015; Mike Scott, "PC Analysis of Key Words—and Key Key Words," *System*, Vol. 25, No. 2, June 1997; and Mike Scott, *WordSmith Tools Version 6*, Stroud, U.K.: Lexical Analysis Software, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Todd C. Helmus, Madeline Magnuson, and Zev Winkelman, *Examining ISIS Support and Opposition Networks on Twitter*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1328-RC, 2016; Kate Cox, William Marcellino, Jacopo Bellasio, Antonia Ward, Katerina Galai, Sofia Meranto, and Giacomo Persi Paoli, *Social Media in Africa: A Double-Edged Sword for Security and Development*, Cambridge, UK: United Nations Development Programme, 2018; Todd C. Helmus, Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman, *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2237-OSD, 2018; William M. Marcellino, Kim Cragin, Joshua Mendelsohn, Andrew Micahel Cady, Madeline Magnuson, and Kathleen Reedy, "Measuring the Popular Resonance

fies word pairs and triplets that occur near one another non-randomly in a text collection. Collocates are often abstractions, personal and place names, or habitual turns of phrase,<sup>31</sup> and extracting them is an important complement to keyness testing.<sup>32</sup>

Lists of keywords and collocates from each platform provide a kind of text summary that can be readily analyzed by a human analyst—instead of reading millions of words, an analyst might read a list of 500 keywords and 100 collocates to get an inductive sense of the topics of conversation. In the following sections, we characterize each of the platforms, listing out their main themes.

## Gab

- Antisocial content
  - Anti-Semitism
  - Racism (primarily anti-Black)
  - Anti-Islam
- Anti-immigrant (“sanctuary cities,” “open borders,” “anchor babies,” “chain migration”)
- Support for Donald J. Trump/Republican Party (GOP)
- Free speech concerns
- White genocide
- Anti-progressivism
  - Critiques of progressive politicians (Nancy Pelosi, Barack Obama)
  - Concerns over Democratic Party voter fraud
  - Antifa as a threat
- Australia and Australian politics (#ausfam, #auspol, #ausfam).

## Reddit

- Antisocial content (this is the primary characteristic of the Reddit data)
  - Anti-Semitism
  - Racism (primarily anti-Black)
  - Anti-Islam
  - Anti-LGBTQI

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of Daesh’s Propaganda,” *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2017; and Andrew Scobell, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Astrid Cevallos, Arthur Chan, and Zev Winkelman, “Netizen Opinion and China’s Foreign Policy: Interpreting Narratives About North Korea on Chinese Social Media,” *Asia Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 3, July 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Xiao and Tony McEnery, “Collocation, Semantic Prosody, and Near Synonymy: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective,” *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 27, No. 1, March 2006.

<sup>32</sup> William Marcellino, “Seniority in Writing Studies: A Corpus Analysis,” *Journal of Writing Analytics*, Vol. 3, 2019; and Jennie W. Wenger, Heather Krull, Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Eric V. Larson, Joshua Mendelsohn, Tepring Piquado, and Christine Anne Vaughan, *Social Media and the Army: Implications for Outreach and Recruiting*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2686-A, 2019.

- Concerns over high taxation, denial of free speech to conservatives, and economic policy that favors or causes increased immigration to the United States
- Anti-progressivism, including mocking “wokeness”
- Denial of being White supremacists/nationalists, alt-right, or right-wing
- Anti-immigrant.

## Ruqqus

- White genocide
- *Incel* talk: members framing themselves as victims of involuntary celibacy because of unfair, anti-male social structures
- Anti-immigrant
- Anti-progressivism, including critiques of progressive politicians and fears of Antifa as a threat
- Anti-Semitism and racism (anti-Black)
- Anti-Black Lives Matter and pro-Derek Chauvin (police officer convicted of murdering George Floyd) content.

## Stormfront

- Anti-Semitism and racism (anti-Black)
- Neo-Nazism (praise of Hitler and National Socialism)
- Anti-White fears that the U.S. government is racist toward White Americans
- White supremacy content (e.g., praise for the *Turner Diaries* and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke)

## Telegram

- Antisocial content<sup>33</sup>
  - Anti-Semitism
  - Racism (primarily anti-Black)
- Broad anti-immigrant sentiment
- Conspiracy theories: Deep State (the idea that there is a secret group controlling the U.S. federal government), secret child molestation rings, anti-Semitic theories of secret Jewish banking control
- White genocide
- Free speech concerns.

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<sup>33</sup> The two largest communities on Telegram had predominantly Dutch- and German-language users. The results that we present describe the English content that comprised the majority of the rest of Telegram data.

### Twitter (Community 451)

We focused our RAND-Lex analysis of Twitter to Community 451 because it showed the clearest signature of extremism using dark triad score analysis. The thematic analysis that follows further supports the focus on this community of more than 350,000 individuals:

- Anti-immigrant sentiment (sanctuary cities, open borders, that illegal immigrants are being given preferential coronavirus disease 2019 [COVID-19] vaccination support)
- Support for Donald J. Trump and the GOP
- Free speech concerns
- Anti-progressivism
  - Critiques of progressive policies (“free” health care, economic stimulus)
  - Critiques of progressive politicians (Nancy Pelosi, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris)
  - Concerns that Democratic Party voting proposals will increase voter fraud
- Concerns that the U.S. government is racist toward White Americans.

### Sensitivity Check 2: Manual Thematic Analysis of Twitter Communities

We applied manual thematic coding to a data set of concatenated tweets for single users over the sampled two-year period. The two coders established very high inter-rater reliability (92 percent raw agreement, 82 percent chance-corrected agreement). Inter-rater reliability was established in a sample of concatenated tweets by 55 users. The codebook (Table 3.8) itself was developed inductively (i.e., by reading the sampled Twitter content) by coauthors Todd Helmus and Luke Matthews. The coders then sampled the total data in two distinct ways: (1) the ten most connected individuals from each of the 19 largest Twitter communities and (2) 104 randomly selected individuals from the Twitter community with the highest dark triad score.

We chose to apply thematic coding to Twitter rather than to other platforms for several reasons. One issue was tractability. In comparison with the other platforms’ contents, tweets are mostly short-format text, so the concatenated tweets for most users are feasible for coders to read and assign codes for hundreds of examples. Twitter was also the platform with the lowest average dark triad score, and our data from Twitter was received after content censoring, which meant that we had the greatest concerns that the Twitter content might include a high rate of people who were repeating racist language to critique it or other types of content that would otherwise not be accurate to call WITM/REMVE.

The top ten users in each of the 19 Twitter communities, on average, comprise 21 percent of the total network degree (i.e., the count of connections across all individuals) even though they are only 190 individuals out of 2,028,495 individuals in the total data set (0.009 percent of individuals). The majority of the content (64 percent) identified by our keyword search from the top ten most connected Twitter accounts in each community was consistent with WITM/REMVE sentiment. Within the content that was on-topic among the top ten most connected accounts, a slighter majority (59 percent) supported WITM/REMVE ideas, as

TABLE 3.8

**Theme Descriptions for Manual Coding of Tweets, Concatenated by User**

Theme	Description
Hard-right immigration	Focus on illegal immigration; grievances that U.S. citizens are perceived to be treated less well than immigrants; the Democratic Party, President Biden, and the left are friends to illegals
White supremacy	Classic White supremacist motifs of the racial superiority of Whites, a need to have segregated society, failure of multiculturalism and integration
White supremacist reproduction	Focus on Whites “outbreeding” Blacks or other racial groups, especially by mixed-race breeding and biological/reproductive superiority of Whites
Black supremacist reproduction	Focus on Blacks “outbreeding” Whites, especially by mixed-race breeding and biological/reproductive superiority of Blacks
Liberal repeat critique	People on the political left repeating White supremacist/hard-right statements to disagree with them or to critique American society; includes White or Black authors and appropriation of racist language by Black individuals

NOTE: These descriptions include dehumanizing and problematic terms, which we have included here because this language—and much worse—is used by these communities.

opposed to those users that repeated these ideas to critique them or espouse Black supremacist ideas. A substantial minority of topical content repeated racist or xenophobic language to critique it (37 percent), and a small portion of material was Black supremacist in character (3 percent). Seventy-two of the users tweeted about hard-right immigration policies, White supremacy, or both, with hard-right immigration policies in the absence of White supremacy being the most common theme that we coded (Table 3.9).

These patterns are quite different, however, for the Twitter community with the highest dark triad scores (Community 451). Among the ten most connected individuals in this community, nine of them expressed the kinds of pro-WITM/REMVE views that we were seeking to identify. In a random selection of 104 individuals from this community, 98 percent expressed hard-right views on immigration, White supremacy views, or both. These patterns from the manual thematic analysis are consistent with the algorithmic dark triad method that flagged this community of more than 350,000 individuals as having the greatest potential for violence.

### Sensitivity Check 3: Parsing White Identity and Anti-Illegal Immigrant Keywords Across Platforms

As another means to examine the relationships between conversation about illegal immigrants and White identity, we examined the correlations and overlap of usage of these sets of terms in the data that we sampled. We found that across all platforms except Twitter, White identity terms were used by the majority of nodes when those nodes used either White identity terms or illegal immigrant terms (Table 3.10). During the data pulls that used keywords rather than seed accounts or comprehensive pulls, we separated the White identity and illegal immigrant terms with a Boolean OR, which means that the data-pulling process itself did not

**TABLE 3.9**  
**Themes in Concatenated Twitter User Content**

Account Coding	Top 10 Centrality	Community 451	Community 451 in Top 10 Centrality
Hard-right immigration	49	94	7
Liberal repeat critique	46	2	1
White supremacy	19	1	1
White supremacy, hard-right immigration	4	6	1
Black supremacist reproduction	4		
Unclear	64	1	
Other topic	4		
Total on-topic	122	104	10
Total	190	104	10

NOTE: Counts in the table are of individual users. All content was concatenated for each user and coded.

enforce any necessary pattern of co-occurrence between these term sets. The only pattern enforced by our data-pulling method is that platforms that were queried by these keywords necessarily include at least one of those keywords, while the platforms that were queried via seed accounts or comprehensive scraping do not necessarily have even a majority of content that would use these particular keywords. The relative balance of White identity versus illegal immigrant terms can be validly compared, however, for any of the platforms.

For platforms that had about 50 percent or more of nodes using the illegal immigrant terms and White identity terms, roughly half of the nodes overlapped and used both illegal immigrant terms and White identity terms.

Depending on the platform analyzed, the amount of usage of illegal immigrant and White identity terms is either positively correlated or uncorrelated. The absence of any substantial negative correlation in the term set usages suggests that nodes that mention both topics are not consistently focused either on illegal immigrants or White identity issues to the exclusion of the other issue (such a pattern should have produced a negative correlation).

Twitter stands out as a bit distinctive from the other platforms that we analyzed, in that it was the only one with a dominance of illegal immigrant discussion over and above the use of White identity terms. This observation is consistent with our manual coding of samples of the Twitter data and also consistent with the notion that Twitter is the most mainstream platform in the set we analyzed.

The differences among the platforms that we just described, statistically, can be illustrated by comparing selected quotations from platforms with high levels of charged language. The following examples from Twitter show the more agitated or explicitly racist comments we encountered:

TABLE 3.10

**Comparison of Illegal Immigrant and White Identity Term Set Usage**

Platform	Nodes*	Correlation II and WI Terms	Percentage Using II	Percentage Using WI	Percentage Using Only II	Percentage Using Only WI	Percentage Using Both Terms	Percentage Using Neither Term
Gab <sup>a</sup>	4,812	0.04	75	71	29	25	46	1.4
Reddit <sup>a</sup>	8,192	0.33	69	89	11	31	58	0
Ruqqus <sup>b</sup>	247	-0.01	13	90	10	87	3.2	90
Stormfront <sup>c</sup>	644	0.08	7.8	95	4.5	92	3.3	90
Telegram <sup>b</sup>	418	0.27	47	90	9	53	38	71
Twitter Community 451 <sup>a</sup>	392,327	0.51	98	30	70	1.7	28	0.9

<sup>a</sup> Data were queried with same keywords.<sup>b</sup> Data were queried through seed accounts.<sup>c</sup> Data was comprehensive.

\* Node counts are number that used at least one term.

NOTE: II = illegal immigrant; WI = White identity. Percentage of using neither term set is derived from the total data set; other percentages of usage are derived from nodes that use at least one term set.



Twitter example 1: Discovered: Migrant Safe House in Scottsdale, Arizona! - ICE] and Gov. Agents provide 24/7 security and catering to Illegal Immigrants . . . An African American murders unarmed White father & step-daughter outside her home after he rear-ends daughter. Where is media outrage? Where are White race riots?

Twitter example 2: Being white, I would prefer the continued supremacy of the white race instead of this homogenization that's coming. 2 Simplistic 2 equate that just 2 racism; it's also "habitus"<sup>34</sup>

Although Twitter example 1 uses anecdotal evidence to spin up racial animosity, and Twitter example 2 expressly calls for White supremacy, these are still comparatively less extreme views being expressed than material that we found easily on fringe social media platforms with higher dark triad scores, such as those from Telegram and Gab that follow:

Telegram example 1: Never forget. We are a Knightly Order from which one cannot withdraw, to which one is recruited by blood, and within which one remains body and soul Heinrich Himmler The Combat of Heroes is not intended for collective salvation of the Sudras, nor the White Traitors, nor even the totality of imprisoned or sleeping Vras. Only those will be saved who fight unto magic death, making themselves worthy of triumph.

Gab example 1: #AUTOMATIClynching sounds right to me. #committheCRIMEits HANGINGTIME N.I.G.G.E.R. acronym 4 #NegroIndividualGeneratingGriefEverywhereRoutinely [gangbangers, MUD ARMY rioters, etc] Lynch the NIGGERS; DEPORT blacks to AFRICA

Gab example 2: MTV sells JEW pedophilia, JEW pornography, JEW funded transgender agenda, JEW funded anti-white hate speech, JEW funded mongrelisation of all things American. MTV = More Talmudic Vampirism.; Jews celebrate White Genocide.

These specific examples are illustrative of the differences found in the more extreme speech of individuals on fringe platforms versus on a mainstream platform, such as Twitter. They are also suggestive of where engagement efforts might be best directed. In the former case, individuals are calling for lynchings and deportation of Black Americans, contending that Jewish Americans push anti-White pornography, or pledging to fight with the soul of Holocaust architect Heinrich Himmler to a magic death. It is difficult to envision a constructive policy debate in which one side is willing to make such explicitly violent or hateful comments. More-moderate elements on Twitter might be engageable, however, through substantive policy issues that could allay their concerns and prevent these individuals and groups from further radicalization.

In particular, concerns about illegal immigration and its relationship to border security, worker health and safety, and worker wages can be legitimate policy issues worthy of debate

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<sup>34</sup> Identifying information, such as account name and date of posting, is intentionally not reported in this section because of concerns regarding the protection of human subjects.

in the public sphere and not inherently linked to matters of White identity to the exclusion of other groups. At least portions of even the most extreme-looking Twitter community (Community 451) might be engageable around substantive policy debates about immigration in a manner that might de-escalate the linkage of this issue with broader White identity movements that are potentially more linked to terrorism or REMVE. For example, some influential accounts might belong to individuals who oppose many forms of immigration and also oppose White supremacy and other forms of REMVE. Their anti-immigrant stances could make them more credible with those on the far-right REMVE spectrum, and, therefore, they could serve as useful individuals for influencing those on the far right. Just as the U.S. government sought to enlist anti-ISIS influencers from within Muslim communities to propagate countermessages, it might also be possible to enlist those from the anti-immigrant community to help counter REMVE extremism.<sup>35</sup> Countermessaging efforts usually are less problematic if done through public-private partnerships rather than directly by the government.<sup>36</sup> However, it is important to note that, despite the popularity of counternarrative initiatives, they—as with many prevention efforts that are aimed at online extremism—are often evaluated in terms of their reach rather than whether they were truly persuasive.<sup>37</sup>

Overall, this analysis suggests that both term sets received substantial usage: White identity terms were the more prevalent term set on most platforms, and White identity terms had substantial overlap in usage with illegal immigrant terms for those platforms in which both term sets were substantially associated with frequent topics of conversation.

## Lexical Identification of Location on Platforms Other Than Twitter

We also sought to better understand whether WITM/REMVE actors were using multiple platforms either concurrently to sequentially. Concurrent use might occur when actors focus some efforts, such as recruitment, on a more mainstream platform (Twitter) while simultaneously focusing other efforts, such as operational planning, on less mainstream platforms. Sequential platform usage might occur if individuals shift to alternative platforms after being

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Todd C. Helmus and Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, *Empowering ISIS Opponents on Twitter*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-227-RC, 2017; and Ashley L. Rhoades, Todd C. Helmus, James V. Marrone, Victoria M. Smith, and Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, *Promoting Peace as the Antidote to Violent Extremism: Evaluation of a Philippines-Based Tech Camp and Peace Promotion Fellowship*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A233-3, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> For a more extensive discussion of past U.S. online countermessaging efforts, see Chapter Four of Brian A. Jackson, Ashley L. Rhoades, Jordan R. Reimer, Natasha Lander, Katherine Costello, and Sina Beaghley, *Practical Terrorism Prevention: Reexamining U.S. National Approaches to Addressing the Threat of Ideologically Motivated Violence*, Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center operated by the RAND Corporation, RR-2647-DHS, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Rosand and Emily Winterbotham, “Do Counter-Narratives Actually Reduce Violent Extremism?” blog post, Brookings Institution, March 20, 2019; and Todd C. Helmus and Kurt Klein, *Assessing Outcomes of Online Campaigns Countering Violent Extremism: A Case Study of the Redirect Method*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2813-GNF, 2018.

removed from mainstream ones, for instance, as a result of violating platform policies around the use of hate speech. With these considerations in mind, we attempted to infer whether some network communities were likely to be the same users across separate social media platforms using their linguistic characteristics. Linguistic linkages to Twitter communities also enable us to infer the location of the linked community on the non-Twitter platform.

We constructed linguistic similarity measures by applying the Jaccard measure of similarity to the top 200 most over-prevalent (highest keyness) words for each community. We constructed the Jaccard measure for all pairs of communities within and across all platforms. The Jaccard measure compares the number of words that are shared in common on these over-prevalent lists for each pair of communities both within and across platforms: A shared word is counted as indicative of similarity, one community having a word in its list and the other not is counted as indicative of dissimilarity, and both communities lacking a word is counted as uninformative. The Jaccard thus ignores the spurious similarity of lists both lacking any of the thousands of words in the English language that are uncommonly used and focuses the similarity metric on shared word usages among the words that these communities used much more than expected using a standard corpus of English language books and news articles (the Freiburg-Brown corpus of the English language).

The results showed that most communities are linguistically closest to other communities on the same platform. This result is sensible in that separate social media platforms typically have platform-specific jargon, slang, and other stylistic elements that would appear similar in the Jaccard measure. However, this makes it all the more compelling that we might have identified the same communities on different platforms, given that these communities rate more similar to communities on other platforms than they do to other communities on the same platform. With this assumption, we can also infer the location of some non-Twitter communities that are lexically similar to a correspondingly located Twitter community. Table 3.11 includes the main country locations for the communities that matched lexically to a non-Twitter community.

## Machine Learning to Identify Missing Locations

Recognizing that the location information is missing for about half of the individuals in the Twitter data set, we explored an alternative method to help fill this gap. If any given user was equally likely to report or not report location data regardless of their country location, we could simply assume our results for country location would be roughly doubled, given around 50 percent of location data was absent. But if missing data were not missing at random with respect to location—that is, if individuals in some locations were more likely to not report their location than were individuals from other locations—then this would be a particular concern for the analysis. Given that some countries prohibit the use of and prosecute individuals for hate speech (e.g., Germany), individuals in those countries would have a clear incentive to not report their location in a way that individuals in the United States do not (because the United States protects hate speech as free speech). Also, state-sponsored pro-

**TABLE 3.11**  
**Linguistically Similar Cross-Platform Communities**

Cross-Linked Communities	Similarity Rank <sup>a</sup>	Twitter Community Main Location
TwitterC451—GabC3	3	United States (92 percent)
TwitterC2096—RedditC3	3	United States (86 percent)
TwitterC3649—TelegramC12	2	France (66 percent)
RuqqusC2/C5—GabC6	3	NA
RuqqusC4—StormfrontC41/C0, GabC20	1, 2, 3	NA

NOTE: C = community; NA = not applicable.

<sup>a</sup> This is the ranking of how similar the communities are to one another in comparison with all other communities with the highest similarity being a rank of 1.

paganda trolls or cyborgs (accounts run by both artificial intelligence machines and humans) would have incentives to not report or to misreport their country locations. This suggests that nonreporting of location would not be random.

We applied a machine-learning model to infer location for all accounts (both reporting and not reporting location) by mining lexical patterns from the accounts that reported location. The technique applied was similar to our method to assess cross-platform usage, but in this case, we calculated the lexical similarity between the term-frequency-inverse-document-frequency (TF-IDF) vectors for the words used by each individual account. The TF-IDF method is a very commonly applied technique in natural language processing that assigns high numerical weights to words that are used frequently by a particular user but rarely in the whole data set, and assigns low weights to words that a user rarely uses that are otherwise used very commonly among all users. We used the 500 most common words in the data set to calculate similarities among users based on TF-IDF weights.

To implement our nearest-neighbor method to infer locations, we computed the pairwise distance between each individual user's TF-IDF vector and the aggregated TF-IDF vectors for each country,<sup>38</sup> then we associated our predicted country with the smallest distance. We then cut out user entries in which the minimum distance to any country's TF-IDF vector was greater than 0.9, a threshold that maximized the accuracy in our training set and reduced the number of users by about 84 percent. In other words, we selected the 16 percent of users whose aggregated tweets were closest in their word usage to a known country.

This process produced a *chance-corrected predictive accuracy* (i.e., ability to reproduce the same as reported locations) of 0.66 on a 0–1 scale (the Matthews correlation coefficient from the 20 percent hold-out sample was not seen by the algorithm during training). This predictive accuracy is at the lower end of useful model performance, but this is not surprising for two reasons. First, we suspect that some accounts are intentionally misreporting location,

<sup>38</sup> Pairwise distance was calculated with a Euclidean distance metric.

which introduces noise into both the training and validation data. Second, given the reach of social media, we expect that many users tweet about issues outside their home country, which makes it difficult to assign a country to users simply with the observed language. We did not expect a highly accurate model, which probably would reproduce intentionally misreported locations and be overfit.

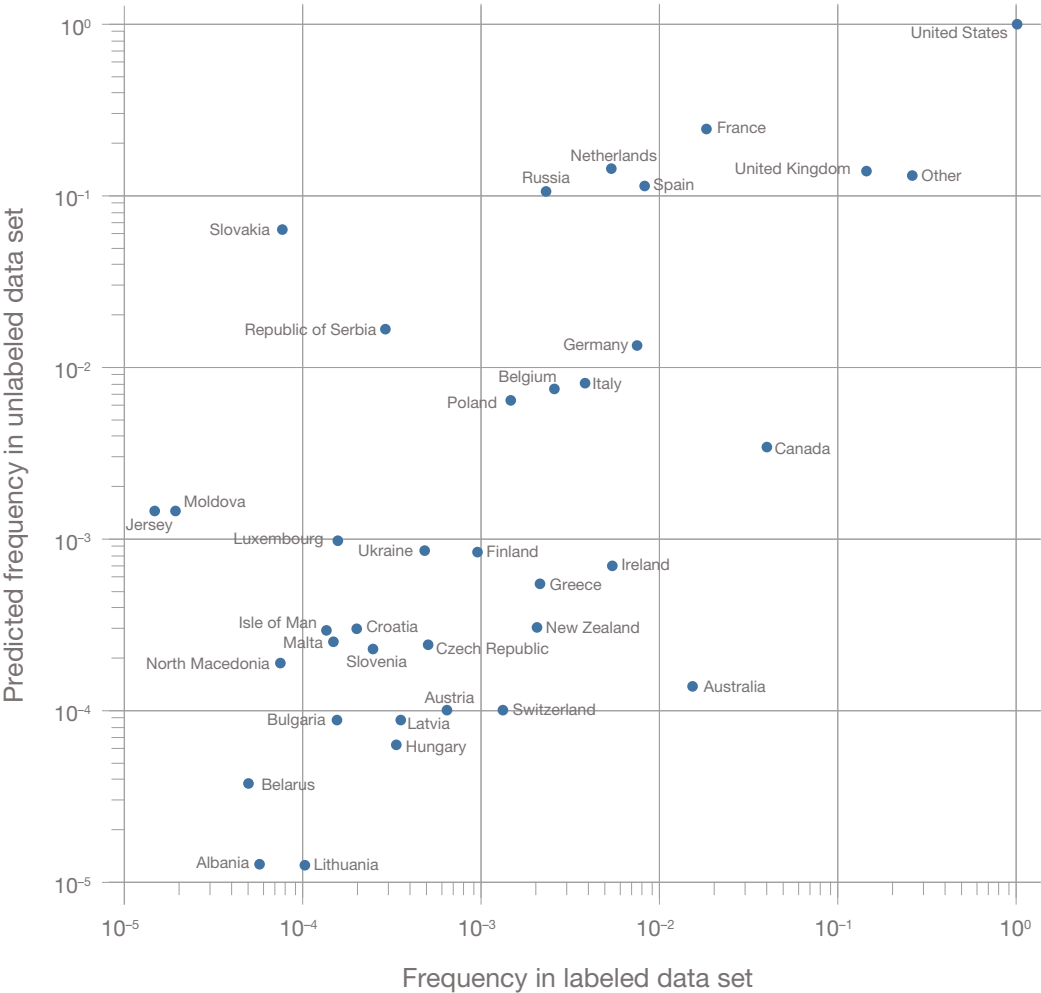
The results of this process are shown in Figure 3.16. We found that while there is some global correlation between the reported frequency in the labeled data and the inferred frequency in the unlabeled data, there are also some significant differences when looking at individual countries. Many major Western European countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain) show an increased frequency of inferred location compared with reported location, while some of the English-speaking nations (Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada) show a smaller frequency. This suggests that users in those Western European countries might be more likely to not report their location and are more present in the data set than we realized, and users in Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada are more likely to have reported their locations. Importantly, the frequencies of the two most frequent countries, the United States and the United Kingdom, are stable when comparing the reported and inferred locations. Because many of the TF-IDF vectors are quite similar to one another and because we only show the results for the subset of the data that is modeled with highest confidence, we caution the reader that not every statistical outlier is meaningful.

### Country Lexical Similarities

Because we trained our TF-IDF model on tweets that were aggregated at the country level, it was straightforward to compute the pairwise distances between each country's TF-IDF vector. We found that many geographically close countries are nearby in linguistic space—Australia and New Zealand, for example, have very similar vectors, as do the Netherlands and Belgium and the Scandinavian countries of Finland, Sweden, and Norway. This makes sense—users in these countries likely are more invested in their geographical region than other countries and are more likely to sound like their neighbors—and gives us a measure of confidence that the TF-IDF vectors are indeed representative of each country. A dendrogram showing the hierarchical similarity between each country is shown in Appendix F.

Interestingly, we found that the closest linguistic neighbor to the U.S. tweets in these data are from Russian users, followed by those of users from Canada, Poland, New Zealand, and Australia. The similarity between U.S. and Canadian users is understandable because of geographical proximity, and New Zealand and Australia are not particularly surprising neighbors either because their populations are mostly native English speakers and culturally similar to the United States. It is unclear exactly why Russia and Poland are so similar. We speculate that Russian influence operations—which have been shown previously to operate on Twitter with the goal of exacerbating U.S. social divides—could play some role. This is an area where further work on country-level similarity scores could provide additional insight.

**FIGURE 3.16**  
**Inferred Location Frequency in Twitter Data**



NOTE: The Y-axis represents inferred location frequency from the machine-learning model versus self-reported location frequency on the X-axis. Scales are logarithmic.

### Conclusions from Inferred Location Analysis

In summary, the machine-learning analysis to infer missing locations would seem to confirm the hypothesis that users from Western European countries that legally prohibit hate speech are over-represented among those who do not report location data, and thus are more present in our network analysis than initially identified. We also found evidence to support that accounts with inferred locations in Russia are over-represented among accounts that are not reporting locations and that these accounts use speech patterns that, curiously, are highly similar to U.S. speech patterns. Given the large cultural and linguistic divergences of U.S.

and Russian cultures generally, this suggests that such accounts might belong to individuals who are purposefully trying to copy U.S. English idioms, potentially because they are part of state-sponsored influence operations.

These conclusions, however, do not undermine the prior conclusion from the reported location data that individuals in the United States are the predominant presence in WITM/REMVE Twitter conversations. Even in the inferred locations, half of all accounts are located in the United States, and this is followed distantly by the European countries (Table 3.12).

## Summary

Our network analysis suggests that particular attention should be given to Twitter Community 451. This community is largely in the United States (92 percent of reported user locations), has the highest dark triad scores of the Twitter communities that we surveyed, and has the lowest rate of persons on the left critiquing or engaging in conversation. This is one of the largest communities that we studied, with more than 350,000 individuals in a social media echo chamber that is focused primarily on hard-right stances about illegal immigration and secondarily on White identity issues.

Twitter's results, even including those from Community 451, stand in contrast with many aspects of the results from other platforms. The REMVE activity found on Twitter is less extreme than what is found on most of the other platforms. Twitter was also the only platform in our study that exhibited greater levels of conversation that focused on xenophobic tropes centered around illegal immigration as opposed to explicitly racist speech; on the other platforms, these issues were either discussed at similar levels or White identity was the more frequent topic of conversation (Table 3.10). We used a previously validated method, dark triad analysis, to assess the potential for violence using lexical indicators by the various groups across platforms and communities. Dark triad scores on the other platforms were substantially higher than on Twitter, and, especially on the fringe platforms Gab and Telegram, it was easy to identify individual quotations that stopped just short of expressing specific acts of violence. We did not encounter similarly extreme content in our review of Twitter material.

Twitter is the only platform from which we have metadata that indicates the country location of individuals. Our analysis of this location information suggested that most REMVE activity on this platform is from individuals based in the United States. A machine-learning model to infer locations for about 50 percent of the data that did not report location confirmed this finding. It also found evidence for higher levels among nonreporting individuals for locations in countries with anti-hate speech laws and higher levels of Russian-inferred locations that could be propaganda trolling activity.

Applying our dark triad method, we also found that violence potential of communities on these platforms is mostly stable, although it increases for fringe platforms Gab and Telegram. For the main community of concern on Twitter (Community 451), the dark triad score

TABLE 3.12

**Top 20 Country Locations Using Inferred and Reported Locations on Twitter, Sorted by Inferred Location Counts**

Country	Counts of Users' Reported Location	Percentage	Counts of Inferred Location for Users Not Reporting	Percentage	Counts Reported and Inferred	Percentage
United States	677,604	65.43	504,253	49.72	1,181,857	57.65
France	12,320	1.19	124,362	12.26	136,682	6.67
Netherlands	3,630	0.35	72,682	7.17	76,312	3.72
United Kingdom	96,829	9.35	70,011	6.90	166,840	8.14
Other*	174,221	16.82	66,410	6.55	240,631	11.74
Spain	5,538	0.53	57,694	5.69	63,232	3.08
Russia	1,565	0.15	53,934	5.32	55,499	2.71
Slovakia	53	0.01	32,028	3.16	32,081	1.56
Serbia	200	0.02	8,440	0.83	8,640	0.42
Germany	5,077	0.49	6,816	0.67	11,893	0.58
Italy	2,584	0.25	4,101	0.40	6,685	0.33
Belgium	1,748	0.17	3,761	0.37	5,509	0.27
Poland	994	0.10	3,267	0.32	4,261	0.21
Canada	27,284	2.63	1,739	0.17	29,023	1.42
Jersey	10	0.00	744	0.07	754	0.04
Moldova	13	0.00	738	0.07	751	0.04
Luxembourg	108	0.01	494	0.05	602	0.03
Ukraine	327	0.03	430	0.04	757	0.04
Finland	643	0.06	424	0.04	1,067	0.05
Ireland	3,669	0.35	353	0.03	4,022	0.20

\* *Other* denotes countries that were not in our countries of interest. We lumped together in this category countries outside Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.



was decreasing, which is an encouraging pattern that we did not observe on any of the other platforms.

Twitter, as we would expect, appears to maintain itself as a more moderated conversation space compared with the other platforms that we analyzed; it has limits on how much language is explicitly violent or racially biased. We cannot assess how much deplatforming or other content-moderation activities are causing this contrast, but it would suggest that content moderation has some impact. The predominance of concerns about illegal immigration on Twitter over and above White identity issues, combined with the low or declining dark triad scores, suggests that engaging Twitter REMVE communities in dialogue about immigration policy might help to bring some of these communities and individuals out of REMVE and into a more constructive approach to resolving their grievances. Our results indicate that this type of prevention and intervention effort might be most important in the echo chamber that is Twitter Community 451.

Reddit, even though it is a highly popular platform with explicit content-moderation policies, still had very high levels of WITM/REMVE activity on its platform. In our data, Reddit had banned only a very small percentage of subreddits (0.061 percent) and it showed many network and lexical patterns that were similar to those on fringe and extremist platforms. The network simulations suggested that Reddit might begin to achieve efficacy from banning subreddits if it were willing to increase the frequency of these bans by tenfold (i.e., banning at least 500 subreddits, or 0.61 percent).

Among the fringe and extremist platforms, Ruqqus had already shut down as of the writing of this report, but Gab and Telegram stand out as being of particular concern because of their high and increasing usage levels of language that is indicative of a potential for violence and an emphasis on White identity issues in addition or above concerns about illegal immigration. Policymakers might need to reconsider the legal framework for how platforms like Gab and Telegram operate, especially if these platforms' policies are dedicated to the principle of having an unmoderated platform suitable for WITM/REMVE and related activity, such that these platforms themselves simply do not wish to take any action to mitigate WITM/REMVE content.

## Country Case Studies

### Introduction

In this chapter, we provide a closer look at REMVE trends in ten countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. These countries were chosen in consultation with the U.S. Department of State for four reasons. Canada and the United Kingdom were selected because these countries featured prominently in our network analysis—after the United States, these countries had the most geolocated REMVE users among the countries examined in our study.<sup>1</sup> Germany and the Nordic states of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were chosen because these were European states where REMVE was known to be of concern and interest. In 2020, the Federal Foreign Office of Germany commissioned a report to study violent right-wing extremists,<sup>2</sup> and the Center for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo has authored several research reports on this topic and maintains a database of right-wing violence in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Australia and New Zealand are countries where REMVE has historically not been an issue of major concern despite White nationalist sentiment in both states; however, these threats have been seen as growing in these countries.<sup>4</sup> Russia and Ukraine were selected because of Russia's role in producing and proliferating REMVE material and providing haven to REMVE groups and because of Ukraine's potential to attract REMVE-oriented foreign fighters. Our assessments of the national threat environments are drawn from existing literature, and we have highlighted some key national counter-efforts, although a more comprehensive exami-

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<sup>1</sup> Of located Twitter users, the United Kingdom accounted for 9 percent and Canada accounted for 3 percent. India and South Africa both ranked higher than Canada; however, these were not countries examined as part of our study. We would note that around half of our data set was unlocated, and, as discussed in Chapter Three, there was unevenness in which countries users hid or masked their location information.

<sup>2</sup> Counter Extremism Project, "CEP Germany Webinar: The Threat Posed by Transnational Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in the United Kingdom and the United States," press release, February 3, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Center for Research on Extremism, homepage, undated.

<sup>4</sup> Shandon Harris-Hogan, "Violent Extremism in Australia: An Overview," *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 491, March 7, 2017; and Milo Comerford, Jakob Guhl, and Elise Thomas, "In the Shadow of Christchurch: International Lessons from New Zealand's Extreme Far-Right," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 14, No. 6, July/August 2021.

nation of counter-efforts in each country would require further study.<sup>5</sup> In the sections on network analysis data, we have included material from our own network study and other network studies done on the country, if available.

## Australia

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Australia

Australia has had far-right-wing armed actors in the country since its founding. In the 1930s, an organic Australian Nazi movement emerged; some groups were centered on Odinist beliefs and others on anti-Semitism, and there were significant violent clashes between right- and left-wing groups during this period.<sup>6</sup> In the 1980s, several violent groups formed and carried out violent attacks consistent with anti-immigrant, race-based, and anti-LGBTQI ideologies.<sup>7</sup> A far-right nationalist group (or conglomeration of groups), called Reclaim Australia, rejuvenated far-right extremist activity with anti-Islam protests between 2015 and 2017.<sup>8</sup> In a June 2017 Australia Pride March, participants were armed with knives and brass knuckles,<sup>9</sup> and a January 2019 rally at St. Kilda included Nazi imagery and symbols. One group, the National Socialist Network, “has successfully employed a repertoire of trolling Australian Jewish organisations, brazen media stunts such as a cross burning, and a recent assault, to generate enormous media attention and position itself as Australia’s leading neo-Nazi organization.”<sup>10</sup> However, when compared with other countries, “the scale of far-right activism has been—and still is—marginal relative to activism in North America and many Western European countries.”<sup>11</sup>

Another sign that this problem is of a lesser scale in Australia than in some other countries is that we did not identify recent actions of lethal REMVE violence. This is not to say that there could not be lethal violence in Australia because Australian authorities have disrupted a number of right-wing actors planning acts of violence. For example, in August 2016, police arrested a right-wing actor who had been researching how to construct explosive devices and

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<sup>5</sup> In describing other countries’ counter-efforts, we use the term *countering violent extremism* (CVE) in reference to programming, although that terminology is no longer applicable to U.S. domestic government programs.

<sup>6</sup> Kristy Campion, “A ‘Lunatic Fringe’? The Persistence of Right Wing Extremism in Australia,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 2019, pp. 4–5; and Mario Peucker and Debra Smith, “Far-Right Movements in Contemporary Australia: An Introduction,” in Mario Peucker and Debra Smith, eds., *Far-Right Movements in Contemporary Australia*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Campion, 2019, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Jordan McSwiney, “The Rise of the Fascist Cadre: Shifts in Far-Right Organising in Australia,” blog post, Center for Research on Extremism, May 18, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Jade Hutchinson, “The New-Far-Right Movement in Australia,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 33, No. 7, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> McSwiney, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Peucker and Smith, 2019.

expressed his interest in “waging war against Muslims and ‘lefties.’”<sup>12</sup> The perpetrator of the attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, was an Australian citizen.

Australian authorities have also expressed concern about a growing number of REMVE actors and the increasing sophistication of the movement. The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) said in late 2020 that “far-right violent extremism constitutes up to 40% of the Australian domestic spy agency’s counter-terrorism caseload, up from 10–15% before 2016.”<sup>13</sup> Similar increases in caseload were cited by regional police:

Victoria Police says the threat of far-right extremists has grown rapidly over the past couple of years. “Over the last 18 months, we’ve seen essentially our workload in this space double,” said Assistant Commissioner Mick Hermans of Counter Terrorism Command. He said police were now watching “hundreds” of far-right extremists in Victoria, many of whom were influenced online during COVID-19 lockdowns.<sup>14</sup>

ASIO, in a 2021 report to the Australian Parliament, expressed concern that “extreme right-wing groups are more organised, sophisticated and security conscious than before” and that it saw “more people drawn to and adopting extreme right-wing ideologies.”<sup>15</sup>

Given this backdrop, the potential for REMVE influences from abroad to exacerbate the problem is of particular concern. Kristy Campion, a leading researcher of the Australian far-right, has argued that

the persistence [of right-wing extremism] is not simply the consequence of an Australian-centric white nationalism, but is the result of international and domestic exchanges. . . . This exchange is evident from Australian contacts with international counterparts and networks, personal visits, and literature interchanges. The [right-wing extremism] threat in Australia, therefore, did not evolve in isolation from the global right wing community, but in interactions with it.<sup>16</sup>

REMVE literature from the United States often has been sent to Australian REMVE actors and circulated among them.<sup>17</sup> In the 1990s through the 2000s, branches of REMVE groups active in the United States and the United Kingdom (or groups modeled on those

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<sup>12</sup> Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, “Phillip Galea Jailed for Terrorist Offences,” Victoria: Supreme Court of Victoria, Australian Federal Police, November 20, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Karp, “Asio Reveals up to 40% of Its Counter-Terrorism Cases Involve Far-Right Violent Extremism,” *The Guardian*, September 22, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Ben Knight and Josie Taylor, “Why Aren’t Australian Authorities Banning More Far-Right Extremist Groups?” *ABC News*, March 30, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, *Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security: Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia*, Canberra, February 16, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Campion, 2019, pp. 2–20.

<sup>17</sup> Campion, 2019, pp. 6–7.

active abroad) were formed in Australia, and the U.S. neo-Nazi organization The Base has attempted to set up a franchise in Australia.<sup>18</sup> The Australian Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies has raised concerns that Australian right-wing extremist groups seek to link up with others in the United States and Canada, as well as in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe, through online connections and limited travel.<sup>19</sup> In 2021, ASIO reported that “for the first time, a right-wing extremist was prevented from travelling offshore to fight on a foreign battlefield.”<sup>20</sup> The Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s International Cyber Policy Centre also has identified nine Australian Telegram channels that share right-wing extremist content and used “at least 22 different funding platforms, including online monetisation tools and cryptocurrencies, to solicit, process and earn funds.”<sup>21</sup>

## Network Analysis Data

Around 80 percent of Australia’s population uses social media, particularly Reddit and Twitter.<sup>22</sup> Australian far-right groups, such as the Nationalist Australian Alternative, also are known to use less-moderated platforms, such as Gab.<sup>23</sup> Previous research on Australian right-wing extremist discourse on social media has identified themes and narratives from right-wing social media accounts based in the United States that resonate with Australian users.<sup>24</sup> Another analysis of Australian right-wing social media communities on Facebook (between 2011 and 2019) found that themes in these communities included physical violence, racial animus, and national identity.<sup>25</sup> Other studies of core narratives of online groups flagged themes that were

(1) anti-immigrant, (2) anti-establishment and anti-elitism, (3) protection of western values and culture, (4) commitment to democratic reform, (5) return to “traditional values,” and (6) strong state and law-and-order.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Alex Mann and Kevin Nguyen, “The Base Tapes,” *ABC News*, March 25, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, *Submission by the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security: Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia*, Burwood, Victoria, February 2021, p. 12, citing Macquarie University, Department of Security Studies, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right Wing Extremists in New South Wales*, Sydney, updated October 9, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Ariel Bogle, *Buying and Selling Extremism: New Funding Opportunities in the Right-Wing Extremist Online Ecosystem*, Report No. 49/2021, Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, August 19, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Simon Kemp, “Digital 2021: Australia,” *DataReportal*, February 9, 2021a.

<sup>23</sup> Campion, 2019, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Macquarie University, Department of Security Studies, 2020.

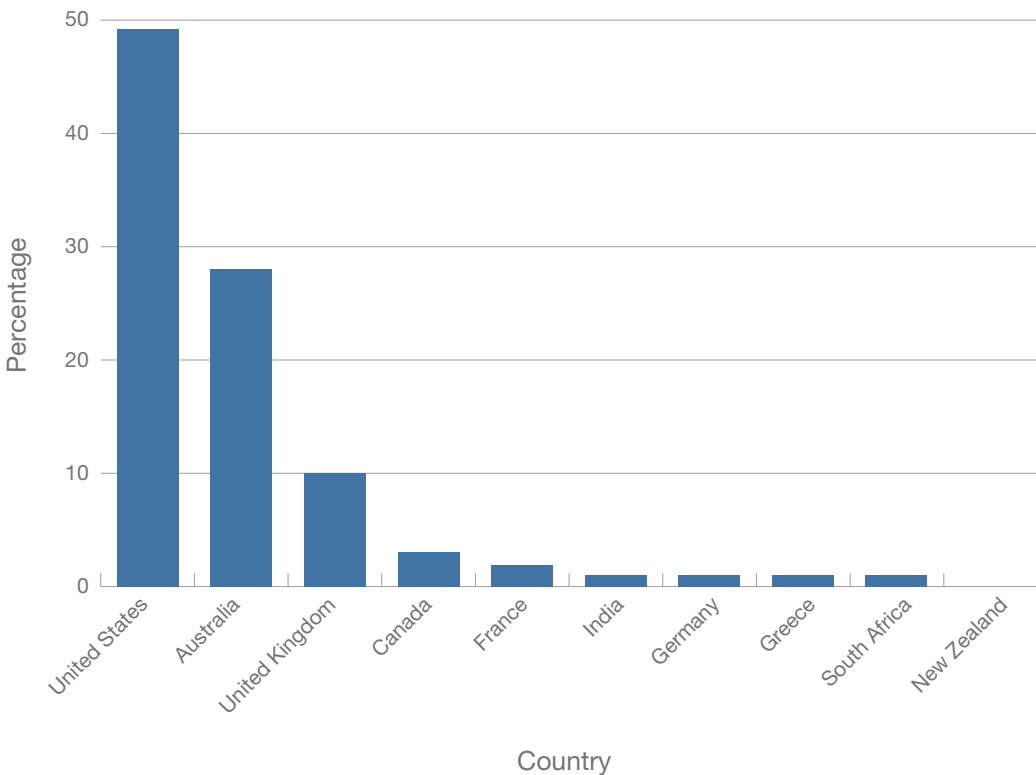
<sup>25</sup> Hutchinson et al., 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Peucker and Smith, 2019; and Geoff Dean, Peter Bell, and Zarina Vakhitova, “Right-Wing Extremism in Australia: The Rise of the New Radical Right,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*,

A 2018 study of the far-right on Twitter found a large cluster of White supremacists in Australia and that Australian far-right groups and networks were well connected globally.<sup>27</sup>

In our network analysis, we identified 18,310 unique users who were located in Australia who engaged in REMVE discourse, which represents 0.96 percent of our sample. Although this percentage seems trivial, this made Australia the eighth-most-prominent country in which we were able to locate users from across our Twitter data set. For connections where we could locate both sides of an engagement, nearly 50 percent of Australian connections were with the United States—a trait fairly common to the general geographic distribution of pairs and a reflection of how prominent the United States is in the data (see Figure 4.1). Compared with the other countries that are included in our analysis, Australia had a high

**FIGURE 4.1**  
**Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Australia**



NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 4,563 Australian pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 2,226; Australia = 1,275; United Kingdom = 449; Canada = 130; France = 88; India = 62; Germany = 59; Greece = 51; South Africa = 30; New Zealand = 18. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

proportion of user-to-user links contained to Australia; these represented nearly 30 percent of geolocated pairs. We also found it notable that, although New Zealand was in the top ten most prominent countries included in our analysis, there were few Australia-to-New Zealand pairs, despite the Christchurch connection and generally close trans-Tasman relations.

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

The threat presented by an increasing occurrence of REMVE incidents is well appreciated in Australia and has led to a parliamentary focus on extremist threats.<sup>28</sup> In late 2020, the country's intelligence services reported that far-right violent extremism constituted up to 40 percent of the total domestic counterterrorism caseload, up from 10 to 15 percent prior to 2016, partially because of the added opportunities for online recruitment and messaging introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>29</sup> The Department of Home Affairs coordinates Australia's national approach to CVE, which focuses on four streams of activity: (1) building strength in diversity and social participation, (2) working with vulnerable communities and institutions, (3) addressing terrorist propaganda online, (4) and efforts around diversion and deradicalization.<sup>30</sup>

In response to a rise in far-right activity, there have been national proposals on whether there should be proscription of REMVE groups, the display of extremist symbols, and the circulation of extremist materials (including swastikas and the Christchurch shooter's manifesto).<sup>31</sup> In March 2021, Australia added a White supremacist group—the Sonnenkrieg Division—to its list of designated terrorist organizations; in November 2021, it added The Base as a designated terrorist organization as well. Given the complexity and fluidity of the REMVE movement, however, there is national recognition that such terrorist designations are an inadequate tool for developing a national counter-REMVE strategy.<sup>32</sup>

## Canada

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Canada

Right-wing extremism is not new to Canada, but researchers Barbara Perry, Tanner Mirrlees, and Ryan Scrivens point to influences from the United States—and xenophobic rhetoric by former President Trump specifically—as reinvigorating White identity politics in Canada

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<sup>28</sup> McSwiney, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Karp, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Home Affairs, "Countering Violent Extremism," webpage, Australian Government, updated August 29, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> McSwiney, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Knight and Taylor, 2021.

and prompting a resurgence of right-wing extremism.<sup>33</sup> Despite strong ties to U.S. far-right movements, Canadian right-wing extremists are less focused on gun rights or survivalism and more focused on ethnonationalism and xenophobia.<sup>34</sup> Canada has identified at least 100 right-wing extremist groups, some that emerged domestically and some that formed out of an infusion of ideas from abroad, such as the proliferation of the Finnish White national group Soldiers of Odin. Generally, these groups are amorphous and the organizational structures are weak; many members have shallow commitments to the ideological cause of REMVE.<sup>35</sup>

Canada uses the term *xenophobic violence* as the closest approximate equivalent term to REMVE, which it considers one type of ideologically motivated violent extremism—alongside gender-driven violence, antiauthority violence, and other ideologically motivated violence. Between 2014 and 2020, ideologically motivated violent extremist actors were the most-violent extremist actors in Canada, killing 21 people and wounding 40 others, according to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.<sup>36</sup> Islamophobia has been identified as a major concern, both because of recent violent attacks and anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment identified in the country.<sup>37</sup>

Two of the most violent attacks in Canada in recent years were motivated by REMVE sentiment toward Muslims. The first was the January 29, 2017, shooting that targeted the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City mosque, killing six and injuring 19. The perpetrator had actively perused far-right websites and was obsessed with serial killers, Muslims, and Trump's tweets.<sup>38</sup> He had also accessed websites that were tied to U.S. REMVE actors Richard Spencer, David Duke, and Dylann Roof. The second, on June 6, 2021, occurred when four Canadians in London, Ontario, were hit with a truck and killed while on an evening walk close to their mosque. Police determined that the perpetrator targeted the victims because they were Muslim and charged him with crimes of terrorism.<sup>39</sup> Canada also has experienced several violent attacks that were motivated by incels. These attacks include a vehicle ramming

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<sup>33</sup> Barbara Perry, Tanner Mirrlees, and Ryan Scrivens, "The Dangers of Porous Borders: The 'Trump Effect' in Canada," *Journal of Hate Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 53, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, "Uneasy Alliances: A Look at the Right-Wing Extremist Movement in Canada," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 39, No. 9, February 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Perry and Scrivens, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *CSIS Public Report 2020: The Threat Environment*, Ottawa: Government of Canada, April 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Craig S. Smith and Dan Levin, "As Canada Transforms, an Anti-Immigrant Fringe Stirs," *New York Times*, January 31, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Dan Bilefsky, "Quebec Mosque Shooter Was Consumed by Refugees, Trump and Far Right," *New York Times*, May 5, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Steve Scherer, "Man Suspected of Killing Canadian Muslim Family Was Motivated by Hate—Police," Reuters, June 7, 2021; and "Canada Truck-Attack Suspect Charged with Terrorism," BBC News, June 14, 2021.



on April 23, 2018, that killed ten and injured 16, and an attack on a Toronto spa on February 24, 2020, that killed one and injured two.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service has released information about REMVE, and yearly hate crimes statistics are collected by the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and reported by the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. Canada saw hate crimes increase significantly starting in 2017—with a marked increase in racially or ethnically motivated hate crimes in particular. Hate crimes rose 37 percent in 2020 despite an overall national decrease in crime during the COVID-19 pandemic; rates of racially or ethnically motivated hate crime nearly doubled. Hate crimes targeting the Black and Jewish populations were the most common types of hate crime.<sup>40</sup> The year 2020 also saw a marked increase in hate crimes against Asians in Canada.

## Network Analysis Data

It is estimated that nearly 85 percent of Canada's population uses social media; Reddit and Twitter are among the top 12 most popular websites in the country.<sup>41</sup> A study on Canadian extremists on social media conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue identified 6,660 right-wing extremist channels, pages, groups, and accounts across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Iron March, Fascist Forge, 4chan, and Gab.<sup>42</sup> The most-resonate areas of conversation focused on anti-Muslim and anti-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau rhetoric.

In our network analysis, we identified 49,561 unique users located in Canada who engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 2.61 percent of our sample and making it the fifth-most-prominent country of located users within our Twitter data set. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, nearly 60 percent of Canada's connections were with the United States—a trait that is fairly common to the general geographic distribution of pairs and not surprising given other literature about the strength of U.S. influences on Canadian REMVE movements (see Figure 4.2). Nearly 30 percent of geolocated pairs were user-to-user links within Canada, with very few connections outside Canada and the United States.

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

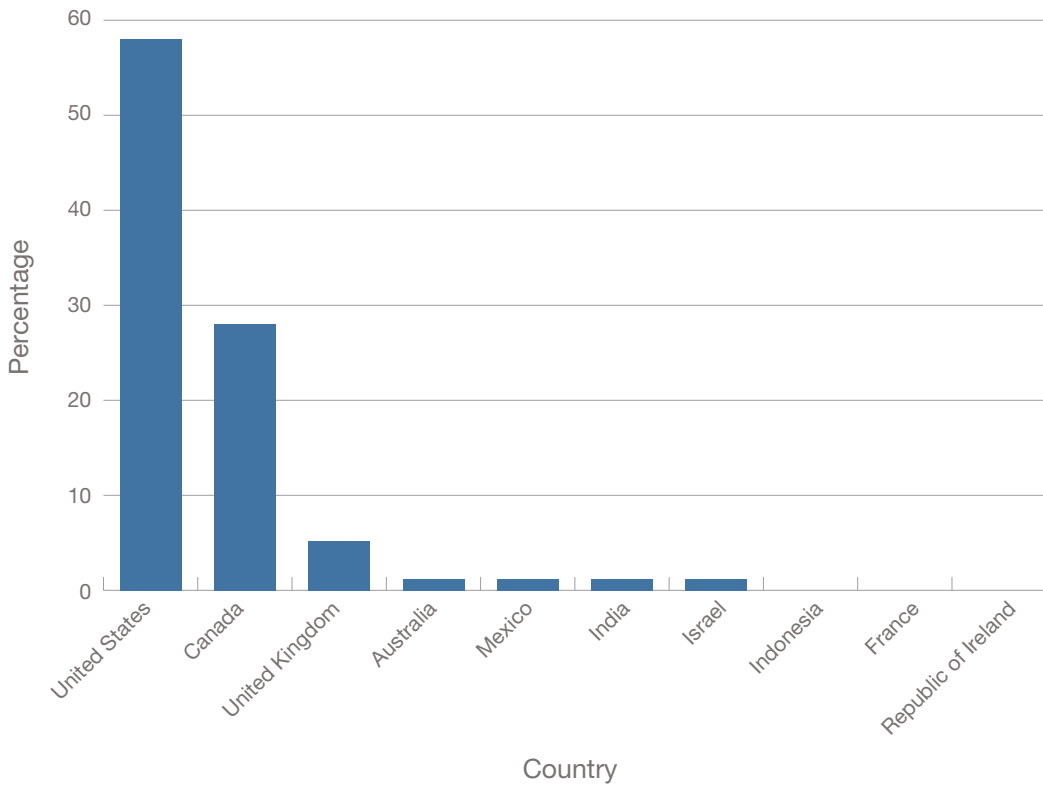
Canada has been forward-leaning in identifying the threats posed by REMVE and in using national tools to respond. In recent years, Canada's Parliament has produced multiple reports that study online extremist activity and has proposed concrete recommendations to address

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<sup>40</sup> Canada categorizes hate crimes against Jewish people as religiously motivated hate crimes (Greg Moreau, "Police-Reported Hate Crime in Canada, 2019," blog post, Statistics Canada, March 29, 2021; and Greg Moreau, "Police-Reported Crime Statistics in Canada, 2020," blog post, Statistics Canada, July 27, 2021).

<sup>41</sup> Simon Kemp, "Digital 2021: Canada," *DataReportal*, February 9, 2021b.

<sup>42</sup> Jacob Davey, Mackenzie Hart, and Cécile Guerin, *An Online Environmental Scan of Right-Wing Extremism in Canada*, Jonathan Birdwell, ed., London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020.

**FIGURE 4.2****Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Canada**

NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 12,392 pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 7,222; Canada = 3,526; United Kingdom = 638; Australia = 130; Mexico = 130; India = 96; Israel = 64; Indonesia = 53; France = 45; Republic of Ireland = 44. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

the problem.<sup>43</sup> These proposals include a whole-of-government approach to improving data collection and media literacy, countering discrimination, and increasing funding to counter online hate speech. In 2017, Canada launched the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence (Canada Centre), which now leads national efforts to counter radicalization to violence. The Centre's activities include issuing policy guidance (e.g., the development and implementation of the *National Strategy of Countering Radicalization to Violence*); promoting cooperation across a variety of stakeholders to build and share knowledge and respond to local-level issues around radicalization; funding, planning, and coordi-

<sup>43</sup> House of Commons, Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, *Taking Action to End Online Hate*, Ottawa, June 2019; and House of Commons, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, *Taking Action Against Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination Including Islamophobia*, Ottawa, February 2018.

nating research around radicalization; and supporting interventions to provide financial support to initiatives that seek to prevent radicalization.<sup>44</sup> The *National Strategy of Countering Radicalization to Violence*, published in 2018, engages with a variety of actors—from police to community organizations—to identify and prevent radicalization. A goal of the strategy includes addressing radicalization in the online space.<sup>45</sup> Canada has also designated multiple REMVE groups as terrorist entities, including Blood & Honour, Combat 18, the Proud Boys, Aryan Strikeforce, The Base, Atomwaffen Division, and Three Percenters.<sup>46</sup> Canada's Parliament also is debating the passage of a drafted Digital Charter, which includes a variety of regulations affecting online data and digital technology, including provisions related to violent extremist content online.<sup>47</sup>

## Denmark

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Denmark

Like its Nordic neighbors, Denmark saw a rise of radical right activity in the 1980s, a decade that was characterized by attacks on immigrants and refugees.<sup>48</sup> Far-right activity still predominately occurred in the context of political meetings, political propaganda, and demonstrations, and it was eventually confronted by an organized antiracist, antifascist movement. By the 2000s, the right-wing militant movement collapsed in favor of more-moderate right-wing political parties.<sup>49</sup> Neo-Nazis in Denmark did seek ties to other sympathetic groups in Europe in the 1990s, but this typically was a response to domestic groups' lack of ability to successfully recruit in large numbers within Denmark.<sup>50</sup> Militant Neo-Nazism has struggled to gain traction in the country given its history of violent Nazi occupation during World War II.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Public Safety Canada, "Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence," webpage, updated January 26, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence, *National Strategy on Countering Radicalization to Violence*, Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Public Safety Canada, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, "Canada's Digital Charter: Trust in a Digital World," webpage, modified January 12, 2021; Gillian R. Stacey, Elisa K. Kearney, Alysha Manji-Knight, and Teraleigh Stevenson, "New Privacy Law for Canada: Government Tables the *Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2020*," Davies, November 20, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> René Karpantschhof, and Flemming Mikkelsen, "The Rise and Transformation of the Radical Right Movement in Denmark, 1980–2015," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 40, No. 8, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Ravndal, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Karpantschhof and Mikkelsen, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Tore Bjørgo, "Investigating Terrorism from the Extreme Right: A Review of Past and Present Research," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6, December 2018.

There have been no lethal REMVE incidents in Denmark in nearly three decades. Hate crime numbers rose between 2017 and 2019, but this largely reflects a change in reporting practices that started in 2017. More than half of hate crimes in Denmark are motivated by racism or xenophobia (which is separated from anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, or anti-LGBTI hate crimes).<sup>52</sup>

Nationalist political parties in Denmark, such as the Danish People's Party, openly express xenophobic sentiment, and immigration long has been a heated political issue in Denmark. Far-right political parties that agitate for stricter immigration policies are active in government, but activism remains limited to within the contours of the political system.<sup>53</sup> Political parties, such as the Hard Line, which have gone so far as to advocate for the deportation of all Muslims from Denmark and the of banning Islam in the country, have performed too poorly to gain any seats in government.<sup>54</sup>

## Network Analysis Data

It is estimated that more than 80 percent of Denmark's population uses social media; Reddit and Twitter are popular social media platforms.<sup>55</sup> In our network analysis, we identified 1,217 unique users located in Denmark who are engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 0.06 percent of our sample. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, more than 50 percent of Denmark's connections were with the United States, and around 20 percent were to the United Kingdom; fewer than 10 percent of connections were limited to Denmark. This distribution was not uncommon to European countries included in our analysis (see Figure 4.3) Although we identified some connections between users in Denmark and Sweden, we found no evidence of a strong Nordic network.

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

Denmark has responded to REMVE incidents that have occurred in recent years. In response to an incident involving vandalism against Jewish properties, including the defacement of tombstones in a Jewish cemetery on the anniversary of Kristallnacht (the "night of broken glass") in 2019, Danish police arrested an NRM leader and an accomplice for the cemetery

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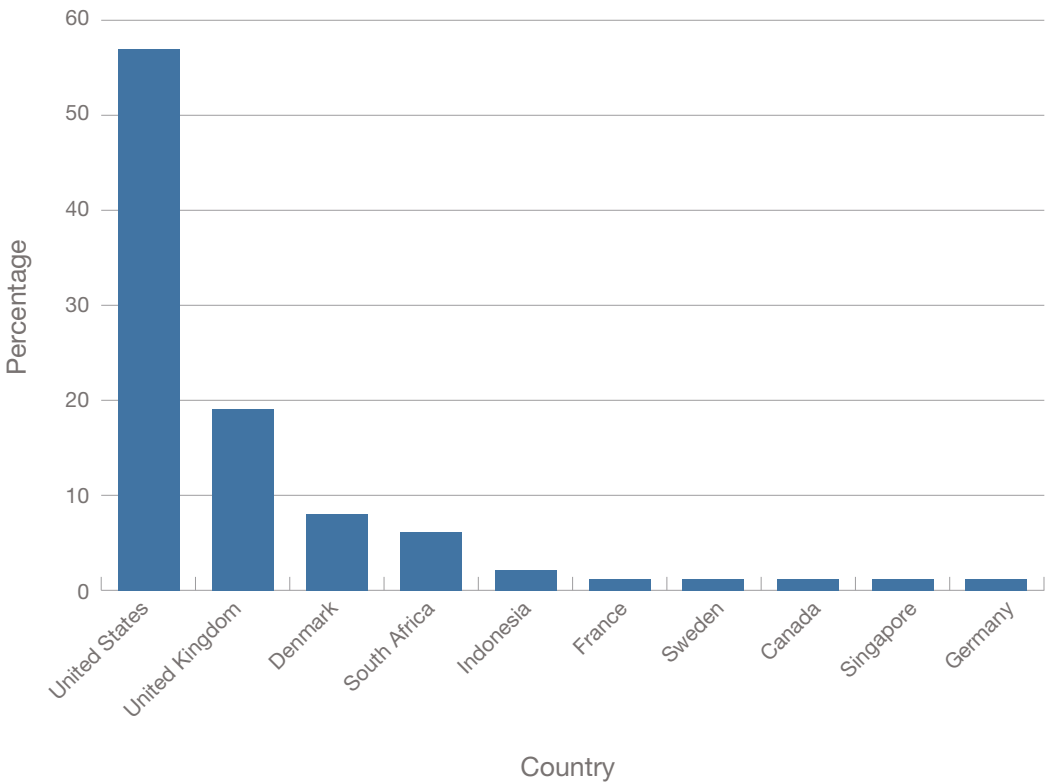
<sup>52</sup> Rigspolitiet, Nationalt Forebyggelsescenter [Denmark National Police, National Prevention Center], *Hadforbrydelser i 2019: Rigspolitiets årsrapport vedrørende hadforbrydelser* [Hate Crimes in 2019: The National Police's Annual Report on Hate Crimes], October 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Regin Winther Poulsen, "How the Danish Left Adopted a Far-Right Immigration Policy," *Foreign Policy*, July 12, 2021; and Jens Rydgren, "Radical Right-Wing Populism in Denmark and Sweden: Explaining Party System Change and Stability," *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Winter–Spring 2010.

<sup>54</sup> "Danish Far-Right Leader Paludan Jailed for Racism," BBC News, June 25, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Simon Kemp, "Digital 2021: Denmark," webpage, *DataReportal*, February 11, 2021c; and Statista Research Department, "Ranking of Social Networks in Denmark as of May 2021, by Market Share," webpage, June 2021a.

**FIGURE 4.3**  
**Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Denmark**



NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 155 Denmark pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 89, United Kingdom = 30, Denmark = 13, South Africa = 10, Indonesia = 3, France = 2, Sweden = 2, Canada = 2, Singapore = 1, Germany = 1. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

vandalism and applied charges of a hate crime.<sup>56</sup> Denmark also has a robust CVE program, although that program is currently oriented toward jihadist terrorism, which has presented a greater national threat relative to REMVE.<sup>57</sup>

Denmark’s latest national action plan for *Preventing and Countering Extremism and Radicalisation* was published in October 2016 and focuses on extremism broadly speaking rather than only violent extremism. Measures included in the plan are linked to several ongoing public efforts, including the fight against terrorism and social efforts aimed at integrating immigrant populations. Specific interventions that are outlined in the plan focus on individ-

<sup>56</sup> “Neo-Nazi Held in Denmark over Jewish Cemetery Attack,” BBC News, November 14, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, *An Introduction to the Danish Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism and Radicalization*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report No. 15, 2015.

uals who already belong to extremist groups, persons vulnerable to radicalization, and youth. Most CVE initiatives and interventions are undertaken as collaborations between municipalities, police services, schools, and social service providers.<sup>58</sup>

## Germany

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Germany

Germany regularly experiences anti-immigrant and racism-related violence, much of which occurs in the context of protests and marches. Right-wing terrorism in Germany historically has been characterized by “long-term, low-intensity right-wing terrorist warfare,” as opposed to large-scale attacks.<sup>59</sup> One study identified 108 right-wing terrorist actors who were responsible for more than 3,000 attacks since 1979; in nearly two-thirds of those cases, violent acts were carried out by small groups of individuals, and lone actors were responsible for 20 percent of offenses.<sup>60</sup> Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution counted 33,300 far-right extremists as being active in Germany in 2020; some 40 percent of these extremists are also believed to support violence for political ends.<sup>61</sup> The office has found that violent extremists are a mix of long-term, highly radicalized right-wing activists and individuals with no previous ties to the organized extreme-right movement, who are typically unknown to law enforcement before attacks or plots uncovered by police.<sup>62</sup>

Xenophobia is the primary motive behind recent far-right attacks in Germany. Migrants, Jewish people, and Muslims all have been targets of recent violence, as have politicians advocating for pro-immigration and pro-refugee policies.<sup>63</sup> Notably, analyses also show that the significant increase in refugees arriving in Germany between 2015 and 2016 coincided with an equally significant uptick in extreme-right violence.<sup>64</sup> Since 1990, anywhere from 109 to 208 people have been killed in Germany in right-wing extremist homicides.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Jenniina Kotajoki, *Preventing Violent Extremism and Crime in the Nordic Countries: Similarities, Synergies, and Ambiguities*, Stockholm: SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, No. 2018/3, September 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Koehler, “Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe: Current Developments and Issues for the Future,” *Prism*, Vol. 6, No. 2, July 2016.

<sup>60</sup> German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies, “Database on Terrorism in Germany: Right-Wing Extremism and Jihadism,” webpage, undated.

<sup>61</sup> *Federal News Network*, “Rise in Far-Right Extremists Seen in Germany Last Year,” Associated Press, June 15, 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Koehler, “Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What Are the Contextual Factors Behind ‘Hive Terrorism?’” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6, December 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Koehler, *Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, February 2019a.

<sup>65</sup> Counter Extremism Project, 2020b.

Germany has had recent mass-casualty incidents that were caused by REMVE actors. In October 2019, a neo-Nazi attempted to storm a synagogue in Halle, Germany, armed with guns, homemade explosives, and a head-mounted camera to livestream his attack. Although he ultimately failed to gain entry, he killed two and injured two. He vowed to “kill as many anti-Whites as possible, Jews preferred” and had written a manifesto filled with anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi messages.<sup>66</sup> In February 2020, a far-right extremist killed nine people at two separate hookah bars in Hanau, Germany. He published a manifesto in which he outlined his plans for global ethnic cleansing and vented about women, and he named more than two dozen countries where he believed “the entire population needs to be annihilated.”<sup>67</sup> That same month, German police arrested 12 members of the far-right terror group The Hard Core, who had been plotting to launch a string of coordinated Christchurch-like attacks on mosques across Germany with the ultimate goal of kicking off a civil war.<sup>68</sup>

As we discussed in Chapter Two, research studies on REMVE offline recruitment often have focused on Germany, where the heavy metal/rock music and MMA scenes have been hubs for recruitment. Because of recent efforts by the German government to shut down REMVE concerts, a growing number are taking place in semi-private venues. They are publicized through online platforms, such as Telegram, and advertised as private and “safe” environments at which extremists can socialize and connect with other like-minded individuals.<sup>69</sup> The yearly martial arts tournament Battle of the Nibelungs, which is organized by a member of one of Germany’s far-right political parties and leader of the neo-Nazi group Combat 18, Thorsten Heise, is one of the largest REMVE-associated MMA events. Visitors from other European countries have also participated in the tournament.<sup>70</sup> The Shield and Sword Festival, organized each year in Ostritz to mark Adolf Hitler’s birthday, combines rock concerts, an MMA tournament, political speeches, and vendors selling far-right streetwear brands. In addition to Germans, the event draws extremists from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the United States.<sup>71</sup>

Starting in 2020, large demonstrations against COVID-19 lockdown measures brought together a broad spectrum of groups, including conspiracy theorists, members of Rechtsbürger (a far-right group that denies the legitimacy of the post-World War II German state), vaccination skeptics, Alternative for Germany party members, Identitarians, and neo-Nazis. Extremist groups have hijacked political, social, economic, and medical concerns throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, benefiting from the insecurity that resulted from changes imposed

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<sup>66</sup> Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020; and Counter Extremism Project, *Germany: Extremism and Terrorism*, New York, undated-a.

<sup>69</sup> Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Hume, 2018.

on the day-to-day life of Germans. As in many other countries, extremist groups have spread disinformation and conspiracy theories to exploit these societal insecurities and divide communities and advance their political agendas.<sup>72</sup>

## Network Analysis Data

Germany's population is active on social media, with more than three-fourths of the population being active social media users. Twitter and Reddit are popular social media platforms, but Telegram in particular is very popular in Germany compared with other countries.<sup>73</sup> Toward the middle of 2019, many far-right extremists and extremist groups migrated away from conventional social media and other online platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, and toward encrypted communications platforms, such as Telegram. The migration was largely a reaction to these conventional platforms' adherence to Germany's Network Enforcement Act, which forces large social media networks to remove any content deemed "manifestly unlawful" under German law, such as incitement to hatred. Telegram is now the main messaging tool for German far-right extremists, although some prominent far-right channels have been moving away from that platform and encouraging their users to move to the dark web.<sup>74</sup> German REMVE extremists also use VK, which is generally popular in Germany, to share right-wing music, neo-Nazi violence videos, and Nazi texts. Extremists in Germany have also accessed the British video portal BitChute for similar activities.<sup>75</sup>

In our network analysis, we identified 10,778 unique users located in Germany who are engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 0.57 percent of our sample. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, nearly 50 percent of Germany's connections were with the United States and around 20 percent were to the United Kingdom; fewer than 10 percent of connections were confined to Germany. This distribution was not uncommon to European countries that we included in our analysis (see Figure 4.4.)

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

As of August 2020, Germany's Military Counterintelligence Service was investigating as many as 600 cases of right-wing extremism within the German military. Most offenses were related to propaganda and racist commentary, although a handful of members were arrested

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<sup>72</sup> Jakob Guhl, "Crisis and Loss of Control—Digital Extremism in German-Speaking Countries During the Covid-19 Crisis," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, December 17, 2020.

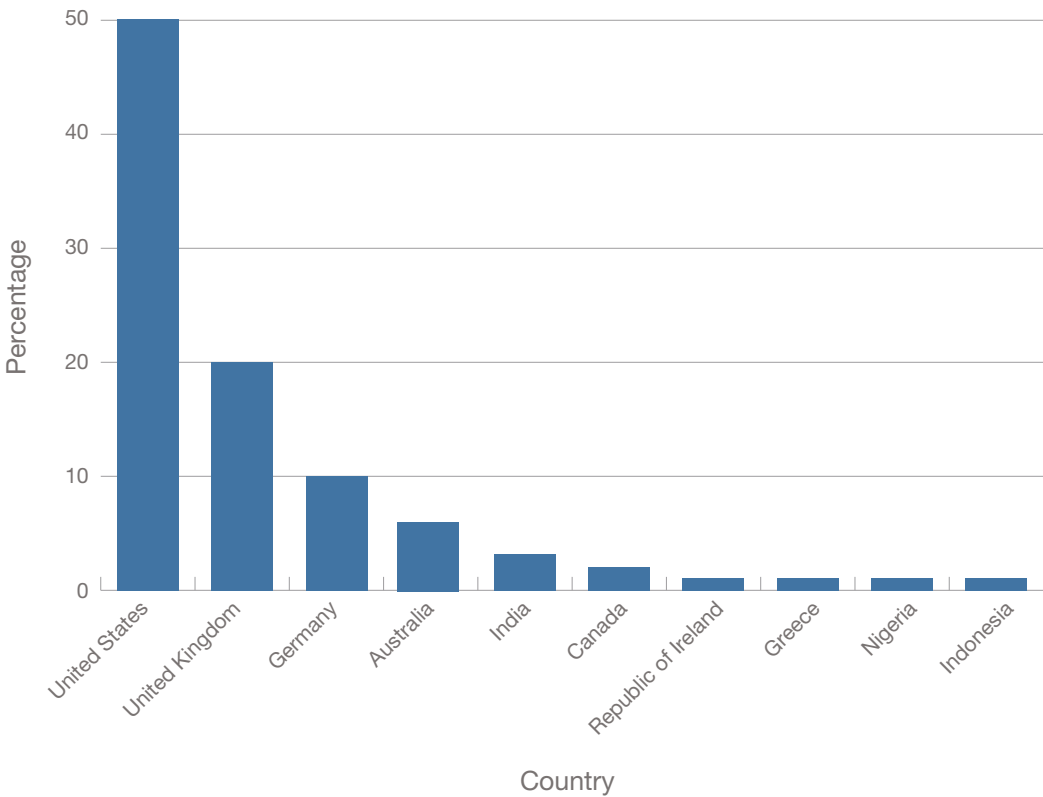
<sup>73</sup> Kemp, 2021; Statista Research Department, "Social Media Used in Germany as of 3rd Quarter 2020, by Share of Respondents," webpage, September 2020; Mark Scott, "Ahead of German Election, Telegram Plays Radicalizing Role," *Politico*, September 22, 2021; and Jordan Wildon and Kristina Gildejeva, "Assessing the Scale of German Language Disinformation Communities on Telegram," *Logically*, September 10, 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Caniglia, Winkler, and Métais, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Counter Extremism Project, 2020b.



**FIGURE 4.4**  
**Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Germany**



NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 1,054 Germany pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 531, United Kingdom = 209, Germany = 103, Australia = 59, India = 28, Canada = 22, Republic of Ireland = 10, Greece = 9, Nigeria = 8, Indonesia = 6. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

in 2018 for plotting to form a neo-Nazi cell within their unit.<sup>76</sup> The German government has implemented new measures to root out extremists from its security services, although intelligence agencies expect the threat to continue into the future.<sup>77</sup> Germany has also banned a handful of far-right extremist groups in recent years, including Blood & Honour, Phalanx 18, Combat 18, Nordadler, and Alternative for Germany Flügel.<sup>78</sup> Germany has launched several

<sup>76</sup> Counter Extremism Project, 2020b.

<sup>77</sup> Florian Flade, “The Insider Threat: Far-Right Extremism in the German Military and Police,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 14, No. 5, June 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-a. Germany’s Interior Ministry has noted that the neo-Nazi group Nordadler operates primarily online.

community-based programs in partnership with NGOs to help prevent far-right extremism. EXIT-Deutschland, founded in 2000, facilitates the deradicalization of right-wing extremists.<sup>79</sup>

In November 2020, the German government announced that it would provide more than 1 billion euros to fight racism and right-wing extremism between 2021 and 2024, and it presented a list of 89 measures to be taken in support of this objective. Together, these measures will help to (1) generate greater awareness of racism as a societal phenomenon in Germany and enhance cooperation across security agencies, the judiciary, and relevant state civil society organizations; (2) extend the work of existing efforts to prevent right-wing extremism and racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of discrimination, including online; (3) provide additional support to victims of racist discrimination; and (4) strengthen equal opportunities for migrants to participate in society.<sup>80</sup>

Germany also takes a very forward-leaning stance against extremist speech and censures far-right, racist propaganda and rhetoric. In September 2015, the government formed a task force that joined together government agencies, technology companies, industry associations, and activists to help curb online hate speech. Two years later, the German parliament adopted new legislation cracking down on hate speech, criminal material, and misinformation on social media platforms. The previously mentioned Network Enforcement Act requires social media companies to remove illegal content and hate speech from their platforms within 24 hours of receiving a notification and also enables the government to levy fines on social media companies in cases of noncompliance. The law also mandates that social media companies publish detailed reports on the number of complaints that they receive and on the countermeasures that they deploy.<sup>81</sup> An amendment to the law, approved in February 2020, requires social media companies to report instances of far-right propaganda, portrayals of violence, murder or rape threats, and posts indicating that someone is preparing an attack on the police; it also expands the definition of criminal hate speech to include threats of rape or property damage and expressions of approval for serious crimes.<sup>82</sup>

## New Zealand

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in New Zealand

Much of the focus on REMVE and extreme right-wing threats in New Zealand is defined by the March 2019 attack on a mosque and Islamic center that killed or injured more than 90 people; this is a direct result of that event's scale and terrible consequences. However, the

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<sup>79</sup> EXIT-Deutschland, homepage, undated.

<sup>80</sup> Cabinet Committee, "A Clear Signal in the Fight Against Right-Wing Extremism and Racism," webpage, Federal Government of Germany, November 25, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Heidi Tworek, "How Germany Is Tackling Hate Speech: New Legislation Targets U.S. Social Media Companies," *Foreign Affairs*, May 16, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-a.

country's broader history includes enduring concerns about threats arising from such causes as White supremacy.<sup>83</sup> The neo-Nazi organization Fourth Reich, which emerged in New Zealand in the early 2000s, and the right-wing Dominion Movement, which emerged in the late 2010s and rebranded itself as Action Zealania, all present significant security concerns.<sup>84</sup> Extreme-right activism primarily has been limited to protests, poster and leaflet distribution, and online communication, as opposed to violent action.<sup>85</sup> New Zealand's Security Intelligence Service's Combined Threat Assessment Group defines right-wing extremism in New Zealand as "generally fragmented in nature and [with] a significant presence online."<sup>86</sup> There is an acknowledgement that the scale of far-right extremism in New Zealand is difficult to ascertain, particularly given the reality that many far-right violent actors went underground in the wake of the Christchurch attacks.

## Network Analysis Data

More than 80 percent of New Zealand's population is estimated to use social media, with Reddit and Twitter being popular platforms; more than one-fifth of the population accesses these platforms.<sup>87</sup> A 2021 study of the online environment in New Zealand found that far-right groups were the most active in the country (compared with left-wing, Islamist, and conspiracy theory-focused actors), and accounted for more than half of all online posts.<sup>88</sup> Although the analysis saw some international connections (i.e., mentions of events and actors in other countries by New Zealand-based extremists and vice versa), the researchers concluded that "New Zealand extremists are more interested in their international counterparts than vice versa."<sup>89</sup>

In our network analysis, we identified 2,581 unique users located in New Zealand who engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 0.14 percent of our sample. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, nearly 60 percent of New Zealand connections were with the United States. More than 10 percent of geolocated pairs were user-to-user links that were confined to New Zealand; after these, the strongest connections were to other English-speaking countries—the United Kingdom and Australia (see Figure 4.5.)

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<sup>83</sup> Kieran Ford, "Mapping the New Zealand Far-Right," *Peace Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> John Battersby and Rhys Ball, "Christchurch in the Context of New Zealand Terrorism and Right Wing Extremism," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2019; and Comerford, Guhl, and Thomas, 2021, p. 49.

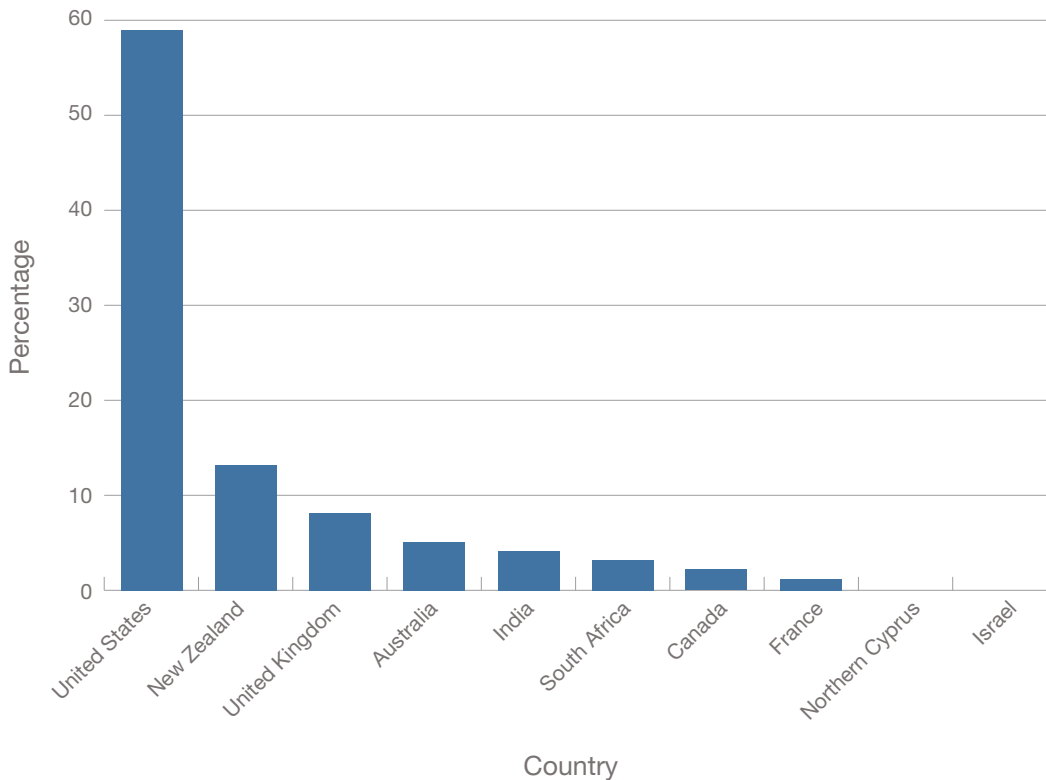
<sup>85</sup> Ford, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Summary of New Zealand's Terrorism Risk Profile*, Wellington: New Zealand Government, June 2019, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Kemp, 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Milo Comerford, Jakob Guhl, and Carl Miller, *Understanding the New Zealand Online Extremist Ecosystem*, London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Comerford, Guhl, and Miller, 2021, p. 16.

**FIGURE 4.5****Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to New Zealand**

NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 397 New Zealand pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 235; New Zealand = 53; United Kingdom = 32; Australia = 18; India = 17; South Africa = 13; Canada = 8; France = 2; Northern Cyprus = 1; Israel = 1. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

The Christchurch attacks prompted a national pivot in counterterrorism law and responding to terrorist threats. Shortly after the March 2019 attacks, the government established a Royal Commission of Inquiry to investigate what happened. The Commission of Inquiry published a report in December 2020 that called out failings and intelligence gaps and outlined 44 recommendations organized under four main themes: (1) improving New Zealand’s counterterrorism effort; (2) revamping the country’s firearms licensing system; (3) supporting the ongoing recovery of victims’ families, survivors, and witnesses; and (4) improving social cohesion and New Zealand’s response to an increasingly diverse population.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> See the summary of the Christchurch Commission Report in Clair Meyer, “New Zealand Reassesses Counterterrorism Post-Christchurch,” *Security Management*, March/April 2021; and Daniel Byman, “Reflections on the Christchurch Commission Report,” blog post, *Lawfare*, December 10, 2020b.

Notably, although New Zealand has a list of designated terrorist organizations, expanding the number of designated groups is still a focus of policy debate.<sup>91</sup> As of this writing, no right-wing extremist groups—only the Christchurch gunman as an individual—have been added to the list.<sup>92</sup> Other domestic counterterrorism activities include socially focused initiatives that promote greater social inclusion and engage vulnerable communities, interventions for at-risk persons, the production of counter-violent extremist messaging and content, and activities focused on reducing access to resources needed for attacks.<sup>93</sup>

Internationally, New Zealand led the Christchurch Call, an effort to respond to and regulate hate on social media. The Call includes voluntary participation from 57 governments and ten large internet and social media providers.<sup>94</sup>

## Norway

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Norway

Similar to its Nordic neighbors, far-right extremism in Norway originated in the mid-1970s and 1980s and reached a peak with the neo-Nazi skinhead movement of the 1990s, even if its movement remained the smallest among the Nordic countries.<sup>95</sup> Attacks targeted immigrants and minorities using firebombs, small explosives, knives, and firearms, but they did not cause any fatalities.<sup>96</sup> Such groups as the Boot Boys adopted the White power, skinhead subculture that developed in other European countries; there was an added dimension of Viking symbols and Norse mythology. Although threats emanated from both National Socialist and ethnonational groups during this time, most groups were representative of the latter.<sup>97</sup> Far-right activity gradually slowed in the early 2000s and lost significant following after the 2001 murder of Benjamin Hermansen, a 15-year old boy of mixed Norwegian and

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<sup>91</sup> Katie Scotcher, “New Zealand’s Terror List Needs to Be Expanded—Experts,” *Radio New Zealand*, March 22, 2021.

<sup>92</sup> New Zealand Police, undated.

<sup>93</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019.

<sup>94</sup> Courtney C. Radsch, “On Christchurch Call Anniversary, a Step Closer to Eradicating Terrorism Online?” *JustSecurity*, May 21, 2021; Christchurch Call to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online, “Supporters,” webpage, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, undated.

<sup>95</sup> Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Right-Wing Terrorism and Militancy in the Nordic Countries: A Comparative Case Study,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 30, No. 5, 2018a.

<sup>96</sup> Keiran Hardy, “Countering Right-Wing Extremism: Lessons from Germany and Norway,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2019; and Ravndal, 2018a.

<sup>97</sup> Tore Bjørgo and Ingvild Magnæs Gjelsvik, *Right-Wing Extremists and Anti-Islam Activists in Norway: Constraints Against Violence*, Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism, C-REX Working Paper Series No. 3, December 2017.

Ghanian descent.<sup>98</sup> The drop-off has also been attributed to the success of local prevention efforts, which some studies argued led to the “virtual collapse of organized neo-Nazism by 2010.”<sup>99</sup> The contemporary movement comprises mainly older and inactive members of various anti-Islamist and neo-Nazi groups, such as Vigrid, Pegida, Stop the Islamization of Norway, Soldiers of Odin, Norwegian Defence League, NRM, and a handful of others.<sup>100</sup>

Groups, such as NRM, started to engage in more public activities, such as marches and handing out flyers, from 2016 onward. Relative to activists in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, however, Norwegian members of NRM are less involved in violence and crime. (According to RTV data, only one NRM attack occurred in Norway between 2007 and 2019, compared with 16 in Sweden and six in Finland).<sup>101</sup> Although some anti-Islam groups have successfully attracted new followers over the last five to seven years, recruitment has been limited to online platforms and networks, and groups have not engaged in violent activism.<sup>102</sup> Although young men and teenagers are identified as the most at-risk demographics for radicalization by Norwegian authorities, there also is belief that the drop in xenophobic sentiment among the country’s youth population contributes to a reduced threat.<sup>103</sup>

The July 2011 attacks in Oslo and Utøya, which killed 77 and injured hundreds, are significant in the context of contemporary far-right terrorism: Other violent REMVE actors claim these attacks as inspiration. However, in the context of REMVE trends in Norway, the perpetrator of these attacks is considered a lone wolf who self-radicalized online rather than a reflection of a growing national threat. The only other recent lethal incident in Norway occurred in August 2019, when a Norwegian man killed his stepsister of Chinese origin and opened fire at an Islamic center in Oslo, injuring one. He stated that his attacks were inspired by other foreign far-right violent actors and that “white Europeans were facing a genocide and will end up as a minority in their own home countries.”<sup>104</sup>

## Network Analysis Data

In our network analysis, we identified 1,607 unique users located in Norway who engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 0.08 percent of our sample. For connections where both

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<sup>98</sup> Katrine Fangen and Maria Reite Nilsen, “Variations Within the Norwegian Far Right: From Neo-Nazism to Anti-Islamism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2020.

<sup>99</sup> Lorenzo Vidino and James Brandon, *Countering Radicalization in Europe*, London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Fangen and Nilsen, 2020.

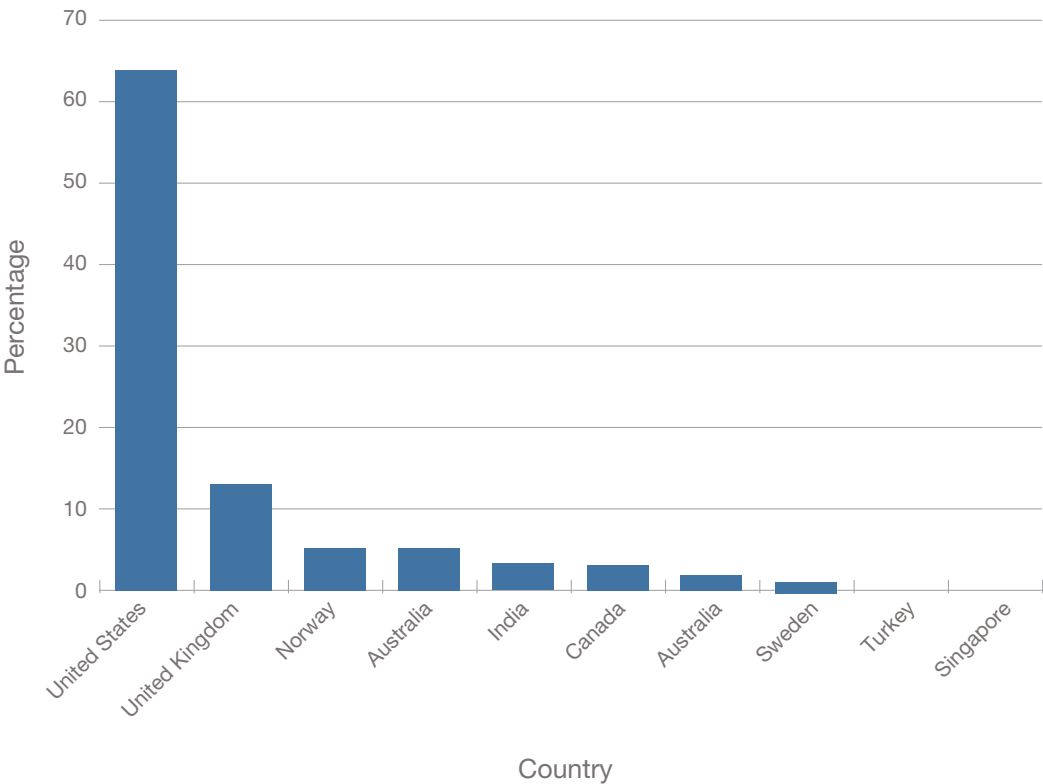
<sup>101</sup> Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains Its Use of Violence,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 6, December 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Ravndal, 2018a.

<sup>103</sup> Nina Berglund, “PST Sees a Rise in Far-Right Threats,” *Norway News*, August 11, 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Counter Extremism Project, *Norway: Extremism and Terrorism*, New York, undated-b.

**FIGURE 4.6**  
**Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Norway**



NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 263 Norway pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 168, United Kingdom = 33, Norway = 14, Nigeria = 14, India = 8, Canada = 7, Australia = 4, Sweden = 3, Turkey = 1, Singapore = 1. Results include only the initially geolocated data, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

sides could be geolocated, nearly two-thirds were with the United States, and there were very few connections to other Nordic states (see Figure 4.6).

### National-Level Counter-Efforts

Norway has a longer history of addressing the threat from right-wing extremism (specifically neo-Nazi and ethnonationalist groups) relative to many other countries; its efforts began in the 1990s with EXIT-Norway.<sup>105</sup> Evidence from prior research suggests that CVE efforts in particular have been successful compared with similar ones in other countries that have a shorter history when it comes to addressing right-wing extremism.<sup>106</sup> Relative to other

<sup>105</sup> Hardy, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Bjørge and Gjelsvik, 2017.

Nordic countries (and other European countries more broadly), police in Norway have taken a more proactive and preventive approach when it comes to addressing far-right violence.<sup>107</sup> Norway's approach to CVE is built on a model whereby local crime-prevention measures are coordinated across nearly half of the country's municipalities. The multi-agency strategy targets youth and young adults up to the age of 23, and includes "empowerment conversations" in which police, acting as mentors, speak with youth affected by far-right extremism.<sup>108</sup> The policy dates back to the 1990s and is grounded in Norway's long tradition of community policing. Starting in 2003, the Norwegian Police Security Service held such conversations with 95 members and associates of Vigrid, a neo-Nazi group that draws on Norse mythology; more than half of the group has since left the organization.<sup>109</sup> Notably, Norway's CVE efforts have developed organically over time through a variety of programs implemented at the local level; they are not byproducts of a national-level strategy (an example of practice dictating strategy in which the NGO sector and regional and local governments play leading roles).<sup>110</sup>

Following the 2011 Oslo and Utøya attacks, Norway changed its terrorism law and emergency preparedness legislation: Provisions to the law, added in 2013, closed the "lone offender" loophole, which previously had required proof of a large conspiracy for a terrorism conviction and also criminalized participation in terrorist training. In 2014, the Norwegian government issued a new action plan against radicalization and extremism, a whole-of-government approach to CVE that includes strengthening research on CVE, improving national and local cooperation counter-radicalization efforts, promoting the reintegration of former violent extremists, and working to prevent recruitment and radicalization to violent extremism online.<sup>111</sup> In 2016, the country also issued a new Action Plan Against Antisemitism (2016–2020), which outlined 11 measures to combat anti-Semitism and the government ministries responsible for specific measures, and it added new amendments to its penal code to criminalize travel or attempts to travel abroad to participate in armed conflict.<sup>112</sup> Norway also cooperates with European Union states and the United States in various information- and intelligence-sharing initiatives as part of its counterterrorism strategy.<sup>113</sup> Compared with other countries, Norway has adopted strong legislation against hate speech. However, many hate speech cases that are brought before a court of law are eventually dismissed; analysts describe this approach as a reflection of "Norway's overall ethos in counter-radicalization

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<sup>107</sup> Bjørge and Ravndal, 2020.

<sup>108</sup> Hardy, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Bjørge and Gjelsvik, 2017; and Vidino and Brandon, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Hardy, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, *Action Plan Against Radicalization and Violent Extremism*, Oslo, August 28, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, *Action Plan Against Antisemitism 2016–2020*, Oslo, 2016.

<sup>113</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-b.



efforts, which emphasize ‘reform rather than punishment . . . to help guide young people away from radicalization and potentially negative influences, and to inspire them to achieve their goals through mainstream processes.’”<sup>114</sup> In 2019, Norway’s National Criminal Investigation Service established a new center for digital policing to confront the rise in online hate speech. Although a small number of cases of online hate speech and threats have been prosecuted and led to several convictions, many cases remain in legal gray areas.<sup>115</sup>

## Russia

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Russia

Far-right ultranationalist extremism and neo-Nazism in particular have been on the rise in Russia since the 1990s.<sup>116</sup> A poll by the Levada Center in 2016 indicated that as much as 52 percent of Russians support the idea of “Russia for ethnic Russians,”<sup>117</sup> and right-wing extremism generally is not socially stigmatized, at least relative to Western European contexts. Right-wing violence in Russia is not homogenous: Some is committed by unorganized individuals, while other violence is more organized and perpetrated by such groups as violent youth gangs. Far-right violence also has been linked to party policies and uniformed paramilitary structures.<sup>118</sup>

Far-right violence in Russia in the 1990s was mostly a series of ad-hoc attacks that had little organizational basis. Through the 2000s, the violence became more organized, and far-right attacks increasingly targeted non-White migrants. This shift largely was characterized by the rise of skinhead movements and associated violence in the country and the rise of groups such as the Movement Against Illegal Immigration and Russian Social Movement.<sup>119</sup> In 2008, there was a peak in levels of far-right violence across Russia: During that year, there were more than 200 violent far-right attacks in Russia, and the annual Russian March drew thousands of nationalist supporters across Russian cities. Large-scale, far-right urban riots occurred in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2013.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Vidino and Brandon, 2012.

<sup>115</sup> Bjørge and Ravndal, 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018, pp. 156–157.

<sup>117</sup> Counter Extremism Project, *Russia: Extremism and Terrorism*, New York, undated-c.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš, “Right-Wing Extremist Violence in the Russian Federation,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, January 2011.

<sup>119</sup> Laruelle, 2018, p. 163; Nicu Popescu, “Putinism Under Siege: The Strange Alliance of Democrats and Nationalists,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 23, No. 2, July 2012; and Vera Tolz and Sue-Ann Harding, “From ‘Compatriots’ to ‘Aliens’: The Changing Coverage of Migration on Russian Television,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3, July 2015.

<sup>120</sup> Richard Arnold and Lawrence P. Markowitz, “The Evolution of Violence Within Far-Right Mobilization: Evidence from Russia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 9, 2018.

Today, neo-Nazi symbology is especially popular among certain groups and gangs of youth, notably violent soccer hooligans.<sup>121</sup> These groups (or *firms*, as they are commonly called) have served as a machine for recruiting and radicalizing young men to the far right across Russia. Some have participated in *white wagon attacks*, in which groups of racists board trains and attack anyone appearing to be of non-Slavic descent. Individual members of these firms also are responsible for upticks in attacks against immigrants throughout Russia.<sup>122</sup>

However, is it difficult to understand trends in REMVE violence in Russia given the sparsity of data and information on significant far-right attacks in Russia. The RTV-RUSSIA event data set provides information on right-wing terrorist and violent events from 2000 to 2017. It shows that compared with violent right-wing extremism in Western European contexts, Russian right-wing militants have operated more violently (attacks are more frequent) and more purposefully (a larger share of attacks are premeditated).<sup>123</sup> Taking into account differences in population size, Russia has seen five times more far-right violence than the United States, nearly four times more violence than Germany, and twice as much violence as Sweden.<sup>124</sup> There have been few mass attacks, however, such that “right-wing violence and terrorism in Russia has been a low-scale phenomenon like in Western Europe, but with a substantially higher frequency.”<sup>125</sup> Right-wing militant attacks in Russia primarily have targeted racial and ethnic minorities, most often non-White immigrants.<sup>126</sup> Two recent notable incidents that appear to have REMVE connections were an April 2017 shooting on a Federal Security Service office in Khabarovsk that might have been committed by a neo-Nazi that killed two (as well as the assailant), and the July 2019 murder of prominent LGBTQI activist and rights campaigner Yelena Grigoryeva in St. Petersburg.<sup>127</sup>

RIM, an extreme-right White supremacist militant organization based in St. Petersburg, promotes ethnic Russian nationalism, advocates for the restoration of Russia’s tsarist regime, and seeks to fuel White supremacy in the West. The group maintains “contacts with neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups across Europe and the U.S. [and] has provided paramilitary training to Russian nationals and members of like-minded organizations from other

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<sup>121</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-c.

<sup>122</sup> Simon Parkin, “The Rise of Russia’s Neo-Nazi Football Hooligans,” *The Guardian*, April 24, 2018.

<sup>123</sup> Johannes Due Enstad, “Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Putin’s Russia,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6, December 2018. RTV-RUSSIA includes the following types of violent events: attacks with a fatal outcome; attacks/known plots involving explosive devices; and *pogroms*, defined as onslaughts involving large groups of attackers typically targeting marketplaces or migrant dormitories. The data set does not include nonfatal attacks involving the use of deadly weapons, such as knives.

<sup>124</sup> Enstad, 2018.

<sup>125</sup> Enstad, 2018, p. 92.

<sup>126</sup> Enstad, 2018.

<sup>127</sup> Erin Miller, Gary LaFree, and Laura Dugan, “Global Terrorism Database,” database, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, updated 2018.

countries at its facilities in St. Petersburg.”<sup>128</sup> Members of the group’s armed wing, Imperial Legion, also have fought alongside pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and likely have been involved in Russia’s conflicts in Libya and Syria. The group did not feature prominently in the public record until it started supporting pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine in 2014; it attracted international attention when it began asserting a leadership role in the transnational White supremacist movement.<sup>129</sup> Specifically, the group co-founded the World National-Conservative Movement in 2015, a network of extreme-right groups from around the world that promotes the use of violence in the service of its ideology. Such groups as the National Democratic Party (Germany), the NRM (Sweden), and the American Freedom Party (United States) all were invited to join, among others.<sup>130</sup> In January 2017, members of NRM who had received 11 days of training at a RIM paramilitary program in Russia conducted an attack against a refugee center in Gothenburg, Sweden.<sup>131</sup> That same year, RIM members traveled to the United States with the goal of networking with U.S. citizens. Leaders of the neo-Nazi Traditionalist Workers’ Party hosted RIM leaders in Washington, D.C.<sup>132</sup> The United States designated RIM as an SDGT in April 2020.<sup>133</sup>

As we will discuss more in our “Ukraine” section, recent analysis suggests that Russian intervention in Ukraine’s Crimea and Donbas regions has also spurred far-right extremism in Russia and beyond its borders.<sup>134</sup> Russia also has become a source of financial and logistical support for certain U.S.-based White nationalist groups, such as The Base.<sup>135</sup>

## Network Analysis Data

Our analysis does not include the most popular social media platform in Russia, VK, but a 2019 analysis of right-wing radical communities on the platform identified a total of 42 such communities, 13 of which were considered extreme. Only two of the identified groups

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<sup>128</sup> Mapping Militant Organizations, 2021.

<sup>129</sup> Mapping Militant Organizations, 2021.

<sup>130</sup> Soufan Center, *Special Report: Inside the Russian Imperial Movement: Practical Implications of U.S. Sanctions*, New York, April 2020a.

<sup>131</sup> Soufan Center, 2020a.

<sup>132</sup> Ezel Sahinkaya and Danila Galperovich, “Radical Russian Imperial Movement Expanding Global Outreach,” *VOA News*, May 9, 2020; and Casey Michel, “Russian, American White Nationalists Raise Their Flags in Washington,” *ThinkProgress*, September 22, 2017.

<sup>133</sup> Although RIM is sometimes referred to as a designated terrorist organization, RIM has not been added to the U.S. list of FTOs. SDGT is primarily a sanctions-related designation and does not trigger criminal liability for those providing material support to the group in the same way as those on the FTO list (Jon Lewis and Mary B. McCord, “The State Department Should Designate the Russian Imperial Movement as a Foreign Terrorist Organization,” blog post, *Lawfare*, April 14, 2020).

<sup>134</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-c.

<sup>135</sup> Julian E. Barnes and Adam Goldman, “Russia Trying to Stoke U.S. Racial Tensions Before Election, Officials Say,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2020.

remained active as of 2017, as a result of censorship by Russian authorities: These communities often also openly criticize Russian authorities.<sup>136</sup> Another study of VK from 2012–2016 found government bans on the extreme right led to an increase in the number of smaller, so-called shelter groups that retain their ideological underpinnings but abandon explicit hate speech online. Users also moved to Telegram.<sup>137</sup>

In our network analysis, we identified 3,356 unique users located in Russia who engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 0.18 percent of our sample. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, nearly 60 percent were with the United States, and nearly 30 percent were with the United Kingdom. Only around 5 percent were Russia-to-Russia ties, and there were very few ties to other locations in Europe (Figure 4.7).

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

Russia has taken an aggressive stance against extremism in censoring online spaces and creating counter-extremism laws; however, in both cases, Russia has interpreted these authorities to often target political dissenters, religious minorities, and other nonviolent groups. The 2002 Federal Law of the Russian Federation on Countering Extremist Activity, for example, which allows the government to sanction individuals, groups, and media organizations that are labeled as extremist but otherwise does not define extremism, has been used to target Jehovah's Witnesses. Other laws also have been used to justify banning specific social media networks and messaging services, such as Telegram and LinkedIn, for failure to turn users' data over to the government.<sup>138</sup>

Conversely, Russia has allowed far-right extremist groups, such as RIM, to operate relatively freely: Russian authorities knowingly tolerate RIM's paramilitary camps and have thus far not taken any action to disrupt or combat the group's violent activities despite knowledge of its operations.<sup>139</sup> This lack of counterterrorism pressure has allowed the group to form connections with other like-minded groups abroad.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Mikhail Myagkov, Evgeniy Shchekotin, Sergey I. Chudinov, and Vyacheslav L. Goiko, "A Comparative Analysis of Right-Wing Radical and Islamist Communities' Strategies for Survival in Social Networks (Evidence from the Russian Social Network *Vkontakte*)," *Media, War and Conflict*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2019.

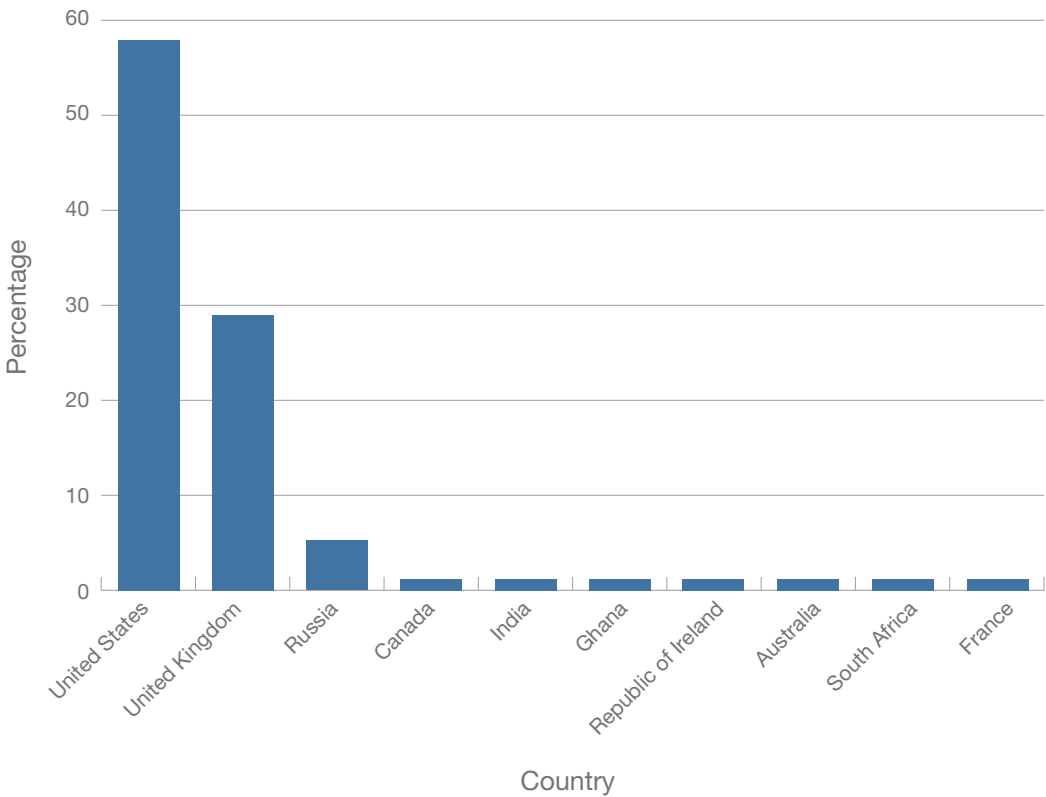
<sup>137</sup> Vitaliy V. Kashpur, Mikhail Myagkov, Alexi A. Baryshev, Viacheslav L. Goiko, and Evgeniy V. Schekotin, "Where Russian Online Nationalists Go When Their Communities Are Banned: A Case Study of Russian Nationalism," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2020.

<sup>138</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-c.

<sup>139</sup> Andrew Roth, "A Right-Wing Militia Trains Russians to Fight the Next War—With or Without Putin," *Washington Post*, January 2, 2017. RIM training camps, such as Partisan, provide White supremacists and neo-Nazis with military-style training that includes weapons and explosives training and close combat training (see Tim Hume, "German Neo Nazis Are Getting Explosives Training at a White Supremacist Camp in Russia," *Vice News*, June 6, 2020).

<sup>140</sup> Grimm Arsenault and Stabile, 2020.

**FIGURE 4.7**  
**Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Russia**



NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 551 Russia pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 319; United Kingdom = 158; Russia = 25; Canada = 7; India = 6; Ghana = 3; Republic of Ireland = 3; Australia = 3; South Africa = 3; France = 3. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

## Sweden

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Sweden

Sweden has experienced the highest rates of extremist right-wing activity among the Nordic states. Activity peaked with a wave of neo-Nazi violence against refugees, immigrants, and political opponents in the 1980s and 1990s. After the millennium, these groups focused less on crime and their activities became increasingly open, including such events as parades; overall, studies show that “more cooperation ensued among right-wing extremist organizations” after 2000.<sup>141</sup> In fact, terrorism researcher Jacob Aasland Ravndal has characterized

<sup>141</sup> Anna-Lena Lodenius, *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies: Country Analyses Sweden*, Ralf Melzer and Sebastian Serafin, eds., Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014, pp. 23–26.

this period as a transition from older nonviolent groups and their replacements in more-recent years by “smaller underground groups and networks . . . [with] loose organizational structures and a declared interest in using violence and terrorism to pursue revolutionary goals.”<sup>142</sup> Although there was an increase in attacks on immigrant housing facilities in the mid-2010s, the rate of fatal attacks per capita has dropped considerably over the past three decades.<sup>143</sup> There is some concern that groups are building an internal capacity for violence—approximately 30 Swedish extreme-right activists are estimated to have participated in pro-Kyiv militias in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>144</sup> Starting in 2019, the Swedish Security Service raised concerns about the normalization of violent right-wing extremist ideology and increases in attacks and crimes by those in “the white power movement.”<sup>145</sup>

REMVE attacks in Sweden typically have targeted immigrant populations. In October 2015, an individual who self-radicalized online attacked a school in Trollhättan with a high immigrant population, killing three and injuring one. In January 2017, NRM members who had been trained by RIM bombed a residential building for refugees in Gothenburg, seriously injuring one person. An NRM member also unsuccessfully attempted to ram a group of Iraqi immigrants with a vehicle in Malmö in June 2017.

## Network Analysis Data

In our network analysis, we identified 3,293 unique users located in Sweden who are engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 0.17 percent of our sample. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, the United States and the United Kingdom were dominant—as was typical for our study—but there were higher domestic country-to-country ties within Sweden than in many other countries. We found little evidence of strong connections to other Nordic states (see Figure 4.8). Other analyses of online discourse around right-wing political violence across Sweden social media found that online spaces provided opportunities to share information; however, true coordination and sharing of practical information that facilitates violent action was rare.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ravndal, 2018a.

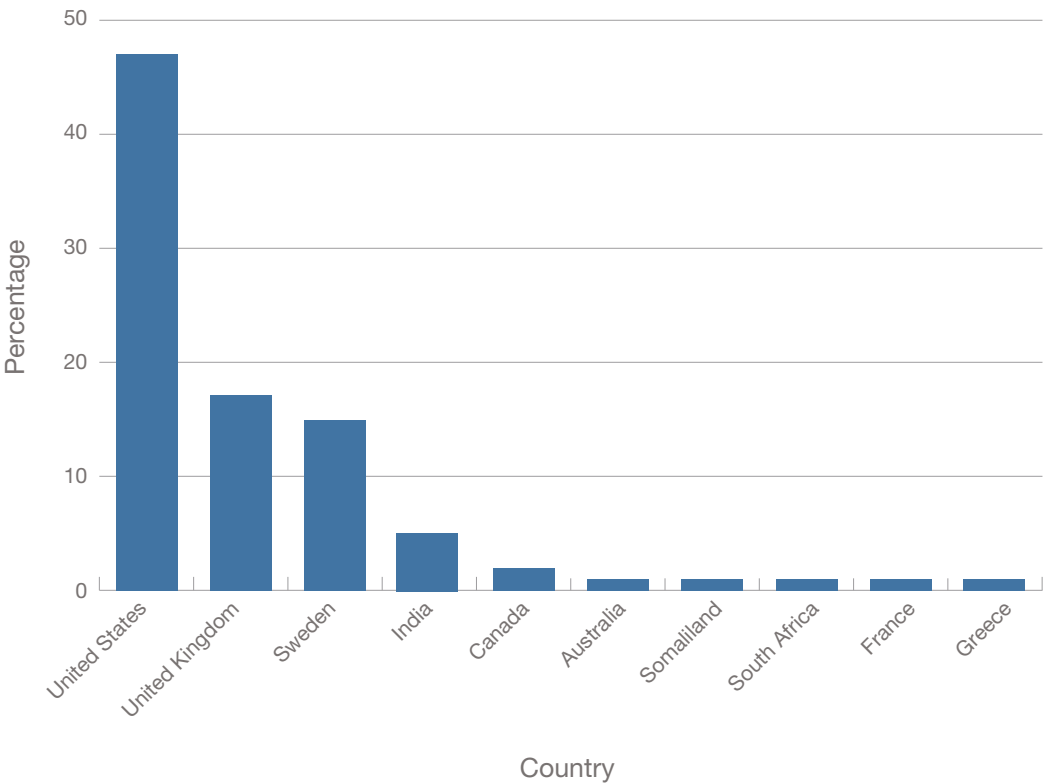
<sup>143</sup> Jacob Aasland Ravndal, Madeleine Thorstensen, Anders Ravik Jupskås, and Graham Macklin, *RTV Trend Report 2021: Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990—2020*, Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo, No. 1, 2021; and Mattias Wahlström and Anton Törnberg, “Social Media Mechanisms for Right-Wing Political Violence in the 21st Century: Discursive Opportunities, Group Dynamics, and Co-Ordination,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2021.

<sup>144</sup> Ravndal, 2018a; and Irma Norman, “Declining Number of Reported Right-Wing Extremist Activities,” *Radio Sweden*, May 11, 2021.

<sup>145</sup> Swedish Security Service, “Development of Violent Right-Wing Extremism,” press release, Stockholm, August 23, 2019.

<sup>146</sup> Wahlström and Törnberg, 2021.

**FIGURE 4.8**  
**Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Sweden**



NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 357 Sweden pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United States = 168; United Kingdom = 59; Sweden = 52; India = 17; Canada = 8; Australia = 5; Somaliland = 5; South Africa = 4; France = 3; Greece = 3. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

Given its history of domestic violent extremist threats, Sweden has “a long history of trying to control and counteract groups seen as subversive or as a threat to state security, primarily those belonging to the far right (fascists and Nazis) and radical left (communists).”<sup>147</sup> In 2015, the government released a new counterterrorism strategy, which found that Islamist extremists were the country’s greatest terrorist threat. However, the strategy also recognized the potential for violent threats from the “right-wing ‘white supremacy’ extremist movement,” and in 2016, the government published a national strategy to counter violent extremism.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Jan Jämte and Rune Ellefsen, “Countering Extremism(S): Differences in Local Prevention of Left-Wing, Right-Wing and Islamist Extremism,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 24, Fall 2020, p. 197.

<sup>148</sup> Stefan Löfven and Andres Ygeman, *Prevent, Preempt, Protect: The Swedish Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, Stockholm: Government Offices of Sweden, Government Communication 2014/15:146, August 27, 2015,

The strategy focuses extensively on democracy-strengthening as an approach to CVE, insofar as it supports the development of social skills, critical thinking, and knowledge about democratic rights and responsibilities and emphasizes building societal resilience to resist violent extremism. Other dimensions of the strategy focus explicitly on prevention efforts, identifying measures to curb recruitment into extremism and helping individuals leave the violent extremist environment.<sup>149</sup> It is also worth noting that Sweden was also a founding member of the Christchurch Call, announced in May 2019.<sup>150</sup>

## Ukraine

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in Ukraine

Concerns about REMVE trends in Ukraine generally focus on the potential for the dispute over territory in Eastern Ukraine to attract REMVE foreign fighters, providing them opportunities to gain fighting experience and build a transnational network. In 2014, over 40 pro-government volunteer battalions formed to fight against pro-Russian separatists; some of these battalions attracted neo-Nazis, White supremacists, and other REMVE adherents.<sup>151</sup> The Soufan Center estimated around 3,000 Russians and 880 foreign fighters from elsewhere joined Ukraine's side in the conflict.<sup>152</sup> Far-right nationalists also have been a significant component of Russian forces fighting in Eastern Ukraine, and combatants on the pro-Russian side of the conflict include members of RIM.<sup>153</sup>

The most prominent of the pro-Ukraine right-wing radical units has been the former Azov Battalion, which formed with the mission to “form a coalition of far-right groups across the Western world, with the ultimate aim of taking power throughout Europe”<sup>154</sup> and had documented ties to White supremacist organizations in the United States and Europe.<sup>155</sup> However, the Azov Battalion has since been integrated into the National Guard. Recognizing that Ukraine can still provide critical connections for even a small number of violent transna-

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p. 4; and Kotajoki, 2018. Sweden delegates responsibilities for domestic CVE implementation and efforts to municipalities.

<sup>149</sup> Kotajoki, 2018.

<sup>150</sup> Robin Andersson Malmros, “Prevention of Terrorism, Extremism and Radicalisation in Sweden: A Sociological Institutional Perspective on Development and Change,” *European Security*, 2021, online ahead of print.

<sup>151</sup> Huseyn Aliyev, “Is Ukraine a Hub for International White Supremacist Fighters?” blog post, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, May 13, 2020.

<sup>152</sup> Soufan Center, 2019.

<sup>153</sup> Mollie Saltskog and Colin P. Clarke, “Rebuttal: Ukraine Is Emerging as Critical Node for White-Supremacy Extremists,” blog post, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, September 24, 2020.

<sup>154</sup> Shuster and Perrigo, 2021.

<sup>155</sup> Saltskog and Clarke, 2020.



tional actors, it has been more difficult for White supremacists to travel to Ukraine and join the front since 2014, given response efforts both inside Ukraine and abroad.<sup>156</sup>

Radical right-wing nationalist parties and movements have not exerted sizeable influence elsewhere in post-independence Ukraine. Although far-right groups have the ability to marshal thousands of supporters for protests and rallies that display Nazi and White supremacist insignia, the far-right movement has thus far been unable to garner significant support at the polls, and it received just over 2 percent of the vote in the 2019 parliamentary elections.<sup>157</sup>

## Network Analysis Data

In our network analysis, we identified 753 unique users located in Ukraine who are engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 0.04 percent of our sample. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, Ukraine was the country that we examined where the United States was not the most common pair—the United Kingdom accounted for more than 40 percent of known connections. However, this finding uses very little raw data. Notably, connections to Russia were not in the top ten countries (see Figure 4.9).

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

The Ukrainian government has taken steps to curb the travel of foreign fighters to Eastern Ukraine and reign in far-right paramilitary units, such as the Azov Battalion, although not all ultranationalist fighters have been successfully brought under the government's umbrella. Members of the Azov Battalion, including those who have left active ranks, continue to associate and organize alongside neo-Nazi and White supremacist political elements and street movements. Moreover, far-right nationalists fighting on the pro-separatist side of the conflict are beyond the reach of the Ukrainian government.<sup>158</sup> In October 2020, Ukraine deported two U.S. citizens who had belonged to AWD for attempting to establish a local branch and trying to join a far-right Ukrainian military unit to gain combat experience. The two men had disseminated videos online that encouraged neo-Nazi-style terrorist attacks in Ukraine.<sup>159</sup>

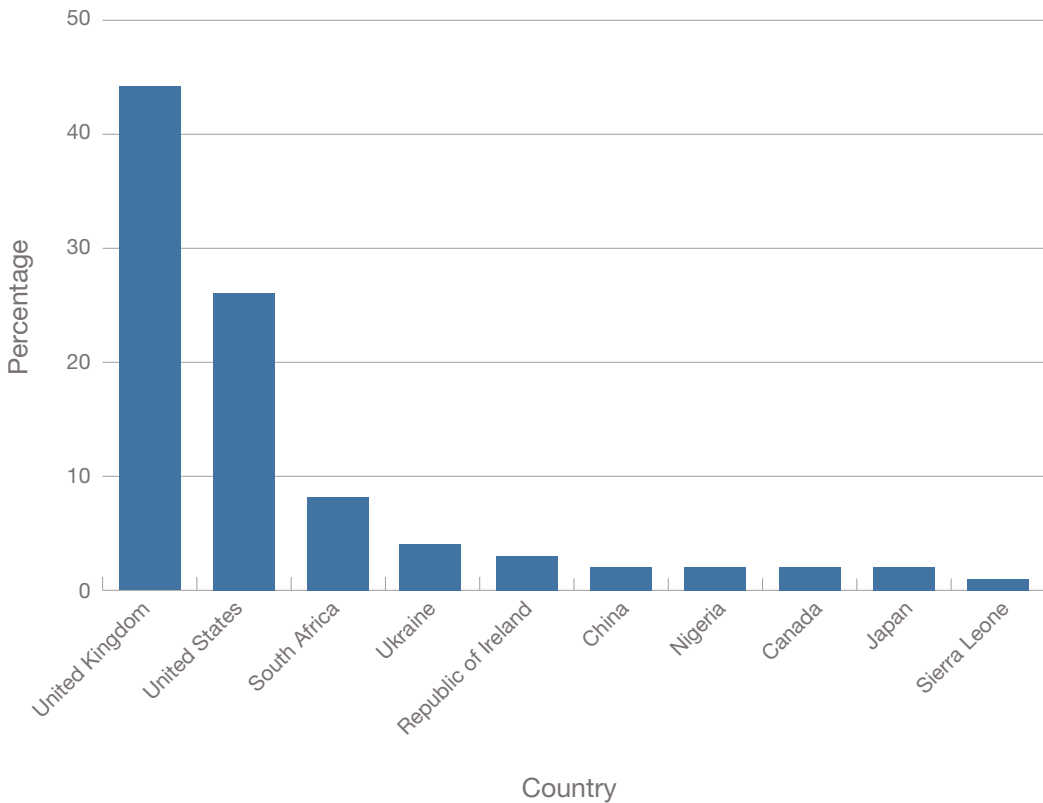
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<sup>156</sup> Aliyev, 2020.

<sup>157</sup> Lister, 2020.

<sup>158</sup> Saltskog and Clarke, 2020.

<sup>159</sup> Counter Extremism Project, "Ukraine Deports Americans Encouraging Neo-Nazi Terror Attacks," press release, October 15, 2020a.

**FIGURE 4.9****Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to Ukraine**

NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 103 Ukraine pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United Kingdom = 45; United States = 27; South Africa = 8; Ukraine = 4; Republic of Ireland = 3; China = 2; Nigeria = 2; Canada = 2; Japan = 2; Sierra Leone = 1. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

## United Kingdom

### The WITM/REMVE Threat in the United Kingdom

Britain's primary terrorist threat continues to come from Islamist extremism—specifically ISIS—and related homegrown radicalization. However, the country also has seen a rise in far-right extremism since 2016 and is taking steps to counter White nationalism in particular.<sup>160</sup>

The far-right platform in the United Kingdom has evolved over the past decade, moving beyond racism, anti-Semitism, and White supremacy to include xenophobia, populism, and

<sup>160</sup> Counter Extremism Project, *United Kingdom: Extremism and Terrorism*, New York, undated-d.

elements of antiglobalism.<sup>161</sup> Far-right extremists in the United Kingdom historically have sought out opportunities to expand internationally, focusing their efforts on establishing linkages to such groups as Greece's Golden Dawn neo-Nazi party. UK citizens have traveled to Ukraine and established ties to such groups as NRM, and prominent far-right radicals also have traveled to Russia on so-called public relations tours, often to seek out Russian bank accounts to move money.<sup>162</sup>

In 2020, UK security forces referred to far-right violent extremism as the "fastest growing threat" in the country. COVID-19-related lockdowns and the related isolation have exacerbated the issue: More individuals spend time online and become the targets of radicalization and terrorist propaganda.<sup>163</sup> In the year ending in March 2019, the number of referrals to the UK's Prevent Programme was more balanced between right-wing and Islamist radicalization relative to previous years. Twenty-four percent of individuals were referred for concerns related to Islamist radicalization, and another 24 percent were referred for concerns related to right-wing extremism.<sup>164</sup> Between January and June 2018, the Community Security Trust, the primary Jewish communal organization in the United Kingdom, separately recorded 727 anti-Semitic incidents in the country, including physical attacks, vandalism of synagogues, and abuse of Jewish members of parliament. The trend is part of a growth of anti-Semitic attacks in the country that has been observed since 2016. In 2020, the Community Security Trust recorded 1,668 anti-Semitic incidents, an 8-percent decrease from the record-high 1,813 incidents reported in 2019.<sup>165</sup> The United Kingdom's domestic security service, MI-5, reported in October 2020 that nearly 30 percent of major terror plots disrupted at a late stage since 2017 had been from far-right extremists.<sup>166</sup>

Several far-right groups continue to be active in the United Kingdom. For example, despite having been banned in 2016, the neo-Nazi group National Action continues to meet under different names and organizational structures.<sup>167</sup> Although the ban has been successful insofar as it dismantled the group organizationally and deterred several militants from further political activity, it has been perceived as less successful in undermining the National Action

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<sup>161</sup> Soufan Center, "IntelBrief: Arrests of Far-Right Violent Extremists in U.K. Highlight Scale of the Threat," blog post, May 10, 2021.

<sup>162</sup> Soufan Center, 2021.

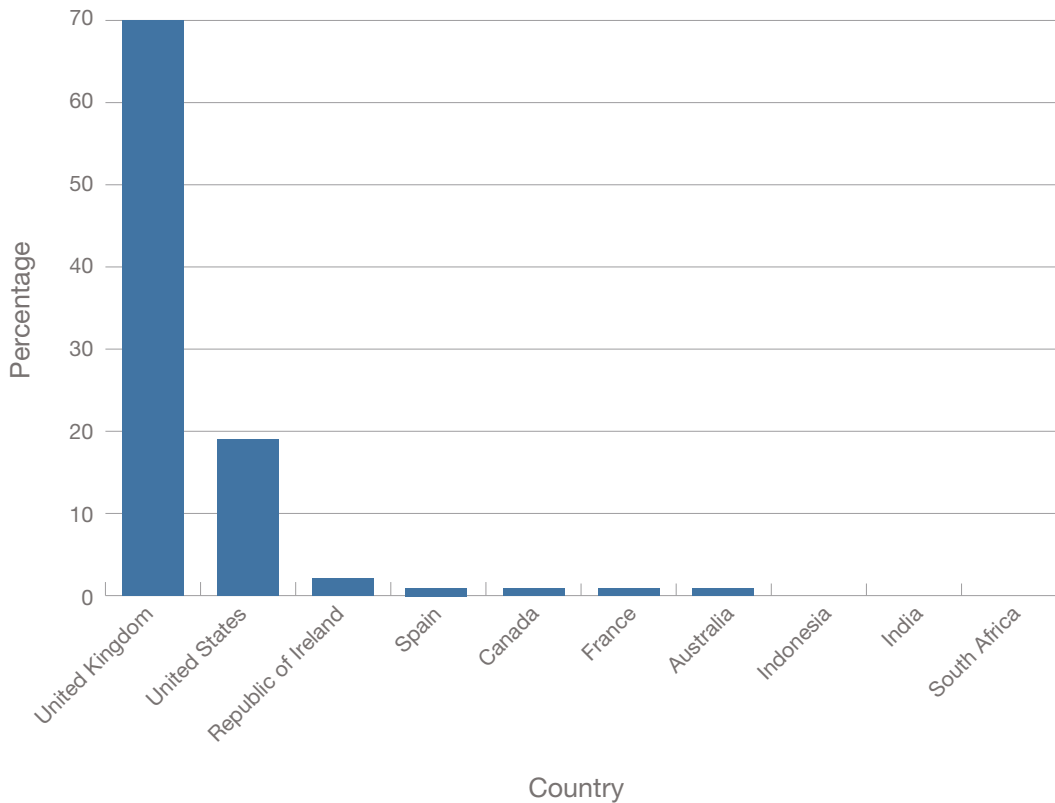
<sup>163</sup> Soufan Center, "IntelBrief: The Rising Threat of Right Wing Extremism in the United Kingdom," blog post, July 1, 2020b.

<sup>164</sup> UK Home Office, "Individuals Referred to and Supported Through the Prevent Programme, April 2018 to March 2019," webpage, December 19, 2019.

<sup>165</sup> Community Security Trust, "Antisemitic Incidents Report 2018," blog post, February 7, 2019; and Community Security Trust, *2020 Annual Review*, London, 2020.

<sup>166</sup> Nick Paton Walsh, "30% of UK Terror Plots Disrupted by MI5 Were Far Right, Says Security Chief," *CNN*, October 15, 2020.

<sup>167</sup> "Banned Neo-Nazi Group National Action 'Kept Meeting,'" *BBC News*, June 14, 2018.

**FIGURE 4.10****Geographic Distribution of Twitter User Pairs Geolocated to the United Kingdom**

NOTE: The percentages shown in this figure were calculated from a total of 71,667 UK pairs. The number of nodes by country among these pairs were United Kingdom = 49,880; United States = 13,960; Republic of Ireland = 1,240; Spain = 722; Canada = 638; France = 570; Australia = 449; Indonesia = 313; India = 312; South Africa = 303. Results include the initially geolocated data only, not inferences further made from our machine-learning approach.

brand by failing to limit its ability to propagate hateful material online.<sup>168</sup> Some far-right extremist groups that are active in the country also have ties to British political parties. Members of the far-right British National Party, for instance, formed Britain First in 2011. Videos on the group's website show members participating in a training camp in North Wales, and the group has also formed "Christian patrols" to hand out anti-Islamic propaganda to Muslims in London and other major cities. Some demonstrations organized by Britain First have ended in violent clashes with counterprotesters.<sup>169</sup> Other far-right extremist groups linked to the British National Party include Patriot Alternative, which calls for the expulsion of non-

<sup>168</sup> Graham Macklin, "Only Bullets Will Stop Us!—The Banning of National Action in Britain," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 9, December 2018.

<sup>169</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-d.

White individuals from the United Kingdom by highlighting the threat of “White genocide.” By April 2021, Patriot Alternative’s founder had more than 92,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel; the group itself had more than 4,500 followers on Telegram. According to the Counter Extremism Project, the group has also used the online game *Call of Duty: Warzone* to recruit younger members.<sup>170</sup>

## Network Analysis Data

In our network analysis, we identified 169,944 unique users located in the United Kingdom who were engaged in REMVE discourse, representing 8.94 percent of our sample, and making the United Kingdom the most represented country in the sample after the United States. For connections where both sides could be geolocated, the United Kingdom also showed unique results compared with the other countries studied: Nearly 70 percent of connections were internal to the United Kingdom. The United States accounted for another 20 percent of connections, and, unsurprisingly, Ireland accounted for the next-highest number of connections (see Figure 4.10).

## National-Level Counter-Efforts

As noted previously, the UK government has taken actions to ban far-right extremist groups National Action, Sonnenkrieg Division, and AWD, and has classified them as terrorist organizations—the first such action in British counterterrorism policy. More broadly, the UK government’s counterterrorism strategy, known as CONTEST, consists of efforts to stop terrorism, prevent people from becoming or supporting terrorists, enhance protection against terror attacks, and mitigate the impacts of attacks that do occur. Although an update to CONTEST released in 2018 continues to view Islamist terrorism as the primary security threat to the country, the new strategy also recognizes the growing threat of far-right extremists.<sup>171</sup>

The UK’s Prevent Strategy, which falls under the scope of CONTEST, further aims to respond to extremist ideology by building relations with civil society groups and providing support to prevent radicalization. Through Prevent, which thus far has primarily targeted Islamist radicalization but is meant to be ideologically agnostic, the government has funded sports activities, leadership development forums, discussions on current affairs, and other programs to boost community engagement in counterterrorism.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-d.

<sup>171</sup> UK Home Office and Sajid Javid, “Security the Future: Counter-Terrorism Strategy Published,” press release, June 4, 2018.

<sup>172</sup> Counter Extremism Project, undated-d; and Josh Halliday, “Almost 4,000 People Referred to U.K. Deradicalisation Scheme Last Year,” *The Guardian*, March 20, 2016.

## Conclusion and Opportunities for Impact

This examination of existing research and network analysis can help inform a counter-WITM/REMVE strategy, both offline and online. We find that the United States is overwhelmingly responsible for REMVE discourse online. Although some of this is driven by the U.S. dominance of social media networks generally and a yet-to-be-fully measured proportion originates from disinformation efforts by U.S. rivals, neither of these factors detract from the conclusion that the United States is the primary proliferator and consumer of REMVE rhetoric online. This finding speaks to the critical role for the United States in responding to this problem. Recognizing that the main question is likely not *whether* to do something but *what* to do and *how*, we have focused on a few areas where our analysis can provide informative takeaways.

Section 1299F of the FY 2021 NDAA, from which this study emanated, calls for a global counter-WITM strategy, and its language primarily is externally focused. It calls for a regional or country prioritization of the WITM threats to the United States and charges the U.S. Department of State with leading a governmentwide effort. This language could suggest that the WITM threat is seen as one external to the United States, whereas—as we have presented in the earlier paragraph—we found that WITM/REMVE is very much fueled by U.S. domestic drivers. We also found that WITM and REMVE are less of a problem in other countries, and those countries generally—with the notable exception of such places as Russia—have national resources, experience, and will to counter the problem. Our limited analysis of the content of discussions found that most concerns being raised in WITM/REMVE discourse are national or local rather than transnational. Furthermore, CVE programs in other countries are generally most productive when they are local. All of this suggests that, although global coordination is important and there are lessons to be learned from our international partners, the primary need is for robust *national* strategies to counter WITM/REMVE, foremost inside the United States.

A WITM/REMVE network characterized by financial and operational transnational connections would be very concerning, but these types of linkages appear to be the exception rather than the norm. Financial transactions are generally small and violent actors typically are self-funded. There is little evidence of international training; the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is the most notable potential opportunity for REMVE actors to gain operational experience, but this was more of a concern in 2014 than now given the government's efforts to bring militias under greater government control. (As Russia stages to potentially

invade Ukraine at the time of this writing, this is an important issue to watch.) Violent actors sometimes cite a mass murder as inspiration, even though the event might have occurred in a different country—but it is the notoriety of the murderer and the resultant carnage that functions as the inspiration, not the transnational element. For example, the Christchurch shootings have been lauded by other global actors not because of unique aspects of New Zealand’s demographics or geographic significance but because of the number of individuals killed and the livestream and broadcast of the attack. Any transnational connections that do exist are often predominately to the United States, increasing the risk that the hateful and xenophobic rhetoric that emanates from the United States will inspire a lone wolf to commit violence in a country where national REMVE movements are largely absent. Because the United States appears to be most responsible for the current rise of WITM/REMVE movements, efforts focused abroad open themselves to criticism if there is not a robust effort to respond to this problem within the United States.

An organization- or actor-focused counter-WITM/REMVE strategy likely will not work because of the diffuse nature of REMVE movements. Organizations and actors are critical components in the U.S. strategy to counter jihadist terrorism. The United States has designated over 50 Islamist extremist FTOs and an even larger number of SDGTs and maintains a database of over 1.6 million foreign known or suspected terrorists.<sup>1</sup> These designations and data sets allow the United States to use various judicial, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement authorities to monitor and mitigate terrorist threats from individuals and groups. Even if the United States wanted to establish similar authorities to deal with REMVE—which it currently lacks—the movement’s tactical reliance on leaderless resistance and the shift toward what analysts have referred to as a *post-organizational landscape*—where individuals are radicalized toward violence outside the boundaries of organized groups—reduces the utility of these tools. We found few references to organizations in REMVE discourse, consistent with the literature review’s finding that REMVE organizational structures generally are diffuse and weak.

These differences highlight the need to develop a counter-REMVE strategy that differs from our counterterrorism strategies against ISIS. In that circumstance, ISIS had called for a global caliphate, propagated its message widely in many languages on social media, and inspired tens of thousands from around the world to travel to Syria to join its cause.<sup>2</sup> The countries that were the primary source of its manpower and funds generally lacked the resources or the national will to combat recruitment.<sup>3</sup> European states, Australia, New Zealand, and

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<sup>1</sup> National Counterterrorism Center, “Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE),” fact sheet, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security, *Final Report of the Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, October 2015.

<sup>3</sup> The exact number of foreign fighters who joined ISIS are understandably difficult to determine, but research frequently draws on numbers compiled by the Soufan Group in 2014, 2015, and 2017. Around

Canada are concerned about and committed to combatting REMVE. They bring national funds, talent, and experience in combatting terrorism. They can benefit from coordinated global efforts and the sharing of best practices. The United States was a major champion of a global coalition to counter ISIS and jihadist terrorism writ large.<sup>4</sup> These countries can benefit from coordinated global efforts and the sharing of best practices. However, any global counter-REMVE movement, particularly under U.S. leadership, will be hobbled by the fact that the country where the problem is the greatest is the United States, and its counter-efforts are nascent and poorly resourced, particularly in prevention and intervention of the radicalization of at-risk individuals.

Intervention strategies should be multifaceted because of the complex nature of the problem and its intersections with protected civil rights. U.S. counterterrorism strategies have focused primarily on security mechanisms—namely law enforcement and intelligence tools. For many years, the United States had relatively little capacity for prevention and intervention with individuals at risk of violence, and communities and advocacy organizations have sometimes criticized government-led approaches.<sup>5</sup> Counterterrorism professionals and policymakers might have certain assumptions about how to respond to domestic terrorism issues that fail to account for the underlying differences between REMVE movements and past threats. The scale of this movement and the depth of its ideological roots in America's racial history suggest that a strategy of targeting, isolating, and ostracizing sympathizers is not sufficient. Other countries, such as Germany and New Zealand,<sup>6</sup> have useful models for how to tackle the REMVE problem with more than simply a securitized approach. Both the Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence, produced in 2019, and the Biden administration's National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism recognize this point, and two of the four pillars of the Biden administration's strategy are focused on strengthening prevention and tackling underlying contributors,

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72 percent of those were from the former Soviet republics, the Middle East, or the Maghreb, with the three most common countries of origin being Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. (See Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, the Soufan Center and the Global Strategy Network, October 2017; Richard Barrett, Jack Berger, Lila Ghosh, Daniel Schoenfeld, Mohamed el-Shawesh, Patrick M. Skinner, Susan Sim, and Ali Soufan, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, New York: Soufan Group, December 2015; and Richard Barrett, Robert McFadden, Patrick M. Skinner, and Lila Ghosh, *Foreign Fighters in Syria*, New York: Soufan Group, June 2014.) While al-Qaeda generally relied on external donations, ISIS sought to be self-sufficient financially, drawing revenue from its territory in Iraq and Syria. (See Patrick B. Johnston, Mona Alami, Colin P. Clarke, and Howard J. Shatz, *Return and Expand? The Finances and Prospects of the Islamic State After the Caliphate*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3046, 2019.)

<sup>4</sup> Jones et al., 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson et al., 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Miller-Idriss and Koehler, 2021; and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *New Zealand's Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy*, Wellington: Government of New Zealand, February 18, 2020.



such as racism, bigotry, polarization, and disinformation.<sup>7</sup> Although some investments into specific initiatives and programs have been made that reflect these macro-strategies, these programs still need to be resourced appropriately to address the level of need.<sup>8</sup> The path for how best to do so in the United States, in terms of programs and actors, is still not self-evident, and the effort is certain to be prolonged and difficult.

We also found some structural differences in how this problem manifests in Europe versus the United States. The parliamentary system in many European countries allows for the far right to have a presence in the political system than can give these fringe movements a nonviolent outlet. Hate speech laws in some of these countries appear to genuinely discourage individuals from engaging in REMVE discourse, although some clearly still do but mask their locations. Many of these states are also more willing to confront domestic extremist movements using legal tools and more-robust counterextremism programs.

When countering an online network, there are two common tools: intervention and deplatforming. *Intervention* involves introducing positive or proactive content with the hope of prompting it to proliferate through the existing network connections. *Deplatforming* involves the censorship or removal of content or users to deny their ability to proliferate negative content in the network. Deplatforming was a major tool deployed against ISIS's use of social media. However, deplatforming was possible largely because of ISIS's use of branding, which allowed it to be flagged by machine-learning tools and automated systems. Not only does REMVE content lack the same branding, heavy use of memes and coded language complicate interpreting it as extremist content.<sup>9</sup> Deplatforming that mirrors the approach taken with ISIS would require large-scale removal of offensive accounts. Contrary to the notion that deplatforming of ISIS-linked accounts was a highly targeted activity directed only at top ISIS social media influencers, Twitter deplatformed 1.2 million accounts putatively for espousing terrorism between 2015 and 2018.<sup>10</sup> Deplatforming also can be an imperfect tool. For example, 200,000 Saudi citizens claim that they have been inaccurately banned from Twitter in this counter-ISIS effort.<sup>11</sup> Even if deplatforming could effectively eliminate REMVE content from

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019; and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism*, Washington, D.C.: National Security Council, June 2021.

<sup>8</sup> In FY 2020, the Department of Homeland Security awarded \$10 million in grants that support implementation of programming for the prevention of targeted violence (which includes violence motivated by ideological sources, such as REMVE) and expanded its efforts to support the development of local prevention frameworks and programming. Efforts to support the expansion of violence prevention efforts were placed in the newly created Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships in May 2021, including the FY 2021 grant program, which awarded another \$20 million to support local programming.

<sup>9</sup> Maura Conway, "Routing the Extreme Right: Challenges for Social Media Platforms," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 165, No. 1, January 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Don Reisinger, "Twitter Has Suspended 1.2 Million Terrorist Accounts Since 2015," *Fortune*, April 5, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Culliford and Katie Paul, "Unhappy with Twitter, Thousands of Saudis Join Pro-Trump Social Network Parler," Reuters, June 13, 2019.

major social media platforms, a policy that would remove from the public commons more than 1 million or even hundreds of thousands of accounts of U.S. citizens—some of them unfairly—would seem unlikely to be implementable.

A more targeted approach to deplatforming, however, potentially combined with counter-REMVE messaging interventions, might be viable and at least partially effective. Our empirical findings from Twitter, particularly as they contrast with results from the other platforms that we surveyed, suggest that the greater level of content moderation on Twitter has induced users who are not deplatformed to self-moderate their content. Reddit, by contrast, has a very low deplatforming rate: In our REMVE-related data, we observed that only 0.061 percent of Reddit users were deplatformed. Our simulations suggested that Reddit might be able to achieve similar efficacy through deplatforming subreddits if it were to increase its deplatforming rate tenfold relative to its rate as of this writing. There is also promising emerging research around what can be done to build resilience to extremist messaging in social networks. *Attitudinal inoculation*, for example, which can include exposing individuals preemptively with counterarguments to persuasive arguments, could be one method to build resistance to REMVE narratives and propaganda.<sup>12</sup> Other research has looked at the potential for empathy-based counterspeech to reduce hate speech.<sup>13</sup>

Policymakers likely need to reevaluate the legal context for social media platforms if they wish to have any impact on such platforms as Gab and Telegram. Our results suggest that these platforms are enabling REMVE interactions online, and, as of this writing, their maintainers are dedicated to a goal of having no content moderation. If the maintainers of these platforms have no motivation to moderate violent and hateful speech and the U.S. government has decided that social media platforms are not regulated by existing laws, then there is limited opportunity for productive policy interventions without legislative action. As we have mentioned elsewhere in this report, other democratic countries have hate speech laws that curb negative online discourse. This is one possible route for legislative action, but not necessarily the best one, given the sanctity of the concept of protected speech in the United States. Alternatively, the United States could look at the provisions of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which holds that internet platforms are not held to the same legal standards of liability as print and broadcast publishers. This has been the topic of much political debate. Section 230 both shields social media platforms from liability for objectionable content they do not remove and provides them with immunity for objectionable content that they do post; there are some exceptions related to explicitly illegal activity. Although the

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<sup>12</sup> Kurt Braddock, “Vaccinating Against Hate: Using Attitudinal Inoculation to Confer Resistance to Persuasion by Extremist Propaganda,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Dominik Hangartner, Gloria Gennaro, Sary Alasiri, Nicholas Bahrach, Alexandra Bornhoft, Joseph Boucher, Buket Buse Demirci, Laurenz Derksen, Aldo Hall, Matthias Jochum, Maria Murias Munoz, Marc Richter, Franziska Vogel, Salomé Wittwer, Felix Wüthrich, Fabrizio Gilardi, and Karsten Donnay, “Empathy-Based Counterspeech Can Reduce Racist Hate Speech in a Social Media Field Experiment,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 118, No. 50, December 14, 2021.

political debate often circles around whether to repeal or preserve Section 230, there are several options to narrow or modify the law as well.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Valerie C. Brannon and Eric N. Holmes, *Section 230: An Overview*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R46751, April 7, 2021.

# White Genocide Terms

Table A.1 provides the translated list of White genocide that we used to search the six social media platforms that were evaluated in this study to identify REMVE content that have been written in a language other than English. Table A.2 provides the search results for each platform.

**TABLE A.1**  
**Forms of White Genocide Searched in Data Identification**

Language	Keyword
Bulgarian	бял геноцид
Catalan	genocidi blanc
Czech	bílá genocida
Danish	blanke genocide
Dutch	hvidt folkedrab
English	white genocide
Finnish	valkoisten kansanmurha
French	génocide blanc
German	völkermord an den weißen
Greek	λευκή γενοκτονία
Hungarian	fehér népirtás
Italian	genocidio bianco
Norwegian	hvitt folkemord
Polish	białe ludobójstwo
Portuguese	genocídio branco
Romanian	genocid alb
Russian	геноцид белых
Serbian	бели геноцид
Spanish	genocidio blanco
Swedish	vitt folkmord
Ukrainian	білий геноцид

**TABLE A.2**  
**Counts of “White Genocide” by Language and Platform**

Platform	Language	Keyword	Count
Gab	English	white genocide	8,903
Reddit	English	white genocide	26,819
Reddit	Spanish	genocidio blanco	2
Reddit	Portuguese	genocídio branco	1
Ruqqus	English	white genocide	22
Stormfront	English	white genocide	84
Telegram	English	white genocide	1,709
Telegram	Danish	blanke genocide	9
Telegram	Spanish	genocidio blanco	8
Telegram	Swedish	vitt folkmord	1
Twitter	English	white genocide	162,595
Twitter	Spanish	genocidio blanco	2,899
Twitter	French	génocide blanc	798
Twitter	Portuguese	genocidio branco	685
Twitter	Danish	blanke genocide	556
Twitter	Italian	genocidio bianco	309
Twitter	German	völkermord an den weißen	124
Twitter	Russian	геноцид белых	88
Twitter	Catalan	genocidi blanc	49
Twitter	Swedish	vitt folkmord	30
Twitter	Czech	bílá genocida	22
Twitter	Swedish	vitt folkemord	20
Twitter	Greek	λευκή γενοκτονία	19
Twitter	Polish	białe ludobójstwo	5
Twitter	Ukrainian	бели геноцид	5
Twitter	Finnish	valkoisten kansanmurha	2

## Triangulating Platform Antisociality: Dark Triad by Sentiment

To enhance rigor, we developed an additional independent measure for the antisociality that the dark triad analysis attempts to measure. The dark triad analysis is *word-based*, matching a user's word frequencies for lexical items that are associated with social media output from communities who score highly on measures of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. To help validate this analysis, we developed a *sentiment-based* approach at the level of lexicogrammar: words and phrases that might index a dark triad linguistic stance. We found that both the word- and stance-based approaches agreed in ranking communities within fringe (Gab, Ruqqus, Telegram) platforms.

RAND's proprietary text and social media platform, RAND-Lex, includes an advanced kind of sentiment analysis, using a 119-variable measure of linguistic *stance*: the attitudinal dimension of language use. Categories include emotions, social relations, cultural values, temporality, and certainty/uncertainty, and this model of language has proven useful across a variety of text classification problems, such as detecting Russian trolls operating on Twitter and conspiracy theories circulating over social media.<sup>1</sup>

We chose two stance variables each as proxy measurements to quantify dark triad antisociality, as follows:

- Narcissism
  - *Social distancing*: describing social groups in conflict
  - *First person*: first-person pronoun use
- Machiavellianism
  - *Your attention*: language directing another's attention
  - *Insistence*: modal directive language (e.g., “must,” “should,” “need to”)

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<sup>1</sup> William Marcellino, Kate Cox, Katerina Galai, Linda Slapakova, Amber Jaycocks, and Ruth Harris, *Human-Machine Detection of Online-Based Malign Information*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A519-1, 2020; and William Marcellino, Todd C. Helmus, Joshua Kerrigan, Hilary Reininger, Rouslan I. Karimov, and Rebecca Ann Lawrence, *Detecting Conspiracy Theories on Social Media: Improving Machine Learning to Detect and Understand Online Conspiracy Theories*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A676-1, 2021.

- Psychopathy
  - *Anger*: affect language expressing anger/hostility
  - *General negativity*: broad catchall for any negative affect.

To illustrate what these stance categories look like in practice, we include the following examples from our data. In each example, the text tagged by stance are italicized. To protect privacy, where a specific username is mentioned, we insert “[user].”

- Psychopathy
  - *Anger*: “I am actually a victim of anti-white racism *at the hands of* Muslim students at my high school. I experience *hate* directed at me all the time because I am a white guy. The Muslim students in my class are always *blaming* me for things that whites did 100s of years ago.”
  - *General negativity*: “You mean like hoards of black people looting and *pillaging* entire cities because they were *upset* over the *death of a violent drug addict*? No [*expletive*].”
- Narcissism
  - *Social distancing*: “Oh yeah, I’m sure they wouldn’t use that as an excuse *to crack down* on gun ownership and increase surveillance.”
  - *First person*: “I know, *I* know, why should you read this? Because *I* support YOU and @[user] whether you like it or not, no matter *my* skin color, *I* WILL support the Aryan race and join you all in the fight against the white genocide.”
- Machiavellianism
  - *Your attention*: “A national socialist party makes sense to address a great many social issues present, what stands out *to have you express your* frustration as such wigsplitter? what culture would you yourself like to foster? What actions *do you* feel need to be taken to better address your current reality? Would a new national socialist party make the most sense *to you*? *where are you* from in the world?”
  - Insistence:
    - “it’s the [slur slur] that *we should* kill.”
    - “All these anti-White Whites are suffering from Stockholm syndrome. *We need to* learn how to treat this.”
    - “Hard working citizens *have to* obey the law. While illegals get a free pass on everything.”

## Longitudinal Analysis of Highest-Scoring Dark Triad Communities Across Platforms

Most of the longitudinal patterns for the highest-scoring dark triad communities match the patterns seen on those platforms generally and that are reported in the main body of the report.

As with the pattern on the platform as a whole, the highest-scoring dark triad communities on Gab exhibited increasing scores over time (see Figure C.1). It has been asserted that the posting of content on Gab is largely free of any form of restriction.<sup>1</sup> The observed increase in the negativity of the sampled content supports this assertion. Increases in dark triad language might occur on platforms that lack effective content moderation if they become progressively colonized by individuals who would be banned from moderated platforms.

As with the platform as a whole, the monthly dark triad scores for the highest-scoring dark triad Reddit communities are stable over time (see Figure C.2). Although there is variation, this variation is without any upward or downward trend in the data.

The monthly dark triad scores for the highest-scoring dark triad Ruqqus communities similarly are mostly stable and without obvious trends over time (see Figure C.3).

The features of the Stormfront Community 3 and 0 data are similar to those that were observed for the entire platform (Figure C.4), and these features have been described in previous chapters.

The monthly dark triad scores for the two highest-scoring Telegram communities, 32 and 12, show interesting trends (see Figure C.5). For Community 32, from February 2016 until August 2017, the monthly dark triad scores are 0. From August 2017, the monthly dark triad scores rise to a peak of ca 32 in January 2019. From this peak, the scores fall to a January 2020 level of ca 4, at which the score remains until the end of data collection in June 2021. This trend correlates with the monthly sum of the number of characters that are contributed by two nodes to the body of text from which the monthly dark scores are calculated. Of these two nodes one, *bellumacta*, describes itself as, “a ‘Pro-Nationalism’ & ‘not-so-Impartial’ Crisis-focused NEWS aggregator,”<sup>2</sup> and the other, *pol4chan*, comprises politically incorrect,

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<sup>1</sup> Cristiano Lima, “Twitter Is Serving as a Gateway to Gab’s Conspiracy Theories, Study Finds,” *Washington Post*, October 12, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Telegram, “Bellum Acta | Archive Channel,” webpage, undated.



racist, White supremacist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, and transphobic content. For Telegram Community 12, the monthly dark triad scores increase linearly, indicating that the content is becoming markedly more negative with time as is expected for extreme communities on platforms that lack content moderation.

**FIGURE C.1**  
**Gab Dark Triad Scores over Time for the Two Highest-Scoring Communities**

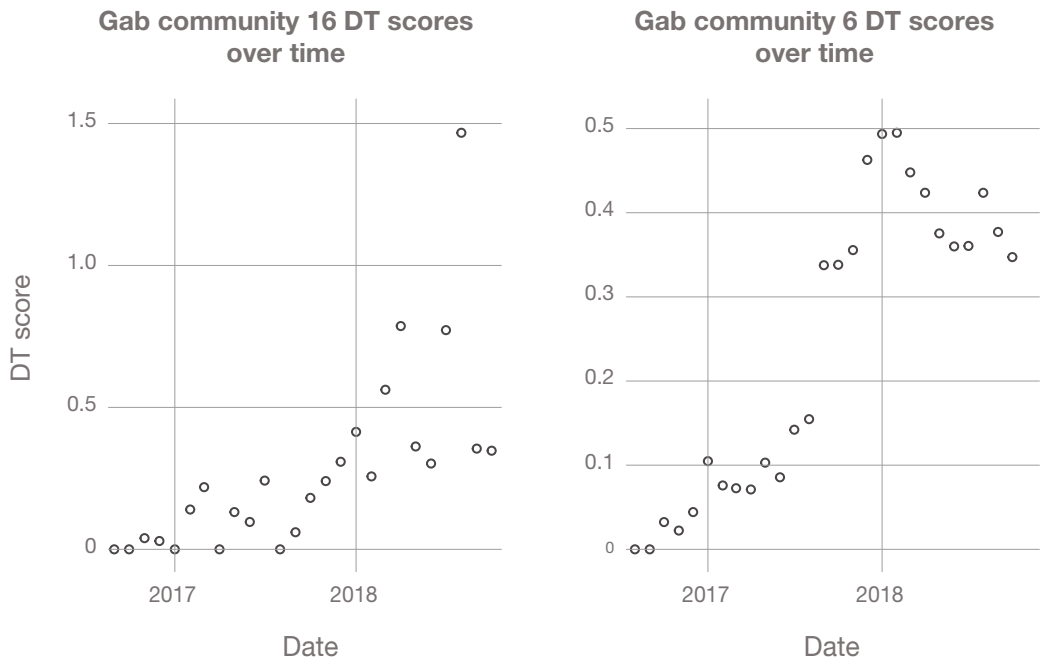


FIGURE C.2

**Reddit Dark Triad Scores over Time for the Two Highest-Scoring Communities**

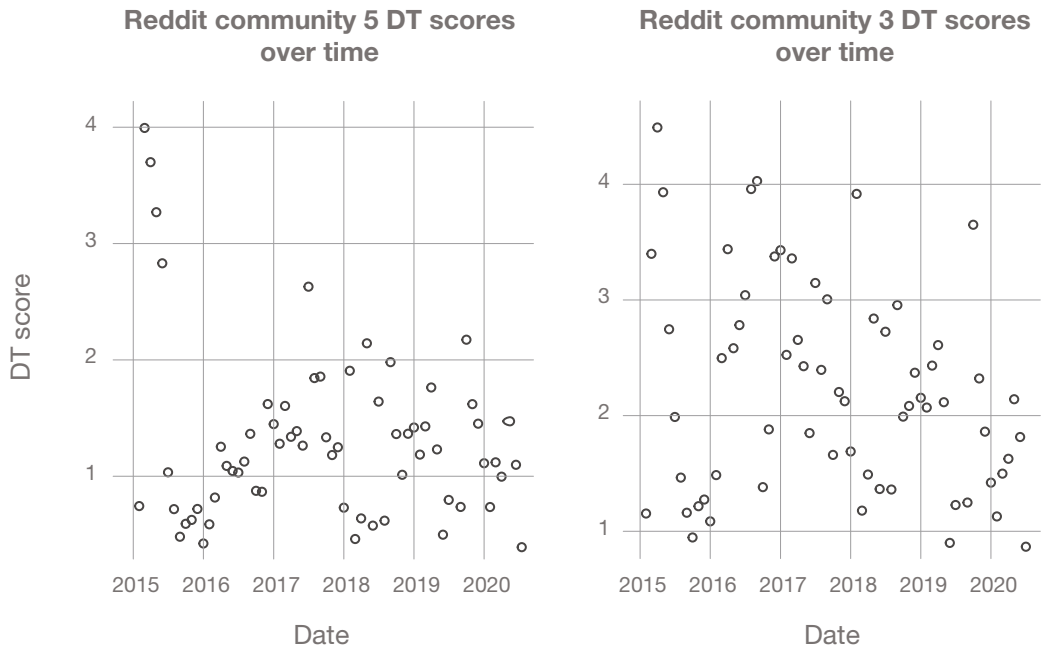
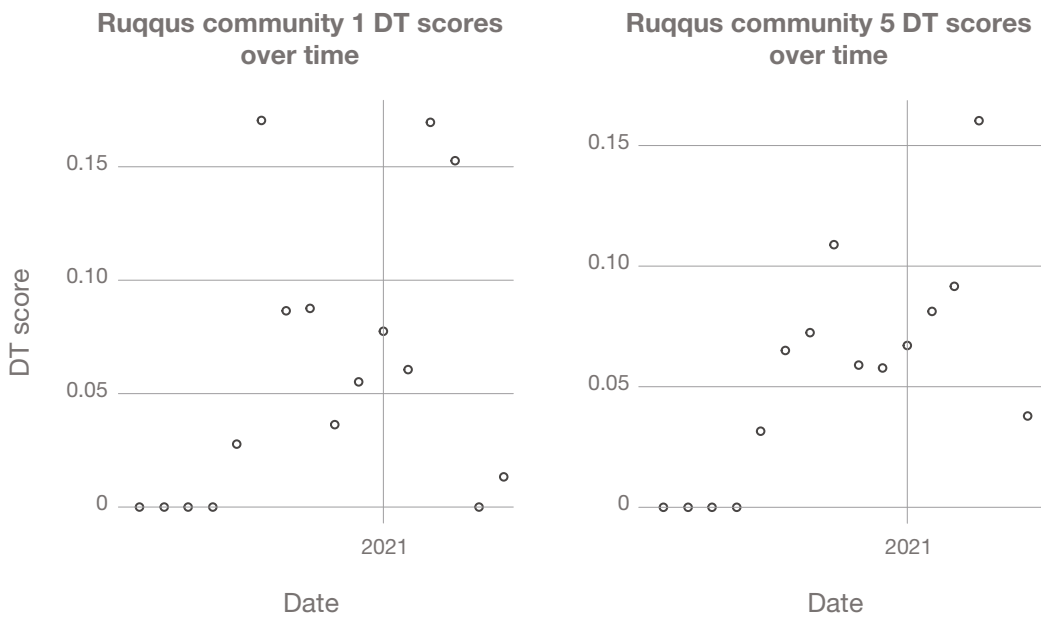
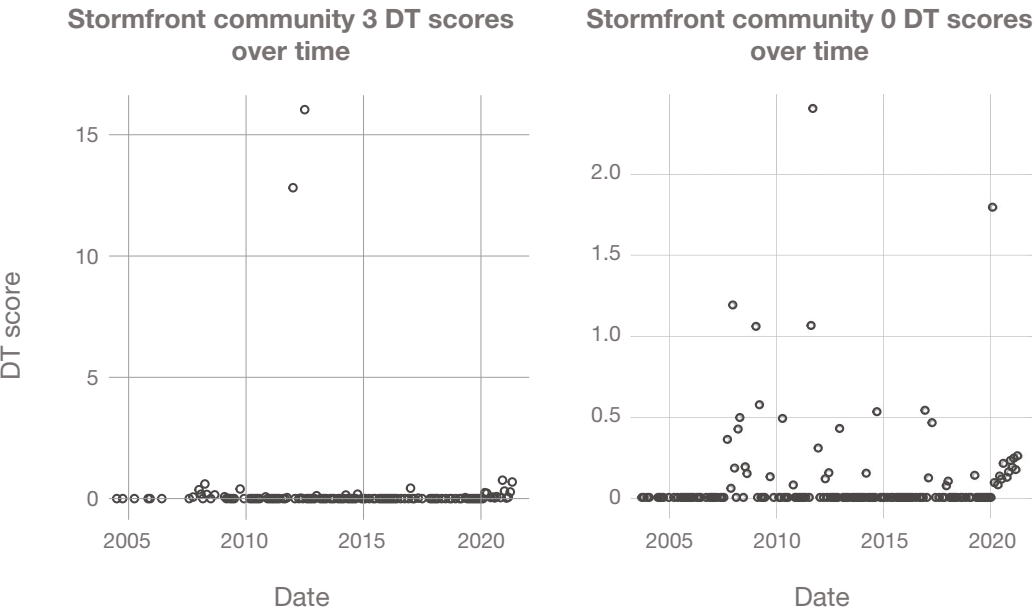


FIGURE C.3

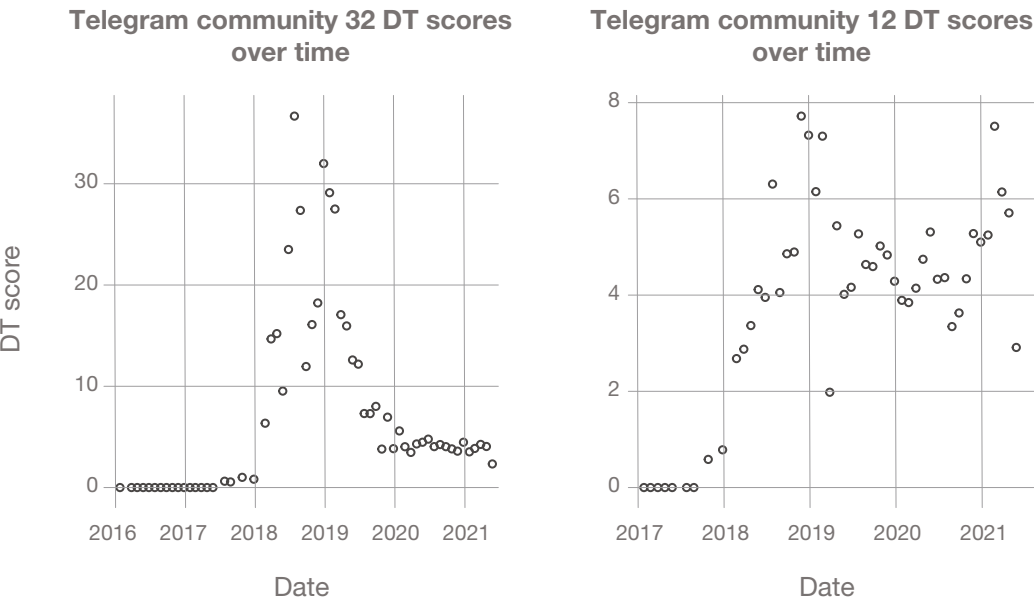
**Ruqqus Dark Triad Scores over Time for the Two Highest-Scoring Communities**



**FIGURE C.4**  
**Stormfront Dark Triad Scores over Time for the Two Highest-Scoring Communities**



**FIGURE C.5**  
**Telegram Dark Triad Scores over Time for the Two Highest-Scoring Communities**



## Simulations of Deplatforming or Other Counter-REMVE Action in Online Networks

Deplatforming simulations are still preliminary because they lack many other social dynamics that are important in the real world.<sup>1</sup> With that caveat in mind, we think that such simulations provide a useful examination of the complexities of implementing a network-targeted campaign. Despite the simulations' simplicity, we found that the varying network structures meant that different centrality measures and even random targeting performed best under different conditions. This suggests that specific and detailed study of the dynamics on individual platforms should be conducted before a targeted deplatforming or messaging campaign is deployed.

We present the results for the simulations of 500 individuals being initially converted via targeted deplatforming or other counter-REMVE action, with a 0.3 adoption threshold. The simulations with 50, 100, and 1,000 individuals yielded qualitatively similar results, although some of the lower numbers (50 and 100) were wholly ineffective and some with 1,000 starting individuals were more effective than those with 500. Although we included Ruqqus in our analysis, we have not presented the results here because the platform's closure in November 2021 means that no interventions on the platform are possible.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, people are known to exhibit *prestige bias*, whereby they preferentially copy the behaviors of individuals whom they view as more important or successful (prestigious) than others, which can affect the resonance of betweenness in a social network. High-betweenness individuals (influencers) definitionally exist in between network communities. Because network communities are highly connected parts of the network, an individual who is peripheral to two or more communities but central to none of them achieves a high betweenness score because many of the shortest paths between the otherwise disconnected network communities must go through these peripheral individuals. Although this affords high-betweenness individuals a powerful role as the brokers of information exchanges between communities, it also means that they are not central, important, or prestigious. For example, David Zeitlyn and Daniel W. Hook found that the highest-betweenness academic researchers were those who worked between disciplines, but these researchers were not the most dominantly connected individuals within disciplines. See Ronald S. Burt, "Structural Holes and Good Ideas," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 110, No. 2, September 2004; and David Zeitlyn and Daniel W. Hook, "Perception, Prestige and PageRank," *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 14, No. 5, May 28, 2019.

## Gab Simulations

The simulations on the Gab network suggested that targeting interventions by degree or betweenness centrality were equally effective, and that these approaches were substantially more effective than random or eigenvector targeting (see Figure D.1). This being said, with an intervention being deployed to 500 individuals, the final proportion of the network that opted out of REMVE plateaued at 0.15. This is a plausible result of the simulation, however, in that we would not expect that an intervention with only 500 starting individuals would induce most of the network to abandon REMVE.

The better performance of degree and betweenness in this simulation likely results from the fact that high-degree individuals are more connected than average random ones, and high-betweenness individuals occupy otherwise less traversed parts of the network. The low performance of eigenvector targeting likely results from its tendency to cluster the interventions in a single portion of the network rather than spreading them out. This is because there is often only a small core of the network that contains high-degree individuals all connected to one another, which is what mathematically defines eigenvector centrality.

## Reddit Simulations

The Reddit simulations pointed to any network-based approach to interventions as superior to a random approach (see Figures D.2 and D.3). All network approaches to removing nodes (in this case, subreddits) plateaued at an effectiveness of around 30 percent of the nodes choosing to opt out of REMVE. We note that the simulations with 500 interventions are exactly a ten-fold greater number of interventions than the number of subreddits that we observed Reddit to have removed during the data window that we studied (50 subreddits were banned in our data). Intriguingly, when we simulated an intervention being deployed to just 50 nodes with all other parameters held identical (as in the 500-intervention simulation), we found that the intervention failed to propagate via network influence on the Reddit network. This finding is consistent with our empirical observations, and it illustrates how the structure of social networks can create tipping points in the parameter space of how many interventions are needed to achieve a policy with some general level of effectiveness.

## Stormfront Simulations

At the adoption threshold of 0.3, betweenness targeting produced the most-rapid gains in spreading the decision to opt out of REMVE, and plateaus, in this case, at a somewhat implausibly high value of half of the nodes choosing to opt out by self-censorship or other means (see Figure D.4). Toward the end of the simulation, random targeting actually outperformed betweenness targeting on average, but with a very high level of variance in the outcome. Because of this variance from the random targeting approach, we would recommend betweenness targeting on Stormfront, which was nearly as effective, on average, as random targeting, and it was much more effective earlier in the simulation. We also explored higher adoption thresholds, at which point the structure of the Stormfront network very effectively blocked the intervention from spreading as compared with the spread achieved at the lower adoption threshold.

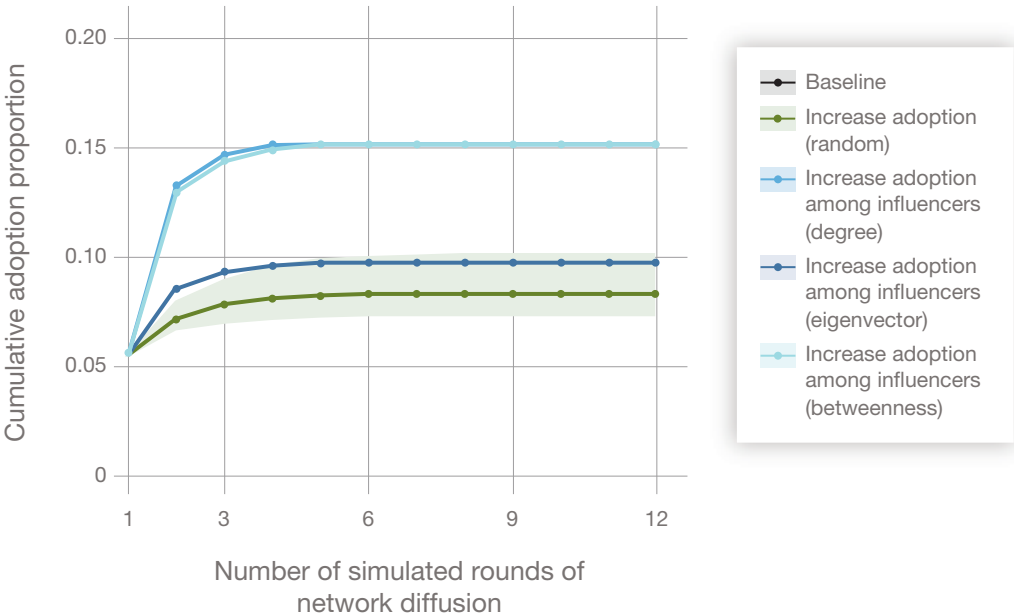
Telegram Simulations

The simulations on Telegram suggest that both degree targeting and betweenness targeting would perform equally well on this platform, and both perform much better than do the alternatives of random or eigenvector targeting (see Figure D.5). The plateau that we observed in this simulation for conversion of the network out of REMVE was between 15 and 20 percent of nodes. The variance in outcome appears to be intermediate between the low variance observed for Gab and the high variance observed on other platforms.

Twitter Simulations

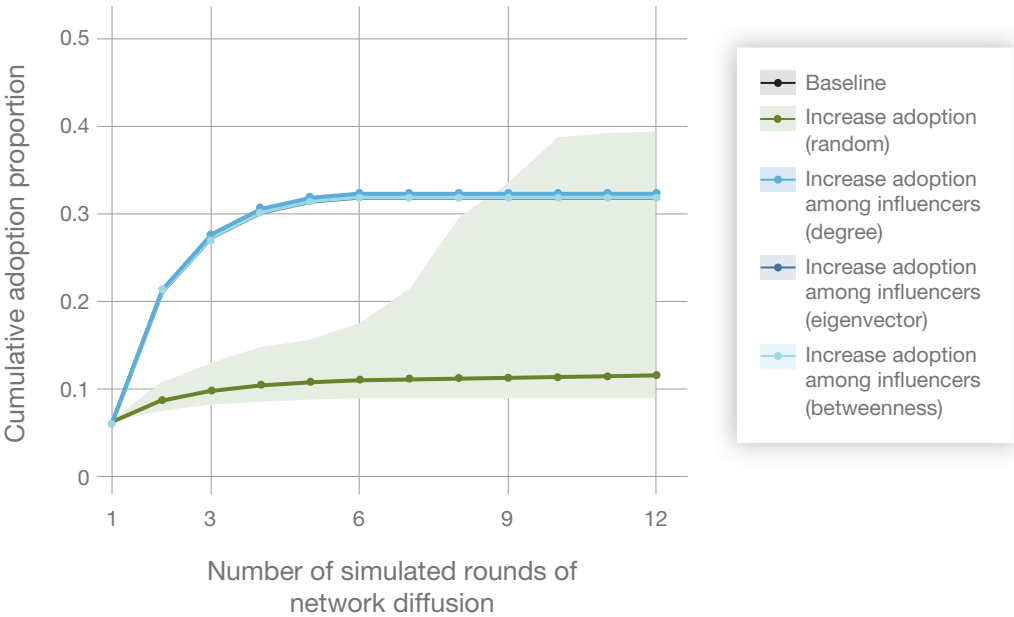
The simulations on Twitter exhibited the pattern that we observed across several platforms: Targeting the initial interventions by either degree centrality or betweenness centrality was equally effective, and both were substantially more effective than other targeting strategies (see Figure D.6). The simulations plateaued at a somewhat implausibly high value of 60 percent of the network being induced to opt out of REMVE as the result of direct interventions on only 500 nodes. Although this might be possible, we think it unlikely that such a small intervention could have such a large effect. We think the simulation results are still valid, but that the likely plateau value is somewhere below 50 percent. As we noted in the description of the simulation protocol, there are many social dynamics that are absent from the simulation—such as prestige effects and the ability of other nodes to take over the social role of deplatformed nodes—that could make REMVE networks more resilient in their REMVE persuasion than the simulation models.

**FIGURE D.1**  
**Simulated Deplatforming or Other Counter-REMVE Interventions on Gab**



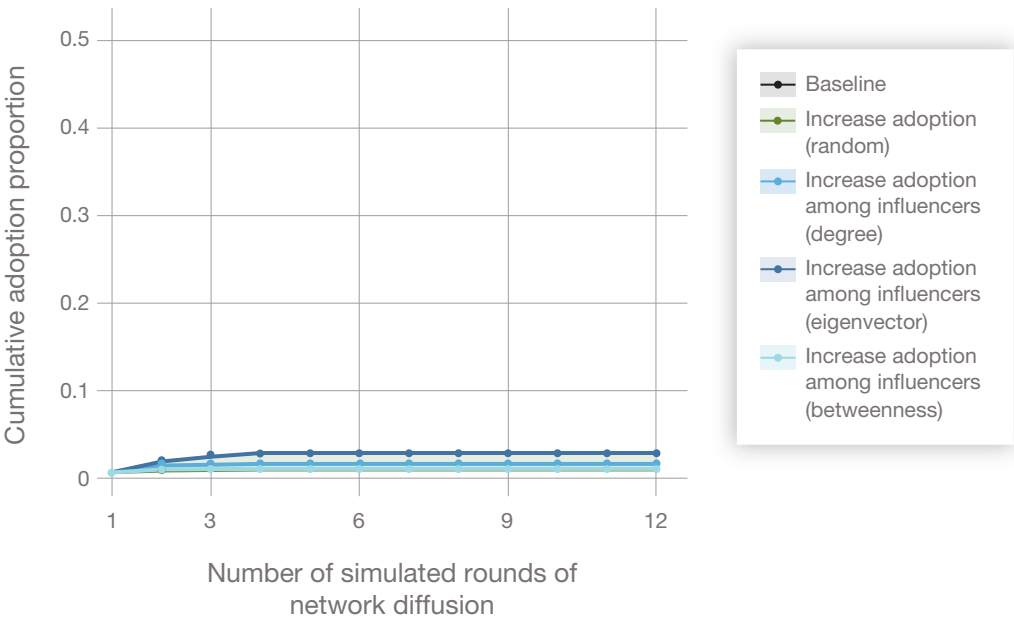
NOTE: Vertex interventions with number of adopters = 500; diffusion threshold: 0.3.

**FIGURE D.2**  
**Simulated Deplatforming or Other Counter-REMVE Interventions on Reddit**



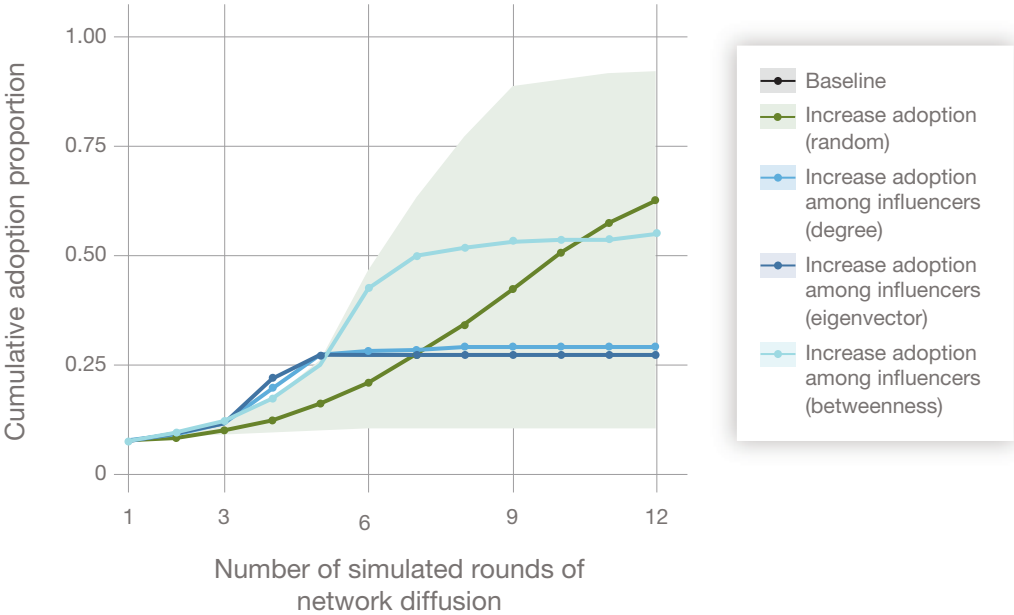
NOTE: Vertex interventions with number of adopters = 500; diffusion threshold: 0.3.

**FIGURE D.3**  
**Simulated Deplatforming or Other Counter-REMVE Interventions on Reddit with Only 50 Initial Intervention Targets**



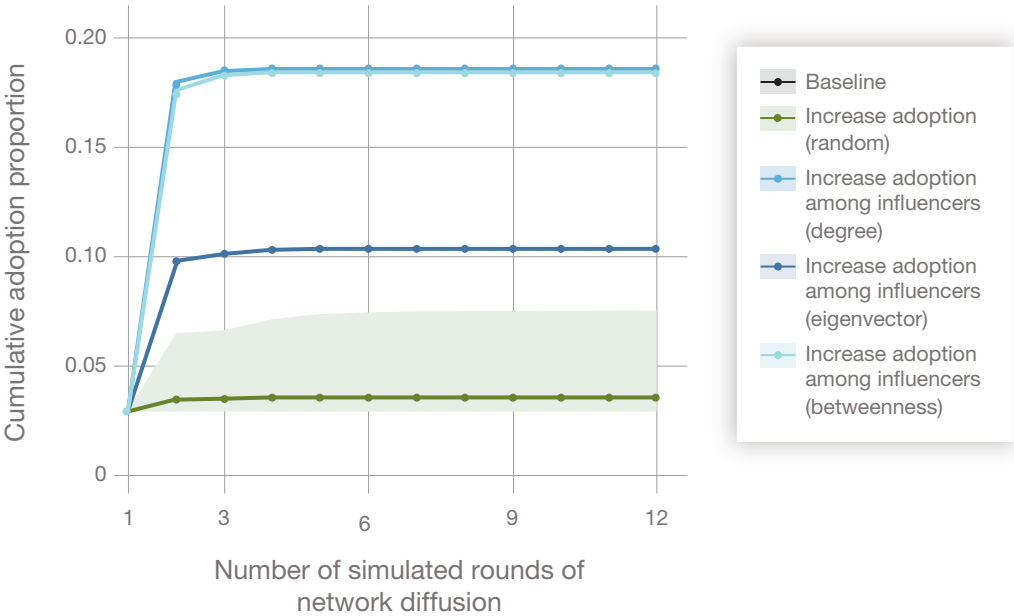
NOTE: Vertex interventions with number of adopters = 50; diffusion threshold: 0.3.

**FIGURE D.4**  
**Simulated Deplatforming or Other Counter-REMVE Interventions on Stormfront**



NOTE: Vertex interventions with number of adopters = 500; diffusion threshold: 0.3.

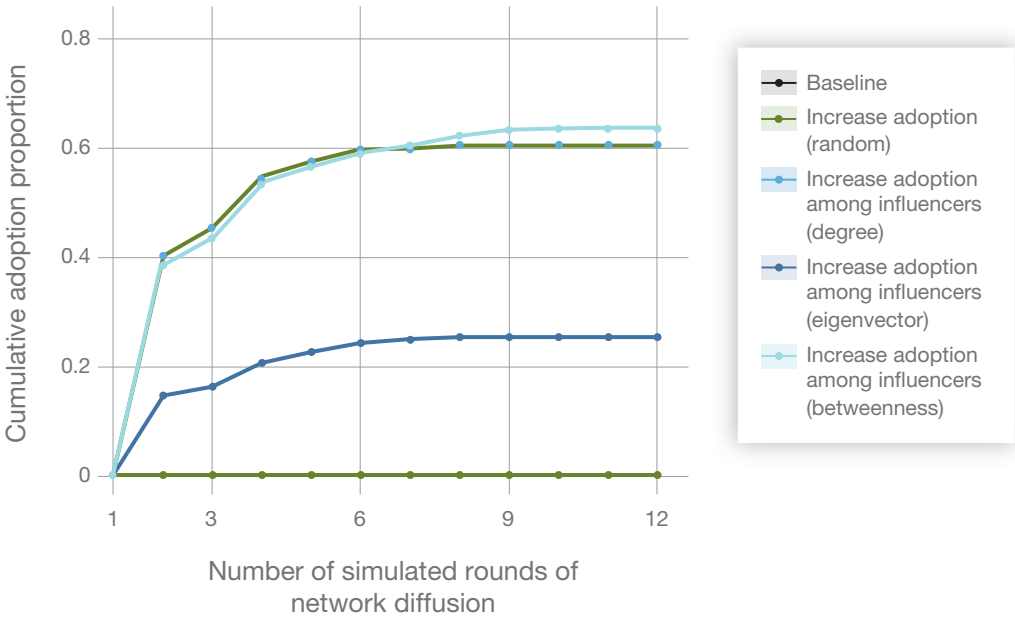
**FIGURE D.5**  
**Simulated Deplatforming or Other Counter-REMVE Interventions on Telegram**



NOTE: Vertex interventions with number of adopters = 500; diffusion threshold: 0.3.



**FIGURE D.6**  
**Simulated Deplatforming or Other Counter-REMVE Interventions on Twitter**



NOTE: Vertex interventions with number of adopters = 500; diffusion threshold: 0.3.

## Religion and Christianity Keywords Applied to Twitter

The following keyword query was used to pull all matching tweets to form a religion-focused Twitter conversation corpus and network. Bolded items were used to define a subset specific to Christianity. The query used word stems to include both singular and plural forms, and letter casing was ignored.

God OR Belief OR Faith OR Heaven OR Hell OR Pray OR

AND one of more of the following:

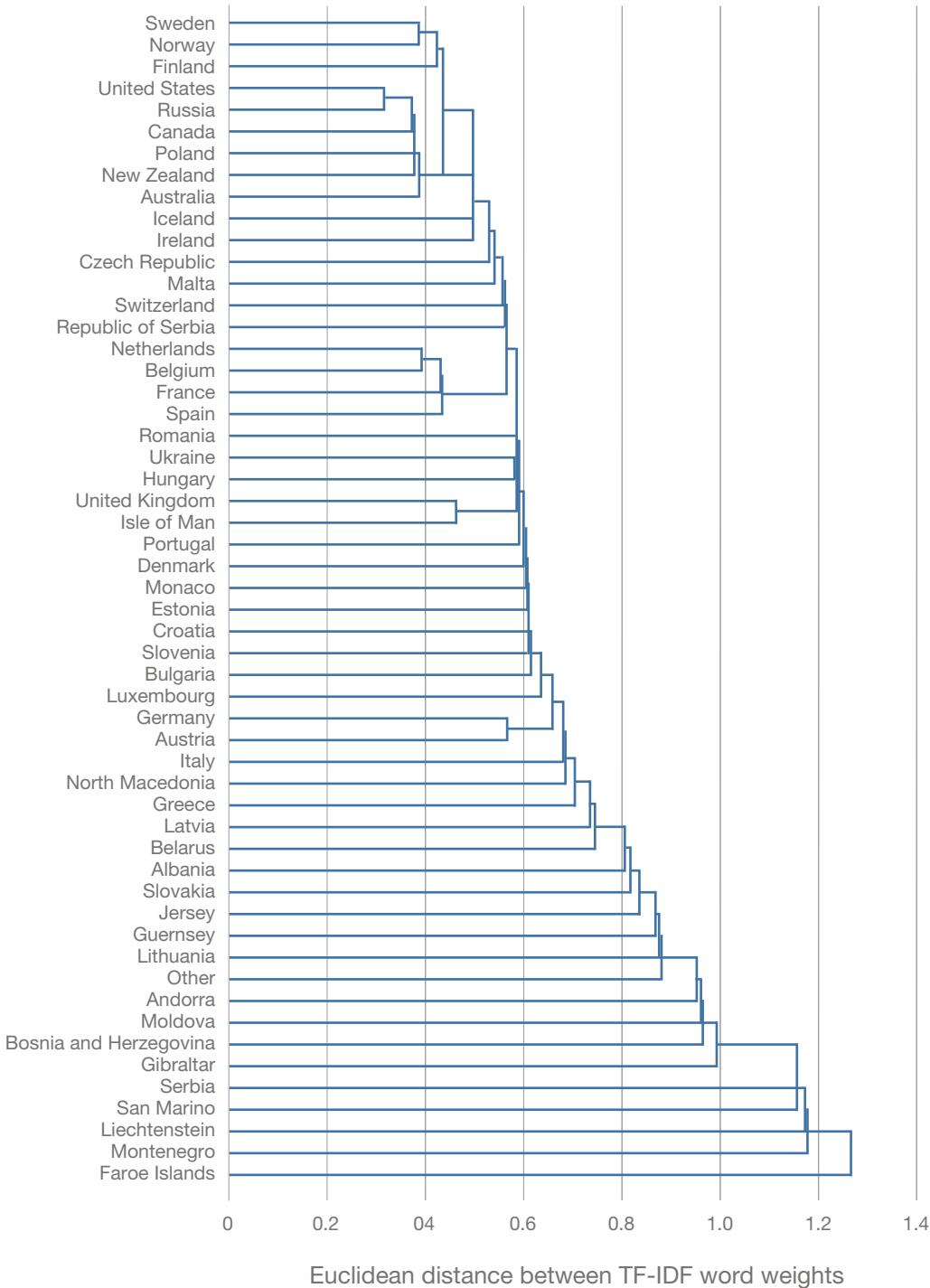
Religion, Belief, Faith, Deity, Doctrine, Dogma, Spiritual, Grace, Blessings, Judgement, Sin, Secularization, Apostasy, **Church**, **Chapel**, Mosque, Masjid, Synagogue, Temple, Mandir, Quran, Qura'an, Koran, Sharia, **Bible**, Torah, **Gospel**, **Old Testament**, **New Testament**, Vedas, Lord, **Jesus**, **Christ**, **God the father**, **Holy Spirit**, Allah, Prophet, YHWH, HaShem, Buddha, Shiva, Vishnu, **Saints**, **Apostles**, Imam, Mullah, Mufti, Rabbi, **Priest**, **Bishop**, **Pastor**, Monk, Angels, Demons, Devil, **Lucifer**, **Satan**, Heaven, Hell, After life, Mecca, Medina, **Vatican**, Jerusalem, **Nazareth**, **Eucharist**, **Sacrament**, Rite, Talmud, Karma, Dharma, Puja, siddhi, atman, sutra, bodhisattva, nirvana, Tao, Dao, Laoze, Laotzi, Laotse, Lao-Tse, Lao-Tzu, Lao Zi, Wu wei, Wuwei, T'ien, Tian



## Dendrogram of Lexical Similarities by Location on Twitter

See Figure F.1 for a dendrogram of lexical similarities listed by location on Twitter.

**FIGURE F.1**  
**Dendrogram of Lexical Similarities Using Reported Locations in Twitter Data**



# Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organization
AWD	Atomwaffen Division
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CVE	countering violent extremism
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
FY	fiscal year
GOP	Republican Party
H.E.A.T.	Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
LGBTQI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex
MMA	mixed martial arts
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NRM	Nordic Resistance Movement
NSM	National Socialist Movement
RIM	Russian Imperial Movement
REMVE	racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism
REMVEs	racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists
RTV	Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence
SDGT	Specially Designated Global Terrorist
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center
START	National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
TF-IDF	term-frequency-inverse-document-frequency
VK	Vkontakte
WITM	White Identity Terrorist Movement



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Racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) and extremists (REMVEs) present some of the most pressing threats to the United States. REMVE also has been identified as the White identity terrorist movement (WITM). REMVEs are among the most lethal domestic violent extremists, and they are the most likely to commit mass-casualty attacks. These movements are characterized by a broad ideological orientation toward xenophobic, anti-Semitic, racist, and misogynistic sentiment.

For this report, the authors reviewed the relevant literature on REMVE networks and collected and analyzed social media data from six social networks (Twitter, Reddit, Gab, Ruqqus, Telegram, and Stormfront) to produce a global network map of the digital REMVE space. That network map evaluates each network's construction, connectivity, geographic location, references to prominent organizations, and proclivity to violence. The authors also reviewed ten countries' experiences with REMVE to sketch out an understanding of the REMVE space in these countries and how REMVEs in those countries relate to those in the United States.

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