

The growing power of online communities of the extreme-right: deriving strength, meaning, and direction from significant socio-political events ‘in real life’

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The role of online communities of the extreme-right in the radicalization of individuals involved in political violence has received increased public attention due to recent tragic events around the world. In this policy brief, we provide a systematic account of the psychological processes underpinning the formation and transformation of these communities. Our analysis is built on the premise that these communities can be understood as ideologically driven psychological groups, and as such their collective beliefs, values, and norms are key to understanding their actions. Drawing on findings from research into an Australian extreme-right online community, we show how these collective beliefs, values, and norms can change in the aftermath of particular socio-political events in the offline domain. We conclude by proposing strategies that can be used to direct policy and recommendations for research in the area.

Keywords: white supremacy, online communities of the extreme-right, political violence, online radicalization, collective identities

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the increasing prevalence of computer-mediated communication technologies has compounded the devastating effects that extreme-right ideologies can have on communities across the world¹. A recent illustration of this combination of extreme-right ideology and modern communication technology is evident in the 2019 Christchurch mosques attacks. The offender—Brenton Tarrant, an Australian living in New Zealand—used social media to live-stream his attack. The video of the live shooting went viral on social media and was shared by users and mainstream media outlets around the world before being taken down. In this case, social media was used as part of a terrorist strategy to instil fear and inspire potential copycats and supporters. Tarrant himself was inspired by previous attackers: we know from media accounts that he wrote the names of other anti-Islamic extreme-right terrorists on his assault rifle. These included Anton Ludic Pettersson, a student who killed two migrant children in Sweden in October 2015, and Alexandre Bissonnette, a Canadian who attacked a Mosque in Québec City shooting 6 people dead in January 2017. In his online manifesto, Tarrant refers to the writings of terrorists such as Dylann Roof, who shot 9 African Americans dead in Charleston in South Carolina in 2015, and Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people, including 69 teenagers, in Norway in 2011. Tarrant was heavily immersed in the larger online community of the extreme-right, frequently visiting 8chan and the Facebook pages of various extreme-right groups in Australia, such as the United Patriots Front (where he often posted messages of support for the group's leader²).

The case of Brenton Tarrant highlights the role of online communities in both empowering violent extremists to perpetrate acts of terrorism (by providing ideological belonging and inspiration) and widening the potential influence of isolated acts (by enabling the broadcast of their actions to wider audiences). It underscores the importance and urgency of research on understanding the internal dynamics of identity formation and transformation in online extreme-right communities and their relationship with the real world – both with regard to political violence perpetrated 'in real life' by members of online communities, and the ways in which these online communities might derive strength from the (offline) socio-political context.

¹ Scrivens, Ryan, et al. "Measuring the evolution of radical right-wing posting behaviors online." *Deviant Behavior*, 1-17 (2018).

² Nick O'Malley et al., White-bred terrorist: the making of a killer. Sydney Morning Herald, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/white-bred-terrorist-the-making-of-a-killer-20190806-p52ee7.html> (2019)

The aim of this policy brief is to provide a systematic account of the socio-psychological processes driving the formation and transformation of online communities of the extreme-right. We start from the premise that online communities (including those of the extreme-right) are ideologically driven psychological groups, that is, their *formation* is underpinned by particular processes which are known to drive other groups of this type. Specifically, they can be conceptualised as cohesive collective identities that incorporate shared beliefs, values, norms and goals (that is, the content of a collective identity³). We then focus on factors that can drive the *transformation* of collective identities and, in particular, discuss how online communities of the extreme-right can be transformed by offline socio-political events. To illustrate this argument, we use recent findings from our research on a major Australian online community of the extreme-right.

Extreme-right online communities as ideologically driven psychological groups

In referring to the extreme-right movement, we consider its ideological base as incorporating beliefs about rejecting democracy and legitimising violence against its enemies (this is distinct from the ideologies of the radical right which primarily promotes the replacement of liberal elites without rejecting democracy)⁴. Supporters of such ideologies can form online communities of like-minded people, in order to share their beliefs and grievances and/or pursue a collective goal⁵. This makes online communities of the extreme-right dangerous, not only because they provide havens of validation and support for extremists with the potential to enact their hate^{6,7}, but also because they empower the broader extreme right movement⁵⁻⁷.

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³ Andrew Livingstone and Alexander Haslam. The importance of social identity content in a setting of chronic social conflict: Understanding intergroup relations in Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 47(1): 1-21 (2008)

⁴ Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal. Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses, ICCT Policy Brief, [https://icct.nl/publication/extreme-right-violence-and-terrorism-concepts-patterns-and-responses/\(2019\)](https://icct.nl/publication/extreme-right-violence-and-terrorism-concepts-patterns-and-responses/(2019))

⁵ Josh Adams and Vincent J. Roscigno. "White supremacists, oppositional culture and the World Wide Web." *Social Forces*, 84(2): 759-778 (2005)

⁶ Ana-Maria Bliuc et al., Online networks of racial hate: A systematic review of 10 years of research on cyber-racism. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 87: 75-86 (2018)

⁷ Manuela Caiani, and Patricia Kröll. "The transnationalization of the extreme right and the use of the Internet." *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 39 (4): 331-351 (2015)

From a psychological point of view, these communities can become central to people's self-definition and further shape their behaviours in significant ways⁸ beyond the online domain. According to social psychological theory, group membership is particularly important in relation to radicalization and the perpetration of political violence, because the group provides individuals with a framework of meaning that is aligned to violent action on behalf of a collective group goal. In other words, the group provides beliefs, values, and norms that can justify the use of otherwise abhorrent behaviours⁹. Thus, such communities are key because, they not only contribute to individual's radicalization, but also further provide radicalized individuals with prescriptive norms that sanction their behaviour¹⁰.

In particular, ideologically driven groups which are based on shared beliefs about how the world should be⁸ provide an ideal platform for radicalization because, by design, they are capable of bringing together like-minded people. Because the basis of group formation in such cases is the *similarity of shared beliefs* about the world, it is not surprising that these groups often function as ideological bubbles where group members reinforce each other's beliefs and fuel associated collective emotions (for example, anxiety as a result of perceived outgroup threats, and moral outrage¹¹). Over time, communication within such ideological bubbles can lead to a reinforcement and transformation of beliefs to become increasingly more extreme^{12,13}. We can assume, for example, that there is an online deliberation and a 'vetting process' of extremist ideas and beliefs, and self-selection of people supporting these increasingly extremist ideas¹⁵. For example, expressing support for the Christchurch attacker in extreme-right online communities might have alienated relatively 'moderate' individuals, but reinforced extremist ideas held by radical members.

⁸ Ana-Maria Bliuc et al., 'Opinion-based group membership as a predictor of commitment to political action,' *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 37(1):19-32 (2007)

⁹ Laura Smith et al. "The Need to Re-focus on the Group as the Site of Radicalization." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1-68 (2019)

¹⁰ Bertjan Doosje et al. "Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization." *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 11:79-84 (2016)

¹¹ Molly J. Crockett, "Moral outrage in the digital age." *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1: 769 (2017)

¹² Walter Quattrociocchi, et al. Echo chambers on Facebook. Available at SSRN 2795110 (2016)

¹³ Magdalena Wojcieszak, "'Don't talk to me': effects of ideologically homogeneous online groups and politically dissimilar offline ties on extremism." *New Media & Society*, 12: 637-655 (2010)

Collective identity transformation in online communities

Online communication between group members provides opportunities for collective identity transformation via a process of continuous intragroup deliberation. That is, discussion between group members can contribute to building a sense of solidarity and collective purpose, while at the same time generating new interpretations of social reality—including conceptualisations of group enemies and allies⁵. These processes of formation and transformation of collective identity do not occur in a vacuum, they are linked to the broader social political context and developments occurring outside the online community. We propose that in extreme-right online communities, collective understandings of what it means to be a member of that particular group ('who we are as a group', and 'who are our allies and enemies'), grievances (concerns about current issues relevant to the group), and group norms can be transformed in response to significant socio-political events in the offline domain. Such transformations can be understood as attempts by the group, as a collective, to adapt and maintain (or even improve) their functionality in the context of societal changes. These attempts often result in the development of new group norms that might be better suited to serving the group's most current goals⁵. While these transformations can gradually occur over time—mirroring changes in the broader societal context—we propose that specific socio-political events of high significance for the group can lead to more rapid changes in collective identities. This may be particularly true for politically oriented groups responding to the surrounding socio-political context.

Here we focus on such transformational events which, in the context of the extreme-right movement, have the potential to re-define and further energise the movement. We propose that this can happen because such events bring supporters together and accelerate the intragroup processes of norm development and refinement. As a general rule, to affect changes in online communities, the event needs to be ideologically aligned to the respective online community's shared ideological base. Drawing on our own research, and that of others³, we identify several features that describe events which have the potential to be transformational for ideologically aligned online communities. These features can be summarised as:

1. Underlying intergroup conflict

The events are direct manifestations of societal divisions and conflicts already present in a community or broader society. That is, they occur in specific socio-political contexts of enduring intergroup conflict and bring into focus 'us versus them' self-categorizations.

2. Conflicting narratives about social reality

When two conflicting narratives seek to explain aspects of social reality, they provide a platform from which to divide communities. When this occurs, particular events can be regarded as a manifestation of supporters of one 'ideological camp' (supporting one of the narratives) coming together to act in defence of that particular narrative. As such, the event provides an opportunity for the public to identify, support, and participate in *collective action* promoted by one side of the conflict.

3. Providing fulfilment of shared goals (collective achievements)

Events that can be regarded as some form of collective action by a group, that is ideologically aligned to the online community, can be re-framed as achievements on behalf of the group (by reclaiming status, resources, legitimacy, etc). Thus, to be empowering for online communities, whose members might not be directly part of the offline collective action, these events should involve collective action that is perceived as an overall group success by the online supporters. Thus, the outcome of collective action should, at the very least, have a positive connotation for the online community, but ideally would bring a symbolic or material benefit to the online community.

Our research studied the impact of transformational events, on the extreme-right online community Stormfront Downunder.¹⁴ These events were local racist riots that took place in 2005, in Sydney, Australia, and commonly referred to as the Cronulla Riots. We investigated whether the collective identity content of the online community Stormfront Downunder was changed by the riots. We next discuss the significance of the Cronulla riots in the context of Australian politics and provide some background on the community in our study.

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¹⁴ Ana-Maria Bliuc et al., 'Collective identity changes in far-right online communities: The role of offline intergroup conflict,' *New Media & Society*, 21(8): 1770–1786 (2019)

The Cronulla Race Riots and their significance for the Australian extreme-right community

The riots started on Sunday, 11th of December 2005, in the beach suburb of Cronulla, about 40 kilometres south of Sydney City Centre. They started as a protest by locals to ‘reclaim the beach’ from the Muslim youths who would typically access the beach via train from the inland suburbs of Sydney. Cronulla Beach being the most accessible beach by public transport from Sydney’s western suburbs, where a large number of Australian Muslims live. While initially peaceful, the protest of approximately 5000 people quickly turned violent with the crowd chanting racist slogans and attacking several passers-by of Middle Eastern appearance. Some tension ensued in the Sydney suburbs with large Middle Eastern populations, with smaller riots occurring in some other beachside suburbs. On the day of the riots, about 26 people were injured, and 16 people were arrested for various infractions, including malicious damage, offensive conduct, and affray. The riots were widely covered by local and international media. At the time, politicians blamed the media for the escalation of violence¹⁵. Beyond the injury to people and damage to property, the riots attained a much deeper significance. They represent a key moment in Australia’s political history—they were the first collective and open manifestation of anti-Islamic sentiment in modern Australia. The participants in the riots appropriated Australian songs, slogans, and slang to perform a particular version of nationalism based on a predominantly White version of an Australian identity, that devalues multiculturalism and excludes other cultural groups in Australia.¹⁶ The riots effectively redefined intergroup relations in Australia, in the sense that they brought debate on the meaning of being Australian to public attention.

Importantly, the riots represent a clear illustration of sharp intergroup conflict between two opposing ideologically driven groups, that can be broadly defined as supporters and opponents of multiculturalism in Australia. The collective action, manifested in the form of the riots, represents a clear illustration of action taken in defence of particular collective goals shaped by support of an anti-multiculturalist narrative. On various online forums (including Stormfront), the riots were framed as a brave challenge to the status-quo of a multicultural

¹⁵ Kevin M. Dunn, Performing Australian nationalisms at Cronulla. In: Noble G (ed.) *Lines in the Sand: The Cronulla Riots, Multiculturalism and National Belonging*, Sydney: Institute of Criminology Press, pp.76–94 (2009)

¹⁶ Ana-Maria Bliuc et al., Manipulating national identity: the strategic use of rhetoric by supporters and opponents of the ‘Cronulla riots’ in Australia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(12): 2174-2194 (2012)

Australia, where all citizens regardless of their ethnicity and religion were seen as equal. From the perspective of the extreme-right movement in Australia, the riots represent a group achievement as both a highly publicised attempt at reclaiming resources (in the form of the beach as public space) and legitimacy (by contesting the accepted value of multiculturalism in Australia). The clear ideological alignment between the supporters of the riots and the extreme-right online community Stormfront Downunder was further evidenced by the presence of members of various groups of the extreme right (driven by the same ideologies as Stormfront) during the riots¹⁶. Based on these observations, we recognized that the riots had the potential to function as a transformational event for the Australian extreme-right movement and associated online communities.

The online extreme-right in Australia: Stormfront Downunder

Stormfront Downunder is the Australian sub-forum of Stormfront.org, the most well-known global online forum (that is an online community) with national sub-forums across the world, including in Europe, South Africa, and Australia and linked to a number of offenders who have engaged in deadly attacks¹⁷ (for example, Anders Breivik, the perpetrator of the 2011 Norway attacks¹⁸). Stormfront Downunder was established in 2001 and since then it has been one of the main online extreme-right communities in Australia. The sub-forum is structured into sections, which in turn are made up of 'threads' or moderated discussions. The website can be viewed by any visitor, but participation in the discussions is only open to registered members. Historically, the Stormfront online community has provided a base for communication, and a platform that brings together supporters of the extreme-right from Australia, New Zealand, and around the world¹⁹. The website provides links to several offline organisations that appear to be endorsed by Stormfront Downunder. These include the extreme-right Australia First Party, the Nationalist Alternative (a Melbourne-based organization self-described as a political think tank and activist group driven by an ideology centred on the "welfare and needs of the Australian people"), Right-Wing Resistance NZ (a Christchurch-based extreme-right, white nationalist organization), and Women for Aryan

¹⁷ Heidi Beirich, 20 years of hate. *Southern Poverty Law Center intelligence reports*. Available at: <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2015/20-years-hate> (2015)

¹⁸ Mark Townsend and Ian Traynor, Norway attacks: how far-right views created Anders Behring Breivik. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/30/norway-attacks-anders-behring-breivik> (2011)

¹⁹ Peucker, Mario, and Debra Smith, eds. *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia*. Springer (2019).

Unity, a global organisation of white supremacist women with chapters in Australia and other places in the world.

Transformations of the collective identity of Stormfront Downunder

To test whether the collective identity of Stormfront Downunder was transformed in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots, we conducted an analysis of online communication between members of the subforum before, during, and after the riots. We automatically collected all posts made to the Stormfront Downunder sub-forum from 2001 (the year it was formed) to mid 2015 (ten years after the riots), using a Javascript program for web capture. In total, 75,795 posts were made under 5489 threads. We examined changes in collective identity content as captured by the use of language in the form of group members' most salient *concerns, group norms, emotions, and levels of consensus* within the community. To analyse the data we used: a) Natural Language Processing (NLP) to calculate the most commonly used nouns²⁰ before and after the riots, as indicators of the group's most salient concerns; b) computerised linguistic analysis using the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count software (LIWC)²¹, to capture the psychological dimensions of language use, from which to assess changes in emotions and expressions of consensus; and c) thematic analysis, in which recurrent key themes were identified²² in the 100 most quoted posts on the sub-forum between 2001 and 2015 (in this case, the quoting behaviour was used as an indicator of topic relevance for the members). All statistical analysis was performed in R²³. Our methodology, analyses, and findings are detailed in Bliuc et al., 2019¹⁴.

Our findings suggest that, in the case of Stormfront Downunder, the online community had changed after the riots to become more extreme in its views, had developed stronger anti-Muslim attitudes and more hostile conflictual norms. At the same time, it had become angrier and less fragmented (with lower levels of disagreement between members). In other words,

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²⁰ Nouns were preferred as these were more efficient for the elicitation of ideas compared with using the complete corpus. See: Martin, Fiona, and Mark Johnson. "More efficient topic modelling through a noun only approach." In Proceedings of the Australasian Language Technology Association Workshop 2015, pp. 111-115. 2015.

²¹ Pennebaker, James W., Martha E. Francis, and Roger J. Booth. "Linguistic inquiry and word count: LIWC 2001." *Mahway: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates* 71, no. 2001 (2001): 2001.

²² Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative research in psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101.

²³ <https://cran.r-project.org/>

the online community became more aligned to a collective identity likely to be conducive to political violence. Our thematic analysis revealed that, after the riots, *group norms* became more conflictual in the sense that they tended to be more focused on who the enemy was, in addition to attempts to strengthen the group by incorporating allies who were ideologically similar (regardless of their ethnicity) into the group. In this setting, the criterion of ethnicity became irrelevant when the new allies meet ideological requirements. At the same time, the group became more unified in terms of consensus between group members (that is, the use of words signifying negation and differentiation decreased significantly after the riots).

Not surprisingly, in the immediate aftermath of the events, the racist riots became a hotly discussed topic between the members of the online community. More specifically, the topic of the riots became one the *most salient concerns of the group*: the term 'Cronulla' was used once during the 26 weeks (6 months) preceding the riots but increased to an average occurrence of 20 times per week in the 26 weeks after the riots. The group also became more preoccupied with issues about race, ethnicity and religion. References are increasingly made to ethnic and religious outgroups such as 'Lebanese', 'Greek', 'Muslim' and 'Islamic'. Increases in these words are accompanied by increases in the use of terms reflecting negative attitudes such as 'gangs', 'violence', and 'scum'¹⁴. The analysis of the *emotions underpinning communication* in the online communities shows that there were increases in energising emotions such as anger (together with swear words suggesting increases in levels of hostility). This analysis shows that the group does not become more anxious or sadder after the riots, only angrier (that is, there is no overall increase in negative emotions)²⁴.

Moreover, our analysis detected that the transformation of group values and norms, code of conduct, and dynamics between group members (or in other words, changes in the *collective identity* of the online community) was accompanied by material changes such as increased levels of public support for the online community (as reflected in the increased number of new members joining) and increased levels of interaction between the group members. Both of these factors resulted in a sharp increase in member activity during and immediately after the riots, as shown in Figure 1.

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²⁴ A detailed description of these findings is provided in a 2019 article by Bliuc and colleagues published in *New Media & Society*.

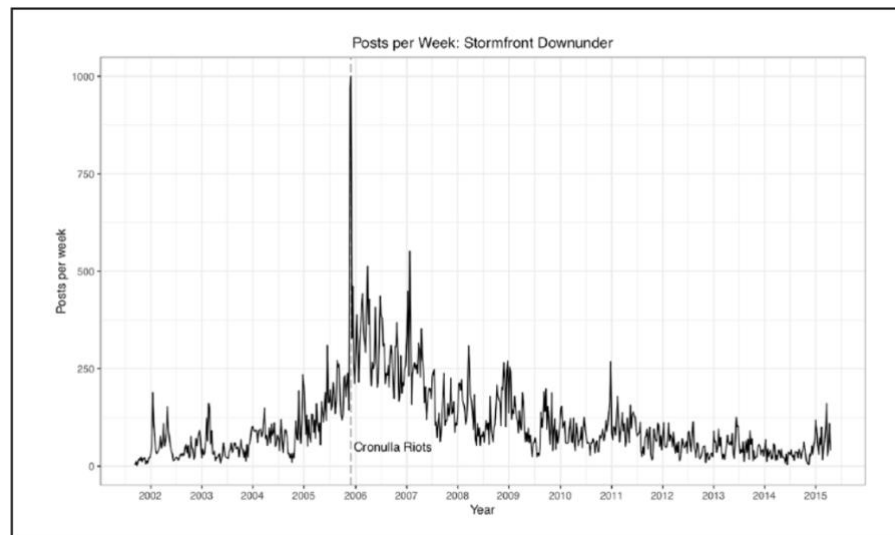


Figure 1. Cronulla Race Riots in Sydney as an empowering event the Australian online community Stormfront Downunder – the riots mark a clear increase in the online interactions between members (from Bliuc et al., 2019).

Overall, our study shows that, in the socio-political context of Australia, the racist riots had been transformational for the online community. In turn, it is plausible that these transformations further empowered both the local extreme-right community and the broader, transnational extreme-right movement.

Importantly, this analysis shows how the identity of the online community was transformed, to become not only more radical and exclusive, but also more focussed and clearly targeting particular (out)groups, after the riots. In this case, these (out)groups are represented by Australian Muslims. It is particularly relevant that these transformed norms are both more conflictual (in the sense that they legitimise more extreme behaviours) and more specific (in the sense that the group enemy is more clearly identified). This provides group members with norms prescriptive of what needs to be done (or how far they need to go) to achieve the group's collective goals. Tragically, this analysis resonates with the violent actions of the Australian Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the Christchurch mosques attacks, whose anti-Islamic sentiment and increasing hostility towards Australian Muslims was detected online.

Many commentators have identified how violent extremists might be emboldened and strengthened by online communities, which has enabled them to engage in violence²⁵. However, our research suggests, this relationship may be reciprocal, that is, online behaviour and online collective identities of extremist groups are also affected by offline activities.

Recommendations for prevention policies and strategic research

Drawing on these findings, we discuss next two sets of recommendations. The first are relevant to the development of effective prevention policies and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) interventions. The second set are relevant to providing support for strategic research into extreme-right group violence (focusing on improving communication between the research community and other stakeholders).

Recommendations relevant to prevention policy and CVE interventions

Preventive policing and other interventions to prevent or counter violent extremism, need to plan for adaptive responses to socio-political events that have the potential to transform and empower communities of the extreme-right in both online and offline domains. Based on past experience and lessons learned, P/CVE practitioners need to be aware of the potential for such events to incite violence. More specifically, the detection of events in society that can have the potential to empower extreme-right communities can be fine-tuned by targeted monitoring of changes in the content generated by these communities in the aftermath of events identified as potentially transformational. Using methodologies similar to the ones we describe, more efficient and targeted monitoring of content can be achieved by identifying changes in language use reflecting particular emotions (such as, for example, the prevalence of anger, as an energising emotion, in contrast to anxiety or sadness), and transformations of group concerns and norms, such as a tendency to become more radical, conflictual, or justifying violence. In addition, targeted monitoring could include identification of potential indicators of increased group cohesion (language use reflecting increased levels of intragroup consensus) and polarisation from mainstream society (language use reflecting increased

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²⁵ Tech against Terrorism. Analysis: New Zealand attack and the terrorist use of the internet, available at [https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/2019/03/26/analysis-new-zealand-attack-and-the-terrorist-use-of-the-internet/\(2019\)](https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/2019/03/26/analysis-new-zealand-attack-and-the-terrorist-use-of-the-internet/(2019)).

intergroup dissent). Building on the findings of our research, the detection of increased group cohesion could be sharpened by using indicators that capture both linguistic markers as well as behavioural markers such as increased social interaction between the members of an online community (i.e. changes in the patterns of online linkages between members²⁶). These approaches can be integrated into the design of detection algorithms that are sensitive to evidence of changes in activity and language indicating shifts as described above.

Recommendations relevant to providing support for strategic research development

There is a need to develop integrated approaches for researchers of Islamic society and politics, with those studying the far and extreme-right, and other types of radicalization, in order to better understand the similarities and differences in how transformational socio-political events may affect these different types of extremist groups. The adoption of evidence-driven strategies can be facilitated by improved communication between researchers, policy makers, and security agencies. In particular, responses to socio-political events with transformational potential for various extreme right communities should be holistic and involve the collaboration of the research community, the public, and private stakeholders such as tech companies (Facebook, Google, and Twitter, for example) to swiftly limit the dissemination of content that may empower and embolden extremist groups.

Our findings and broader research programme highlight the need to continue developing cross-disciplinary research that combines expertise on ‘big data’ analytics and in-depth understanding of the psychology behind human behaviour, and experiment with the combination of different methodological paradigms to explore complementary research questions from different angles.

Concluding remarks

The findings discussed here are based on data drawn from more than 14 years of online communication between members of the extreme-right online community Stormfront Downunder. Using a theoretically driven framework for the analysis, we found that particular

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²⁶ Bliuc, Ana-Maria, et al. "The effects of local socio-political events on group cohesion in online far-right communities." *PloS one*, 10.1371/journal.pone.0230302 (2020).

socio-political events ‘in real life’ can lead to important transformations in the collective norms of extreme-right online communities. Beyond these findings, this research highlights the potential of using real online interaction data for understanding group dynamics and fundamental processes in communities that are traditionally extremely difficult to access. Despite the many benefits of using big data²⁷, we advise some caution in designing a research plan. In particular, we believe it is essential to frame investigations to test hypotheses that have solid theoretical foundations. This is to avoid the distractions arising from trends and correlations due to non-systematic effects that inevitably occur in very large data sets, and which lead to opportunistic and sometimes contradictory conclusions. Notwithstanding these concerns, the richness of the data enables the use of diverse analytic tools and the integration of automatic, computational approaches with critical qualitative analyses of online communication.

Finally, we know that racist riots in Sydney affected a key extreme-right online community in Australia. Through its global connections, this influence has likely extended beyond the Australian context. If racist riots played this role in empowering and sharpening the focus on this online community, we ask: how might events such as the Christchurch mosques attacks be perceived by supporters of the extreme-right movement across the globe? The world saw with horror how those killings unfolded. Since then, academics, politicians, and media representatives have focused on the impact of those killings on the affected community and, more broadly, on the Muslim community in the Western world, trying to find solutions and preventive strategies—most notably, the “Christchurch Call” initiated by the New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Arden.²⁸ However, Tarrant’s actions must have also had an impact on the perpetrator’s ingroup including those who, before the commencement of the shootings, were referred to as “the best bunch of cobblers a man could ask for (...)”²⁹. We know that Tarrant inspired subsequent terrorist acts in the United States, such as the Poway massacre and the El Paso shootings³⁰. It is plausible that these acts might have then functioned as catalysts in their own communities, extending the repercussions of the events in Christchurch,

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²⁷ Ben Shneiderman, Science 2.0., *Science*, 319 (5868):1349-1350 (2008)

²⁸ Mark Scott, Rym Momtaz, and Laura Kayali, Macron, Ardern led call to eliminate online terrorist content, Plotico, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/christchurch-call-emmanuel-macron-jacinda-arden-facebook-google-twitter-extreme-harmful-content/> (2019)

²⁹ Jessica McBride, Brenton Tarrant: 8chan Posts Predated Mosque Shootings, available at <https://heavy.com/news/2019/03/brenton-tarrant-8chan-full-video-nazi/> (2019)

³⁰ Lizzie Dearden, Revered as a saint by online extremists, how Christchurch shooter inspired copycat terrorists around the world, Independent, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/brenton-tarrant-christchurch-shooter-attack-el-paso-norway-poway-a9076926.html> (2019)

and amplifying the need for strategies to mitigate the corrosive influence of extremism in all its forms.

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