SUMMARY

- Public commentary concerning issues relating to the Canadian far-right mirror the nuances, tensions, and disagreement within and between the groups belonging to the movement.

- Generally speaking, responses to overt white nationalist, white supremacist, and right-wing ideas were met with a moderate response by online commentators.

- A strategy of focusing on the semantics and perceived misuse of terms like 'white nationalism', 'white supremacy', and 'Nazi' was frequently used in order to minimize any controversy associated with the recent rise of far-right groups in Canada.
INTRODUCTION

Lurking in online spaces that are often credited with generating online hatred can be a difficult task. They are not typically environments that are particularly welcoming those who fall outside of identifying as male and white.

Indeed, imageboard websites such as 4chan and 8chan explicitly state and celebrate excluding individuals who are not white males. Racist, sexist, and homophobic epithets are used freely and loosely on these platforms, weaving their way into the technical vocabulary and culture of these sites.

As such, it is difficult to get a full picture of how different forms of online hatred falling under far-right ideologies interact with and influence one another.

While it may be tempting to lump together white nationalists and Trump supporters, or men's rights activists and advocates of free speech, there is nuance and disagreement within and between these groups.

While one should guard against painting far-right groups with too broad and homogeneous a brush, there are common themes present within far-right circles (Nagle, 2017). For example, they share the desire to safeguard the high-status position of the 'white race', which is perceived as being threatened by the effects of immigration policies and/or multiculturalism (Doosje et al., 2016).

In addition to espousing race-based hatred, far-right groups also tend to embrace elements of The Manosphere, such as being opposed to "political correctness" and discourse surrounding gender identity and expressions; promoting instead a return to conventional, binary conceptions of gender (Nagle, 2017).

Websites such as the now inactive Return of Kings, for example, not only promote raping women, but also link visitors to articles about white superiority (Bender, 2017).

FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENT IN CANADA

Perry and Scrivens (2016) explain that, by and large, the Canadian far-right movement is fueled by responses to the country's policies of immigration and multiculturalism. They describe it as:

a loose movement, animated by a racially, ethnically, and sexually defined nationalism. This nationalism is typically framed in terms of White power, and is grounded in xenophobic and exclusionary understandings of the perceived threats posed by such groups as non-Whites, Jews, immigrants, homosexuals, and feminists. (p. 821)
The scope and scale of Canadian far-right groups has, in recent years, increasingly been mapped and garnered mainstream attention (Boutilier, 2018). It is currently estimated that no fewer than 100 active right-wing extremist groups have emerged in Canada since the year 2000, ranging in size from three to over 100 members (Perry & Scrivens, 2016).

Canada hosts several websites aimed at promoting far-right conservative ideologies, be they white supremacist, white nationalist, or right-wing extremist in nature. As Scrivens and Perry (2017) contend, “regardless of national affiliation, Internet communication allows white people across the globe to share in the celebration of a common race” (p. 542).

**METHODOLOGY**

**CORPUS-ASSISTED CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CACDA)**

The present study uses corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis [CACDA] (Thomas, 2015) to uncover linguistic patterns in online conversations pertaining to the Canadian far-right movement.

CACDA combines conventionally quantitative corpus linguistic techniques with typically qualitative critical discourse analytic methods. It provides an effective means of mapping out frequency information and association patterns related to linguistic phenomena appearing within large volumes of electronically encoded text.

Specifically, CACDA enables a researcher to identify word pairings that appear frequently within a data set and their statistical significance. Furthermore, it allows for an analysis of how statistically significant word pairs are used in context. ii

**REDDIT**

This research brief analyzes online conversations appearing on reddit, a publicly available, open source website that is most aptly understood as a hybrid forum-based social network/news aggregator site.

As of November 2017, reddit counted over 330 million active monthly users, 138 thousand active communities (subreddits), and was ranked as the fifth most visited site in the United States. iii

Registered reddit users are able to customize what they see on their personal account pages by subscribing to ‘subreddits’. Any registered user may create a subreddit on any
topic and under such categories as: educational subreddits, entertainment subreddits, discussion subreddits, and humour and image-sharing subreddits.

Registered reddit users are also able to submit content to the site in the form of a link (e.g., link to a news article, photo, video) or as a text (“self”) post. Once content has been submitted, registered users can then vote it ‘up’ or ‘down’, which moves this content to a different rank on the website’s pages. Users are encouraged to ‘upvote’ content if they think that it contributes to the conversation and to ‘downvote’ content if they think that it is off-topic; in short, “the popularity and prominence of material on the site are determined by voting from the reddit community” (Duggan & Smith, 2013, p. 2).

Registered users are equally able to comment on one another’s content and to vote on these comments, thus enabling discussion and accentuation of issues that users themselves deem relevant and meaningful.

Importantly, the voting functionality provided by the reddit platform is central to CACDA in that it provides one measure of how online content is being received by audiences.

This approach assumes that the more upvotes that content receives (i.e. the higher its point value), the more its audience agrees with it or sees it as valuable in some way. Whereas, the more content is ‘downvoted’ (i.e. the lower its point value or if it carries a negative point value), the less its audience agrees with it or sees it as valuable.

Moreover, when content receives a high number of downvotes, it becomes ‘downvoted into oblivion’ and effectively disappears from reddit’s main interface, thus potentially signaling disagreement or resistance to mainstream thought patterns.

DATA SET

Conversations that covered topics pertaining to the Canadian far-right movement were sampled using combinations of the following search terms: Canada, “alt right”, “white supremac*”, “white national*”, “right wing”, Edmonton, Nazi*.

All conversations contained within the data set were created in 2018.

Table 1. Data set overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Threads</th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
<th>Primary Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>181,653</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data set used for the present analysis contained 28 conversation threads written predominantly in English, which stemmed from primarily the r/Canada, r/CanadaPolitics, and r/Edmonton subreddits.
FINDINGS

Analysis of the conversation threads contained within the present data set revealed several salient terms. The frequency of these key terms is represented in Figure 1—the larger the size of a word, the more frequently it appeared in the data set.

Figure 1. Frequent salient terms

Analysis of these salient terms revealed several meaningful linguistic patterns. Of these, the following three terms held associations that reveal particularly interesting discursive patterns pertaining to the Canadian far-right movement: white [whites], Nazi [Nazis], hate.

WHITE

Within the present data, analysis of the key word “white [whites]” revealed frequent and strong associations with terms such as: supremacist, supremacy, nationalism, nationalist. These word pairings (highlighted in Figure 2 and Table 2) were used to discuss the nuances of different factions of the far-right movement in Canada.
Table 2. Collocation analysis of “white [whites]”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Associated terms</th>
<th>logDice&lt;sup&gt;iv&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>white [whites] (adj)</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>supremacist (nationalism, nationalist)</td>
<td>12.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white [whites] (noun)</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>nationalism (nationalist)</td>
<td>11.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>supremacist</td>
<td>10.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the following comments highlight, there is little definitional consensus concerning the terms ‘white nationalism’, ‘white supremacy’, ‘Alt-Right’, ‘right-wing extremism’, and Nazi:

- **Right wing extremism means neo-Nazis and white supremacists.** (8 points)

- **I’d take a breath before coming to the conclusion that the ‘alt-right’ are white nationalists.** (16 points)

- **The alt-right subreddit defines themselves as white nationalists. And identity is a big part of the alt right movement. There is also a flavour of anti-establishment that sprinkles itself within this alt-right movement.** (66 points)

- **I think the important distinction you are missing is that ‘white nationalist’ and ‘nationalist who happens to be white’ are very different things.** (11 points)
Do you understand what a white nationalist is? Its more than just being a nationalist who is white. She is advocating for genocide of non-whites in Canada. (13 points)

White nationalists want to make a nation by white people for white people. (15 points)

White supremacy is a type of white nationalism. Even the least hardcore white nationalist believes that whites need to maintain majorities. (10 points)

Moreover, comments revealed a lack of consensus surrounding the possible links between white nationalism or supremacy and Nazism.

For example, there were several comments that argued for the direct comparison:

- Nazis were fascist authoritarian white supremacists. (3 points)
- The Soldiers of Oden are directly tied to and made up of actual proud neo-Nazis. They are overt white nationalists hiding behind a thin guise of protecting communities. Their goal is becoming akin to Hitlers brownshirts. (26 points)
- Nazism isn't white nationalism. (-4 points)

And those that argue against it:

- I never said they were Nazis, I said they were white supremacist and I'm right. (19 points)
- A white nationalist and a Nazi are not the same thing. (1 point)

While the comments made within the conversations analyzed as part of this research brief highlight the nuances, tensions, and disagreement within and between the groups belonging to the Canadian far-right, there was a decided lack of commentary made opposing to the movement overall.

Instead, there were frequent attempts to dismiss the “fuss” being made over the rise of far-right ideologies in Canada and around the world:

- In case you haven't noticed by now 'white supremacist' is simply a slur that anti-Whites call any White person who opposes them. (37 points)
- Nothing wrong with being a white supremacist or white nationalist. (3 points)
NAZI

Analysis of the key word “Nazi [Nazis]” revealed frequent and strong associations with terms such as: call, mean, label. These word pairings (highlighted in Figure 3 and Table 3) were used to question the appropriateness of using the term ‘Nazi’ to describe people espousing right-wing conservative ideologies.

Figure 3. Terms associated with “Nazi”

Table 3. Collocation analysis of “Nazi [Nazis]”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Associated terms</th>
<th>logDice\textsuperscript{vi}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nazi [Nazis]</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>call (mean)</td>
<td>10.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>label</td>
<td>10.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Representative comments include:

So many people in the past few years have been called a Nazi for having even a single conservative position and they get skeptical when they hear Nazis now. (35 points)

Everyone is calling right-wingers Nazis for simply holding conservative views. (61 points)

It’s a double-standard when right-wing groups are called Nazis and terrorists even when there’s no violence; yet Antifa aren’t called
terrorists when they literally attack innocent people with armed mobs. (9 points)

Comments also argued that the term ‘Nazi’ was being over- and mis-used:

You can't just call every neo Nazi you disagree with a Nazi. (8 points)

Are they legit Nazis or just right wingers labeled Nazis? How did ‘Nazi’ get so watered down? (25 points)

Seems the bar for being labeled a Nazi gets lower and lower by the minute. (2 points)

And this actually builds into why people defend the Proud Boys because since they often see people falsely labeled Nazis when actual Nazis are labeled Nazis they are skeptical and don’t want to believe it. (6 points)

These comments seem to suggest that there is a relatively fixed (and shared) understanding of what it means to be a Nazi, which goes beyond simply holding right-wing or conservative views.

Absent from this commentary, however, was an articulation of the possible dangers of the rise of (neo)-Nazism in Canada. Rather, the term appeared in conversations mainly to discount and diminish its use when describing groups belonging to far-right ideologies.

**HATE**

Analysis of the key word “hate” revealed frequent and strong associations with terms such as: crime, speech. These word pairings (highlighted in Figure 4 and Table 4) were used to provide conceptual definitions and to debate where the line between concepts get drawn in practice.

In discussions concerning the far-right messages that had recently appeared in public spaces in urban Canadian cities, comments highlighted a relatively common understanding of the concept of ‘hate speech’ within Canada:

**Stating your opinion on the topic is protected speech. It crosses the line when it involves a call to action against a protected group, which constitutes hate speech.** (13 points)

**We already have protections— no one poses any challenge to them and if the words cross the line or actually cause any harm to us as an identifiable group or whatever we have abundant means to fight it.** (21 points)
Table 4. Collocation analysis of “hate”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Associated terms</th>
<th>logDice⁷⁷</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hate (noun)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>crime</td>
<td>12.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>speech</td>
<td>12.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments equally signaled a common understanding of the potential dangers of hate speech, and whether it should be limited within society:

*There are grave consequences to allowing extremist hate speech. While most of us are able to discern bad ideas and isolate them there are vulnerable members of our society who have not (or cannot) developed this ability. (2 points)*

*If you condemn the act [the hate speech] as potentially criminal you are taking a stand against it. I don't think the police going after someone for this is limiting free speech. It is very clearly some sort of hate speech. (5 points)*

Notably, in conversations concerning the Toronto Police’s decision to launch an investigation into the appearance of Alt-Right posters in Toronto, there were debates about the relationship between racism, hate speech, and hate crimes:

*Racism? Yes. Hate crime as per our laws? No. (4 points)*
Simply being racist is not a hate crime though. (11 points)

Racism is not against the law and in itself is not considered a hate crime. (17 points)

The poster is about white nationalism and all that racist crap. What it doesn't do is straight up say anything racist. There's only an implication. And that implication isn't advocating violence. (5 points)

I do not see anything hateful or criminal about this. It is as 'racist' as 'black lives matter' is in that it is promoting defensive viewpoints from a people who perceive themselves as marginalized. This is a shocking waste of police resources to try and find who put them up. (12 points)

The majority of comments offered in these conversations reacted to the type of racism supported by far-right ideologies with moderation, if not outright support.

DISCUSSION

The online discussions of the Canadian far-right movement that evolved within the conversations analyzed as part of this research brief held libertarian ideological undertones. That is to say that the majority of comments contained arguments in favour of free speech in order to justify measured responses to overt white nationalist, white supremacist, and right-wing ideas.

While few comments explicitly endorsed far-right ideology—

*Please explain for people like me how multiculturalism and diversity of ethnicity is supposed to be beneficial to society? (13 points)*

*[There's] nothing wrong with being a white supremacist or white nationalist. (3 points)*

—the majority of comments attempted to minimize any controversy associated with the recent increase of far-right groups in Canada (Scrivens & Perry, 2017) by focusing on the semantics and perceived misuse of terms like 'white nationalism', 'white supremacy', and 'Nazi'.


REFERENCES


URLS

reddit [http://www.reddit.com/]

Return of Kings [http://www.returnofkings.com/]
SUGGESTED READING


ENDNOTES

i For a fulsome discussion of The Manosphere, see Online Misogyny in Canadian Politics from this January 2019 research brief series.

ii For a full discussion of CACDA methodology, see the resources on the Project Someone: Prejudice du jour web page. [https://projectsomeone.ca/prejudicedujour]

iii https://www.redditinc.com/press

iv The logDice statistic is an account of how often two words appear within a body of text both next to, and away from, each other. The logDice statistic carries a theoretical maximum value of 14; word pairs (collocations) with a logDice value of 10 or greater are considered to be exceptionally strong discursive relationships. For a full discussion, see Rychlý, 2008.

v The negative point value associated with this comment suggests that reddit users disagreed with the statement; thus, it can be deduced that users believe that white nationalism is akin to Nazism.

vi Ibid.

vii Ibid.