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## Article

# Online and Offline Coordination in Australia's Far-Right: A Study of True Blue Crew

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**Abstract:** Far-right extremism transpires in virtual and physical space. In this study, we examine how the Australian far-right extremist group 'True Blue Crew' attempted to coordinate their offline activities with their social media activism. To this end, we conducted a thematic content analysis of administrator posts and user comments present on the group's Facebook page prior to and following an organised street rally in June 2017. This online analysis was partnered with ethnographic field work to gauge the perceptions of group members and supporters during the rally in Melbourne, Victoria. The results highlight the multi-dimensional and intimate manner in which online and offline contexts are coordinated to support far-right activism and mobilisation. This study offers an empirical account of how far-right attitudes, activism, and mobilisation transpired in Australia in the years prior to an Australian committing the Christchurch terror attack. It reveals a growing frustration within the broader far-right movement, leading to later strategic adaptation that can be interpreted as an early warning sign of an environment increasingly conducive to violence. This provides a more nuanced understanding of the context from which far-right terrorism emerges, and speaks to the importance of maintaining a level of analysis that transverses the social and the individual, as well as the online and the offline spaces. Implications for security and government agencies responses are discussed.

**Keywords:** Australia; far right; online–offline; media; activism; True Blue Crew

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## 1. Introduction

Far-right extremism, as with most contemporary political movements, transpires across virtual and physical spaces. While social media platforms have become an increasingly popular medium for communicating far-right ideology (Berger et al. 2020; Holt et al. 2022), facilitating recruitment (Scrivens et al. 2022), and mobilising action among the far right (Davey and Ebner 2017; Peucker et al. 2021), offline activism and activities continue to play a significant role (Berger et al. 2020). As Champion and Poynting (2021, p. 3) have warned, '[t]here are genuine implications for mis-conceptualizing the radicalization of the far right as either offline or online. In the digital information age, these two domains must be considered mutually complementary and reinforcing'. In the Australian context, certain events in the mid–late 2010s, and the subsequent further radicalisation within the far right, has called for more sophisticated responses to extreme-right techniques and strategies for multimodal mobilisation. Over the last dozen years, social media companies have gifted far-right groups with software capable of coordinating and traversing online and offline spaces, extending their logistical and strategic capabilities in targeted communication and attack preparation (Cai and Landon 2019).

Australian far-right groups use various social media platforms, including Facebook, to disseminate information about offline events and encourage visiting users or followers to participate (Hutchinson et al. 2021). One of the most prominent of these groups, active during the period between late 2015 and early 2019, was the 'True Blue Crew' (TBC). TBC described itself as a '[p]ro-Australian group, against Islamisation, open border policies, refugees, asylum seekers and the left wing' (Nilan 2019, p. 106). It was a provocative group with committed followers who were temporarily allied with other far-right groups in the Australian State of Victoria, such as the United Patriots Front, participating in shared offline activities (e.g., Engineer 2016; Richards 2020). TBC emerged out of the anti-Mosque protest movement, most prominently led by the group 'Reclaim Australia'. Similar to Reclaim Australia, TBC held a strong anti-Mosque stance but also promoted a more aggressive form of ethno-nationalism that privileged white, Anglo-Saxon men (Nilan 2019). Champion (2019, p. 12) has situated the schism from Reclaim Australia as the result of a more extreme set of adherents forming 'their own organisations, which appeared to be further committed to violence', and, as Mcswiney (2021, p. 36) describes, TBC became more of a 'violence-prone street-level organization'. The violent potential of TBC was further scrutinised in the context of the 2016 arrest of Phillip Galea, being arrested with extreme-right motivations and charged with terrorism offences. Galea was associated with both the True Blue Crew and Reclaim Australia, and was ultimately convicted under Australian commonwealth counter-terrorism legislation for 'acts in preparation for, or planning a terrorist act' (Australian Government 2020). When sentencing Galea, Judge Holingworth stated the following:

'Although you regard yourself as a patriot who holds mainstream views, it is clear that the jury found otherwise. The jury must have accepted that your particular cause was to reduce the influence of people or groups associated, or perceived to be associated, with left-wing ideology, and/or Muslims. It is not surprising that they did so, given the views you expressed (in numerous documents, and in many hours of intercepted telephone conversations), and the types of organisations to which you belonged (such as Reclaim Australia, and The True Blue Crew)' (Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions v Phillip Michael Galea; Australian Government 2020, p. 1).

In 2019, following the Christchurch terrorist attack in New Zealand, it was also revealed that the Australian perpetrator, Brenton Tarrant, had made several online posts within the TBC Facebook Group, among other forums (New Zealand Royal Commission 2020). While TBC did not openly advocate for initiating violence, it framed violence as permissible in order to defend fellow 'patriots' (Champion 2019). In the wake of the Christchurch attack, TBC was one of the groups that was banned from Facebook and ultimately the group disbanded, with some supporters appearing in other far-right groups (Peucker and Smith 2019).

Before proceeding with the literature review, it is important to acknowledge the terminology used in this article. The conceptual composition of far-right extremist groups is contested, case-dependent, and often changes over time, all the while presenting a varied collection of radical values and themes, often framed in the language of conservatism. The competition between characterisations in the literature has produced an expanding nomenclature of far-right definitions, values, and identities, used to distinguish segments of the broader movement (e.g., Mudde 2000; Dean et al. 2016; Ravndal and Bjørge 2018). However, despite the lack of a universal definition for far-right extremism, Carter (2018, p. 157) suggests that 'there is actually a high degree of consensus amongst the definitions put forward by different scholars'. In this article, we consider far-right extremism to be an exclusivist ideology motivated by various visions of social dominance and broadly outlined by anti-democratic and authoritarian sentiment (see Pedahzur and Canetti-Nisim 2004; Mudde 2016; Carter 2018; Champion 2019). Here, we acknowledge that the term 'extreme right' is often used to identify smaller, more violent sections of a broader political

‘radical-right’ movement. However, because this research involves a transient, nebulous grouping of users on Facebook who are affiliated with but may not personally maintain an offline membership with TBC, the term ‘far right’ was considered more analytically applicable than ‘extreme right’ or ‘radical right’, both practically and in definitional scope. As a result, we use the term ‘far right’ as a collective term to encompass ‘both (democratic) radicals and (anti-democratic) extremists’, who advocate for but do not necessarily engage in violence to enforce notions of ‘social inequality, authoritarianism, and nativism’ (Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, p. 6), and ‘extremism’ to signify ‘a way of thinking that accepts no compromise, sees no middle ground and warrants no limitations on its objectives or means for achieving them’ (Schuurman and Taylor 2018, p. 6).

## 2. Literature Review

Far-right extremism in Australia has not historically reached the level of violence that has come to characterise the political landscape in some other parts of the world (James 2005). Nevertheless, it has historically been present in Australia and influential among international strands of far-right thought (Lentini 2019; Campion 2019). While at times connecting the ideas and tactics of international far-right movements, Australian far-right radicalism and extremism has developed in ways that reflect the domestic context in which it operates (Smith 2017). Since the 1960s, the Australian far right has exhibited a strategic pivot to ‘Australianise’ the movement, and by the 1980s, prominent Australian groups—such as the revolutionary National Action—promoted a form of ‘wombat nationalism’, encouraging the movement to look to ‘Australian history to find its own ideals and symbols’ (Henderson 2002, p. 275; Campion 2019). This distinctly Australian character continues to shape the movement; however, it is by no means homogenous (Hutchinson et al. 2021). Rather, these groups are characterised by complexity, fluidity, and, at times, tension, across their goals, messaging, and attempts at mobilisation (Peucker et al. 2019). For example, various shifts to the Australian political and cultural landscape in recent decades stimulated changes in the movement’s operations, such as being more action-orientated, ideologically adaptive, and technologically savvy (e.g., Poynting and Perry 2007; Rane et al. 2010; Dean et al. 2016; Poynting and Briskman 2018; Hutchinson 2019a, 2019b). This is not exclusive to Australia, however. Aaron Winter (2019) notes that far-right extremists in North America were not always proficient with internet technology but have progressed in their capacity to adapt and support the movement online. Over the last dozen years, however, social media applications have gifted far-right groups, including in Australia, the ability to grow their influence and coordinate their efforts across domains of activity.

Violent extremists now exercise an unprecedented aptitude in internet literacy. Due to social media’s ubiquitous presence in society and persuasive design, violent extremists are using the technology to campaign their views, rally support for upcoming events, disseminate instructive materials, cultivate communities at a distance, and mobilise followers (Peucker et al. 2018; Winter 2019). Furthermore, videos, manifestos, and attack methodologies left by previous far-right terrorists continue to circulate online, with proceeding far-right attackers having made reference to their international and Australian predecessors—arguably contributing to the increasing lethality of attacks (Cai and Landon 2019). Contemporary Australian far-right extremism represents an important point of convergence between ‘online’ and ‘offline’ contexts. For example, in 2019, Australian far-right terrorist Brenton Tarrant targeted two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand during a terrorist attack designed to be celebrated online, killing 51 worshippers. Prior to the attack, Tarrant was exposed to, expressed his admiration for, and financially supported certain Australian and international far-right extremist groups using Facebook and group-owned websites (Begley 2019; Mann et al. 2019; Anti-Defamation League 2019). His affinity with an online anti-Islamic community, along with the anti-Islamic and white supremacist material found on his Facebook account, likely contributed to Tarrant’s sense of self and moral disposition towards Muslims, who he later targeted during his attack (Ganesh

2018). The online community's subsequent and unprecedented surge in activity across social media was linked 'conclusively' to Tarrant's terrorist attack (Davey et al. 2020), which included anti-left conspiracies along with victim blaming and glorification of the perpetrator (Hutchinson 2019b). While Tarrant's acts drove some away from the far right, for others, the events of Christchurch were a watershed moment and reinforced their commitment.

Various attempts have been made to conceptualise the dynamic relationship between online and offline group members and activities. In exploring Roger Eatwell's concept of 'cumulative extremism', Busher and Macklin (2015) considered whether offline interactions with an opposing ideological group or event solidify or strengthen pre-existing motivations for extremist violence. In combination with Randall Collins' (2005) concept of 'emotional energy', the confrontation between opposing social groups presents an opportunity for both sides to escalate, sensitise cues for further engagement, and become integral parts of their mythologies or collective action frames. Similarly, Gallacher and Heerdink (2021) explored the possibility of social media to incite mutual escalation between opposing groups, with acts of offline violence triggering online reactions from both the target and perpetrator groups. Other studies examined the point of convergence between online and offline contexts during a single act of mobilisation or ideological violence, such as acts of far-right extremist violence and terrorism. For example, Criezis and Galloway (2021) point to incidents such as the 6 January 2021 United States' Capitol riot as presenting a motley community of 'concerned citizens', violent extremist groups, and conspiracy theorists, who together traversed from an online space to execute acts of violence in an offline space.

Research has attempted to capture aspects of online and offline activity using various approaches. Most investigations correlate changes to offline settings with fluctuations in far-right online activity in social networking forums (e.g., Scrivens 2017; Powell et al. 2018). Research in this area has identified various conditions present within the offline context that are expressed in conversations and behaviour in online space. Koster and Houtman (2008) found a positive relationship between an offline stimulus, such as social stigmatisation, and its impact on discussions within the far-right, white supremacist website *Stormfront*, such as greater reliance on the virtual community. Wojcieszak (2010) determined that if someone displayed like-mindedness with online participants and dissimilar offline social ties, their willingness to express extremist opinions tended to increase commensurate to their online participation. Similarly, focussing on the impact of offline events, Scrivens (2017) demonstrated that the emergence of the Lesbian–Gay–Bisexual–Transsexual–Queer (LGBTQ) movement in Canada from 2001 to 2016 had a corresponding impact on the online conversation and posting behaviours resident on *Stormfront*, and Johnson et al. (2019) showed that efforts to police extreme communities within a single platform (such as Facebook) result in self-organised, resilient networks that adapt in anticipation or in response to the company's decision to remove their account from the platform (also see Ballsun-Stanton et al. 2020). However, few studies have used both quantitative and ethnographic methods to systematically analyse how violent extremist groups traverse online and offline spaces to mobilise their communities. In rare cases, such as the study presented here, research has found patterned correspondence between the online and offline context by drawing on interviews and interactions with group members and supporters, to substantiate the flow of influence from online discussion to changes in perception and behaviour during offline demonstrations (e.g., Gill et al. 2017). This study contributes to this growing body of literature by pointing to how the dynamic of raising expectations in the online space can sit in tension with the dashed expectations of offline events in ways that have a potentially radicalising effect.

### 3. Methods

The data used in this study are drawn from connective ethnography methods (Hine 2007). Connective ethnography encourages the researcher to develop multi-sited science that transverses online and offline spaces to contextualise digitally mediated structures of meaning that are embedded into people's lives. As such, the project employed a multi-methods approach that captured data from both online and offline engagement with far-right groups in Victoria. The systematic collection and analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) of social media and other online data was complemented by offline fieldwork, based on participant observation and ethnographic interviews in the context of three public far-right events. The three events were:

1. Australia Pride March in Melbourne City, Victoria on 25 June 2017;
2. Australia Day BBQ at St Kilda, Victoria on 26 January 2018; and
3. Australian Flag March in Melbourne City, Victoria on 24 June 2018.

The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed using inductive statistical analysis and inductive content analysis, within a Social Movement Theory analytical framework.

#### 3.1. *The Current Study*

This study draws on a larger research project examining the online activities of 12 far-right groups (Peucker et al. 2018). Here, we focus in particular on the online and offline activities of the group TBC because of the group's central role in organising street rallies during the time of our data collection. This study aimed to generate insights into how the TBC group attempted to coordinate their offline activities with their social media activism. To achieve this, we conducted a thematic content analysis of administrator posts and user comments present on the TBC's Facebook page in the weeks prior to, during, and following an organised street rally called the 'Australia Pride March'. The street rally occurred on the 25 June 2017 in Melbourne, Victoria and was officially organised by the administrators of TBC as well as other affiliated Australian far-right groups. The analysis sought to examine what themes, narratives, and types of posts were employed to promote this rally and gauge how administrators attempted to coordinate their online messaging with offline activity. This qualitative data analysis was combined with ethnographic fieldwork conducted during the rally to gauge the perceptions of group members, supporters, and affiliated groups. Finally, quantitative analysis of user data from the TBC Facebook page was conducted to assess the impact of the rally on user numbers and engagement on the Facebook page. This study aimed to generate insights regarding the far-right group TBC's attempt to connect and coordinate their offline with their social media activism leading up to, during, and following an organised street rally.

#### 3.2. *Online Data Collection and Analysis*

Data were systematically mined from twelve publicly accessible Facebook pages using the then-accessible Graph Application Programming Interface (API). While several rounds of data collection took place over the project period, the final collection was conducted in early 2018 to cover all Facebook content, including users, 'Posts', 'Likes', and 'Comments', starting from the inception of the respective Facebook accounts and ending on 31 December 2017. For this study, we analysed textual data present in one of the twelve Facebook pages, called 'The True Blue Crew T•B•C'. This social media page was chosen because the administrators organised and promoted TBC's 2017 Australia Pride March using the account. These data consisted of the administrator and user posts and comments along with anonymous user interaction data, such as the number of comments and when comments were made.

Following the macro-level statistical assessment of the online data, an in-depth thematic content analysis was used to conceptually explore the themes and narratives present in the 'The True Blue Crew T•B•C' Facebook account. Firstly, a sample of the most

actively engaged user comments was chosen ( $n = 100$ ) based on the sample of administrator posts ( $n = 75$ ) present in the 'The True Blue Crew T•B•C' Facebook data set ( $n = 175$ ) between June and August 2017. The thematic content analysis was conducted on a sample of administrator posts surrounding certain offline events and those user comments that received the greatest level of activity on those posts across the sample. The analysis included the theme and narrative of content, tone of content, identified out-group(s), identified in-group(s), and any accompanying descriptions of photos, videos, or page links. However, during the time sample selection and capturing online content, the 'The True Blue Crew T•B•C' account was suspended for violating Facebook's terms of service. Once the account was removed from the platform, the linguistic content and certain out-links remained available, but if an administrator or user posted media content without a corresponding out-link, it was unable to be viewed during data analysis.

Secondly, a thematic coding scheme was constructed to guide the thematic content analysis, aimed at elucidating which themes and narratives were present. The coding scheme was as follows:

1. the theme and narrative present or depicted by the administrator or user's content description (e.g., 'We are waving goodbye to the Australian race as last year's census shows we become more Asian than European!'/notions of white genocide associated with anti-immigration sentiment in general and anti-Asian sentiment in particular);
2. the descriptive language and pejoratives used in each post and comment (e.g., words, such as 'savage', 'radicals', 'cunts');
3. whether the post identified any out-group(s) and/or in-group(s) (e.g., Antifa);
4. the tone of the post's or comment's message and administrator and user's description (e.g., aggressive, threatening, humorous, sarcastic, celebratory, or unclear);
5. any accompanying descriptions of media contained in the post; and
6. a direct quote from the administrator or user's post or comment.

Each post and selected comments in the data set were subjected to this coding scheme while a constructivist-grounded theory approach guided the progression of the thematic content analysis across the sample (Barbour 2001). The purpose of this was to gain conceptual insight into those themes and narratives posted by administrators related to offline events that generated the most user engagement, and identify whether the use of coordination was negotiated between offline events and online activity and which themes and narratives were being valued or targeted in these posts.

### 3.3. Offline Data Collection and Analysis

As noted above, the online data collection was complemented by offline ethnographic fieldwork at three events. For this study, two members of the research team attended the Australia Pride March, Melbourne City on 25 June 2017. The researchers adopted a covert rather than overt approach to observing and engaging with the rally attendees (Li 2008). This was deemed preferable for researcher safety but raised some ethical obligations for the researchers. In particular, the researchers did not attempt to follow an interview schedule or elicit particular themes, but rather responded to topics raised by participants who engaged them in conversation. The researchers agreed to respond honestly if they were asked why they were at the rally; however, this was never raised.

Participation observation data were recorded in field notes, independently, by two researchers. Field notes captured observations and records of activities and interactions with participants, including the time and place of each event, the physical environment, descriptions of interactions between participants and groups, what signs were displayed, what slogans were chanted, ebbs and flows of social movement energy, official speakers, themes, and conversations. The aim of the ethnographic fieldwork was to investigate the subjective understandings and experiences of participants and interact in informal conversations where necessary. Because of this, these field notes included a series of informal conversations with rally participants that were conducted to complement researcher

observations of the collective behaviour of the event. Immediately following the event, the researchers who attended debriefed their observations and formally documented their field notes for analysis.

#### 4. Results

The following sections present observational findings and descriptive statistics related to the social media and offline activism from administrators and visiting users related to the organised street rally on 25 June 2017 organised by TBC. This includes an in-depth qualitative analysis of both administrator posts and user comments prior to, during, and following the rally, and descriptive findings of participant observations during the rally. The results presented in the online activity were cross-referenced with the results of the ethnographic observations and are conceptually explored in the following discussion section. It must be highlighted from the outset that the behaviour and reflections discussed here represent a vocal minority of the online community and a fraction of the participants present at the offline event. These results are not intended to bring together the disparate characteristics of the online and offline activity into a cohesive group identity or perspective, but to present those behaviours and perspectives recorded as they were presented to the research team leading up to, during, or following the organised street rally. Where possible, these behaviours and perspectives are contextualised in relation to the political, social, and historical landscape in Australia.

##### 4.1. Qualitative Timeline

###### 4.1.1. Months Prior

In the months prior to the 'Australia Pride March' on 25 June 2017, TBC framed the march as an initiative to foster reverence and reminiscence for an imagined Australian cultural history. Presented as an opportunity to 'display [their] pride' for Australian identity and culture, the administrator of the account suggested that the rally was an occasion to 'teach it to your children instilling in them the pride that all Australians should have as a people'. Merchandise, such as 'TBC t-shirts and singlets', was advertised and available for people to purchase and wear to showcase their solidarity 'before the Aussie flag walk', with user comments seeking to confirm their variety and availability. However, posts that sought to invoke positive sentiments were often proceeded with mentions of an enemy or a threat to their initiative or vision for Australian society. For example, TBC used confrontational language to weave anti-immigration into promotions of the event, urging observers to 'turn up to [the rally to] send a message to the third world criminals that are destroying our nation and our peoples [*sic*] safety'. As days passed, their online messaging and descriptions of the rally became increasingly directed toward various out-groups, suggesting that '[t]he first point of attack against [the out-group] agenda is to bring about a return of Australian national pride on mass'. During this period, there was a strategic effort by administrators to create an inflated sense of threat to rally their followers in defence, while simultaneously positioning the TBC at the coalface of this problem.

Following this and during the coming weeks, a small number of comments called into question the group's commitment to ideological progress. Users stressed their dissatisfaction in the lack of offline cooperation and constructive action compared to the group's alleged preference for social media activism. These comments often featured a series of rhetorical questions outlining a negative character assessment of the online community, such as '[w]here are we all? Who have we become? Have we sunk so low as to be this piss poor? Unable to even fight for right? [*sic*]', and lengthy confessions containing insights into their expectation for the group, such as 'I could not be any sadder, disheartened and disappointed in such meek surrender'. Most of these comments featured pejoratives using the term 'keyboard' to degrade the value of social media activism, condemning members of the group as 'keyboard warriors'. Although the type or nature of offline action that these followers thought others ought to pursue was rarely specified, social media activism

remained portrayed as 'weak' or a 'waste'. Social media activism is almost exposed as inauthentic, ineffective, or dishonourable, as if those who do not provide evidence of offline engagement are 'nothing without Facebook' and simply 'hiding behind the safety of [their] keyboards'. Considering the context in which these comments were made, these contentious claims received a mixed response, with some agreeing with comments, such as '[w]ell said mate good on ya', while others opposed, suggesting '[t]hat makes no sense, at all'. Nevertheless, this in-group animosity appeared to generalise until the group's alleged apathy became the cause of their woes, with their 'backs' now against 'the wall' and 'options fast disappearing' as the country and culture are 'taken over by charlatans, thieves, embezzlers, liers [*sic*] and murderers'. With an occasion for offline mobilisation marked months into the future, distant ideals were pledged and minor preparations were made as frustrations started to take shape among those most eager for change.

#### 4.1.2. Weeks Prior

In the weeks prior to the rally, a particular out-group gained notoriety in TBC's promotion of the upcoming rally. The group's promotional messaging was increasingly framed by a cautionary tale of 'the left' and its (alleged) influence over society or attempts to silence their efforts. Coincidentally, offline events further fuelled their mobilisation focus on what they considered to be left-wing institutions or groups. For example, around this time, Blair Cottrell, leader of a parallel far-right group, 'United Patriots Front', posted an inflammatory anti-Islamic video depicting the decapitation of a Muslim effigy, in protest of a proposal to build a mosque in Bendigo, Australia (Oaten 2017). Shortly after, the 'United Patriots Front' page was removed from Facebook and Blair Cottrell was later charged under Victoria's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act for inciting 'serious contempt against Muslims' (Oaten 2017). TBC seized this opportunity to strategically depict Facebook's censorship efforts as an administrative overreach, an expression of liberal political ideology, and an attempt to expurgate conservative political figures and beliefs from society. These posts construed involvement in the group's protest as an anti-authoritarian objection, or akin to mounting civic opposition to the social media company, as if '[Facebook's] silencing tactics only make [them] stronger'.

Around this time, controversial Australian conservative commentator Andrew Bolt was ambushed and assaulted by several people who were allegedly affiliated with anti-fascist groups (Kozioł 2017). The physical altercation was recorded both by the assailants and surrounding security surveillance, with the footage later used in mainstream media reports. Videorecording of the exchange captured Bolt's attempts to marshal a defence and somewhat fend off the assailants' advances (Kozioł 2017). After circulating media reports on the altercation on their Facebook page, TBC user comments largely praised Bolt's attempts at self-defence. TBC celebrated the confrontation as an exemplar of reactionary violence with comments such as 'he sure packs a whallop [*sic*]' and in doing so 'made ordinary Aussie hearts [*sic*] proud'. Users admired Bolt's resistance as a proud model of far-right reactionary violence and expressed their anticipation to emulate this example of reactionary violence against antifascist counter-protesters at the upcoming rally 'on the 25th', suggesting that 'any self respecting [*sic*] Australian' should also fight the 'antifa clowns' at the 'Australian Pride March', or if an opportunity arises, 'beforehand should we cross paths in the meantime, by chance, in your suburb'. Furthermore, these posts used sardonic language to gloat about the perceived harm caused to the assaulters, stating that there is 'nothing like seeing the traitorous scum receiving some discipline' and proposing that viewers ought to '[e]njoy the footage'.

The occasion was said to be such an 'intimidating' display of the far-right's physical prowess that it functioned as an exhibition for other out-groups, such as the so-called Islamic State, with one comment stating '[t]hat'll show isis [*sic*] you pack of softcocks'. Words of praise for Bolt's actions were matched with political slurs, metaphorical impurity, and animalistic analogies of the assailants as '[p]eice of shit lefty [*sic*] fuckwits', 'weak cunts', and '[f]ilthy [*sic*] cowardly vermin'. Amongst these smears, two reoccurring

comments concerning their antifascist political opponents' Australian identity and lack of 'Australianness' populated administrator posts. Firstly, TBC comments concentrated on the assailants' choice not to unveil their identities, but instead 'cowardly' choosing to conceal themselves during an act of political violence. Secondly, while the attackers' status as Australian citizens was acknowledged, their actions against a conservative political figure were interpreted as action against Australian identity and culture. This violation was said to warrant being 'shunned and disowned by the rest of Australia' as 'an embarrassment to Australia and all Australian Tradition and values'.

Antifa was largely absent at the Melbourne rally after many of those who openly identify with what Vysotsky (2021, p. 51) refers to as 'formal antifascism' had left the main ('informal') antifascist network, called Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) (Peucker et al. 2022). However, Antifa had a stronger presence at earlier protests in Bendigo and Melton, where members met against multiple Australian far-right groups (Peucker et al. 2022). In anticipation, mounting tensions between TBC and antifascist groups were reflected in the descriptions and tone of their messaging, with a fixed 'us' versus 'them' narrative now steering the online campaign. While administrators continued to characterise themselves as 'patriotic Australians' who share with their supporters 'a heritage to take pride in', antagonistic language and out-group labelling—'arrogant leftist traitors'—surfaced with increasing rapidity. Posts progressively featured descriptions of imminent threats, conveyed desperate appeals, and expressed their frustration with systems of governance, as if society was 'letting [them] down' and 'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH'. Rather than concede to being 'too afraid to display [their] pride at the upcoming Aussie Pride March', administrators reassured members that they were a 'force to be reckoned with' when faced with anti-fascist counter-protesters and that the rally was an opportunity not to 'let them succeed with this horrible agenda which is destroying our nation and our people'. As the weeks passed, an increasing proportion of online conversation concentrated on and was acutely agitated by mentions of Antifa and their elevation to a primary threat position. This depiction is reflected in other far-right conversations had across a range of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and GAB), which also 'reinforce the image of a powerful left-wing enemy of "ordinary" patriotic (white) Australians' (Guerin et al. 2020; Guerin et al. 2021, p. 23).

#### 4.1.3. Days Prior

In the days prior to the street rally, TBC's anticipation assumed a kind of urgency and excitement. Administrators started punctuating their pleas with multiple exclamation marks—'[t]he more support the better so if you got something on cancel it!!!'—while the consequences for not engaging escalated dramatically—'[t]his will effect the way we live forever so stand by your mates and lets [*sic*] show these traitors we mean business'. Furthermore, posts started to sympathise with their online supporters and encourage their transition from social media to the streets—'get out from behind the keyboard and join us'. Prior to the event, users signalled their eagerness to participate in the protest but were often bound by prior commitments or conditions. Some users pledged their enthusiastic commitment to partake in the public rally, such as '[c]ount me in', '[I]'ll be there for The Melbourne Pride March', and 'I'll be there cant [*sic*] wait'. Others declared their intention to attend at least one related rally, such as 'WA no can do [*sic*], VIC count me in', or made explicit their prior commitments or personal conditions that restricted their ability to attend, such as '[f]uck think I'm on an instructors [*sic*] course that day' and 'I've got a bad heart and have been through major brain surgery'.

A common condition was the physical distance that a follower had to overcome to participate in the Melbourne rally, with comments such as I '[I]live too far away to make it there' and I am '[I]looking at flying over from Tassie [*sic*]'. With '9 days to go', their eagerness rolled over recent attempts to create a sense of urgency and instead revived a sense of encouragement and even excitement—'[t]his one is going to be huge, don't miss it, make sure you bring your proud patriotic friends along with you'. 'With only two days

to go', administrators instructed their followers to prepare themselves and 'share the event page far and wide'. With this call for offline mobilisation made and as the anticipated event drew near, followers advertised their availability and commitment to the group's aspiration for change.

#### 4.1.4. The Day of: Offline

On the 25th of June, 2017, despite unseasonably pleasant weather in Melbourne, the event had a relatively small turnout. An estimated 150–200 people attended in support of the rally. While TBC were the organisers of the rally, some attendees displayed group symbols and clothing affiliated with other far-right groups or movements. For instance, in addition to TBC-specific symbols, the researchers identified other symbols represented by clothing, badges, or tattoos that were associated with political views, such as the Eureka flag, the Southern Cross, the Swastika, merchandise promoting the Australian (ultra)nationalist political party 'One Nation', and the former President Donald Trump's campaign paraphernalia, such as 'Make America Great Again' caps.

At the start of the rally, participants gathered in a public park. Most people were standing idle in small, separate clusters with very few interactions, apart from some key organising figures. When the researchers walked into the area, they were not approached or subjected to any checks of verification. Rather, they received the occasional collegial smile, but were largely ignored. Eventually, a decision was made to begin marching toward Victoria state's Parliament House. At this point in the rally, there was no outward animosity toward the police present and leaders appeared to be actively negotiating and communicating with them regarding the route ahead.

During the marching, the researchers spoke with a man approximately forty years of age, who was attending his first far-right rally. He learned about the event through Facebook and decided to attend despite claiming to disagree with many aspects of TBC's political messaging. For example, he stressed that he felt uncomfortable with much of the anti-gay and racist sentiments within the far right and was eager to point out to the researchers that he personally supported multiculturalism. As proof, he proffered up a description of past 'ethnic girlfriends' and his wife's Italian heritage. His openness about his points of divergence from TBC's online ideological messaging points to how ideological boundaries online are fluid and enable people to individualise the ways that they engage with them, developing hybridised versions that sit more comfortably with their own personal world views (Miller-Idriss and Hughes 2021). For this participant, his reasons for attending the event were specifically connected to concerns about what he perceived to be 'radical Islam' and an increasing 'Islamification' of Australia. Rather than seeing these views as fringe or extreme, he expressed a view that they were consistent with those of most Australians, in part reflecting an increased mainstreaming of Islamophobia in the post-9/11 environment (Cherney and Murphy 2016). Islamophobia has become a powerful online mobilising concept within the extreme right, with particularly strong resonance among those who may not be able to reconcile other, more traditional threads of extreme-right ideology within their belief systems. As noted by Smith and Iner (2021), Australia's extreme right has capitalised on the tolerance of Islamophobia to represent their movement as a patriotic defence of the country. Yet, while the event had been explicitly promoted and framed in positive terms as an opportunity to display what is colloquially referred to as 'Aussie pride', the months of online messaging, including the painting of certain groups (such as Muslims) as an inherent threat, appeared to resonate more with this participant's concerns.

As the march progressed toward Parliament House, it encountered oppositional protests that far outnumbered the attendance of the far-right rally. These 'protests against racism' were organised to counter the message of the Australia Pride March, which was viewed as broadly racist and fascist in its agenda. The two protest movements were separated by a police barricade; however, there was a cacophony of yelling directed at the rally by the counter-protesters. Names such as 'Nazi', 'fascist', and 'racist', accompanied

by derogatory terms such as ‘pig’, ‘slut’, or ‘scum’, or threatening language such as ‘die’, were yelled at the rally participants, and appeared in signs and placards being waved.

A man in his late 20s or early 30s, who was wearing a TBC shirt and holding an Australian flag, expressed his views on the antifascist counter-protests. He complained that ‘the left’ would always try to provoke trouble, and stop them from ‘having their say.’ He accused them of deliberately ‘looking to pick a fight’ and described the taunts of being a ‘Nazi’, ‘fascist’, or ‘racist’ as ‘ridiculous.’ Rather than being angry or upset, this man expressed resignation, stating that it ‘was just part of what happens at these rallies.’ He expressed approval of the strong police presence to protect ‘us’ from the counter-protesters, and even suggested that we should ask the police for help if we felt threatened. Similarly, a man, aged in his late 50s or early 60s, wearing a TBC jacket, described to the researchers how he saw ‘the left’ counter-protesters allegedly abusing attendees, particularly women and older people, at a previous anti-Mosque rally in rural Bendigo. While not a member of TBC at that point, this experience encouraged him to contact TBC (via email), and formally join the group. He described the oppositional protesters as aggressive and prone to using violence. He appeared frustrated about the alleged aggression from the left, their persistent presence at events, and their larger numbers. These signs of frustration at counter-protesters’ tactics and numbers provide a glimpse into a potential change in activities in the future (Jasper 1998). Frustration has been linked to both the emergence and decline of movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977), as well as with a change in tactics (Jasper 1998). Yet, it was only during the hostile interactions with the counter-protesters that a strong sense of group unity among rally attendees emerged. Collins (2005) explicates how shared identities can emerge and strengthen from interaction rituals that are characterised by a collective focus of attention with boundaries that delineate who is part of the collective ‘we’ and who is not. For much of the time surrounding and during the march, people seemed fragmented and kept to their own smaller groupings. However, the presence of the counter-protesters provided an embodied ‘enemy’, which generated feelings of collective emotional energy and group solidarity, at least temporarily.

Following the rally, marchers began to drift away and disperse on the return towards the starting point of the rally. A group of three women were reflecting on the rally, expressing disappointment at the turnout and of the current leadership strategy. Talk of a lack of unity and of being outnumbered by the counter-protesters was framed in terms of the need to rethink—otherwise, the movement would ‘come to nothing’. The far-right claim of representing the silent majority was increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of much larger oppositional turnout, despite the fleeting solidarity that the interactions were able to create.

#### 4.1.5. The Day of: Online

Online, during and immediately following the event, TBC’s Facebook page made claims of victory and congratulatory comments were made in droves. Users aired their appreciation for TBC and proudly celebrated the group’s performance in Melbourne, such as ‘[y]ou beauty, great work Melbourne patriots’ and ‘[p]roud of you guys’. This cheer was said to be shared and allegedly sent by international supporters in the United States and United Kingdom, such as ‘[w]ell done Aussies from London England’ and ‘[l]ove and [s]upport from the U.S.A’. Other comments proclaimed that the rally achieved its intended effect as a public demonstration of Australian (ultra)nationalism and protective measure to preserve Australian identity and culture. Various comments implied that the march had stunted the encroachment of an unidentified out-group and secured their vision for Australian identity and culture—for instance, ‘good to see you reclaiming your city back from the traitors’ and ‘its people like yourselves that may save our country’.

These perceived achievements were thematically associated with popular, long-standing military traditions related to Australian identity and culture, such as the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC). ANZAC represents an influential occasion and symbol of Australian nationalism, patriotism, and national identity, with the

rally said to have honoured 'our Anzac's [sic] by not letting what they fought for slip away'. This association with a military tradition was, at times, partnered with action-orientated language that modelled a sense of duty or the demand of war-like violence, with such comments suggesting that it is 'time to take back our great nation's by force if necessary [sic]'. Prominent among Australian far-right groups, the use of the ANZAC tradition is considered 'an explicit, or thinly veiled, attempt to portray' enemies of the movement and 'to pitch them against the "good Australians" who love "their" ANZAC' (Peucker et al. 2021, p. 197). Other figures associated with the group's perceived achievements included Australian parliamentary senator Pauline Hanson, as if the group shared a personal sense of solidarity in having 'Pauline...on our side [sic]'. Growth in in-group references animated the group's imagination and spurred calls to expand the group's operations, such as organising a national rally and establishing TBC chapters across the country. An administrator responded to their calls in the comment section, warning of 'the first proper NATIONAL rally' in the future. Proclaiming to have 'marched peacefully to [their] intended destination' and made 'Australians proud', TBC illustrated an impression that they had achieved their initiative and celebrated their public performance as a model of nonviolent protest.

Yet, certain comments exclaimed a disappointment in TBC's ability to meet their expectation for offline action, denigrating the efficacy of their efforts and suggesting that the group achieved 'fuck all'. What featured in most of these comments was a challenge to publicly display one's dedication to the cause—'[s]tand up and be counted'—and, in some instances, an invitation for members to mobilise—otherwise referred to as 'hit the streets'. A growing number of comments referred to the means or state by which the user participated. For instance, some 'watched start to finish via you tube [sic]' while others joined in person, 'hungover as hell'. A range of questions and statements made public their willingness to contribute to the cause, but they were often barred from doing so because of increasingly specific reasons, personal obligations, or circumstance. In an attempt to overcome this, users often accompanied their disclosures with pressured remarks to administrators, pleading with them to organise another protest in their local region or city, enquiring, '[w]hen we gonna [sic] have another Sydney Rally?'

In contrast to in-group arguments over the efficacy of the event, TBC members and proud patriots were united in their opinion of the counter-protesters, which they referred to as 'the feral mix of communists', 'anarchists', 'un-Australian traitors', and 'cowardly members of Antifa', who all attempted 'to violently shut it down' and scare 'innocent bystanders'. Amidst revelling in police efforts to give 'a good dose of the old spicy orange foam' to counter-protestors and thanking 'patriotic Australians' such as Blair Cottrell, who 'display[ed] their Australian national pride', categorisations of counter-protesters were for the first time partnered with comments about their inherent, biological value, such as those 'left wing fwits with there nazi propogander [sic]' have 'done nothing but confirm their position on the bottom of the evolutionary ladder'. In some instances, users evoked action-orientated language during the event, such as 'smash the shit out of these leftist fucktards'.

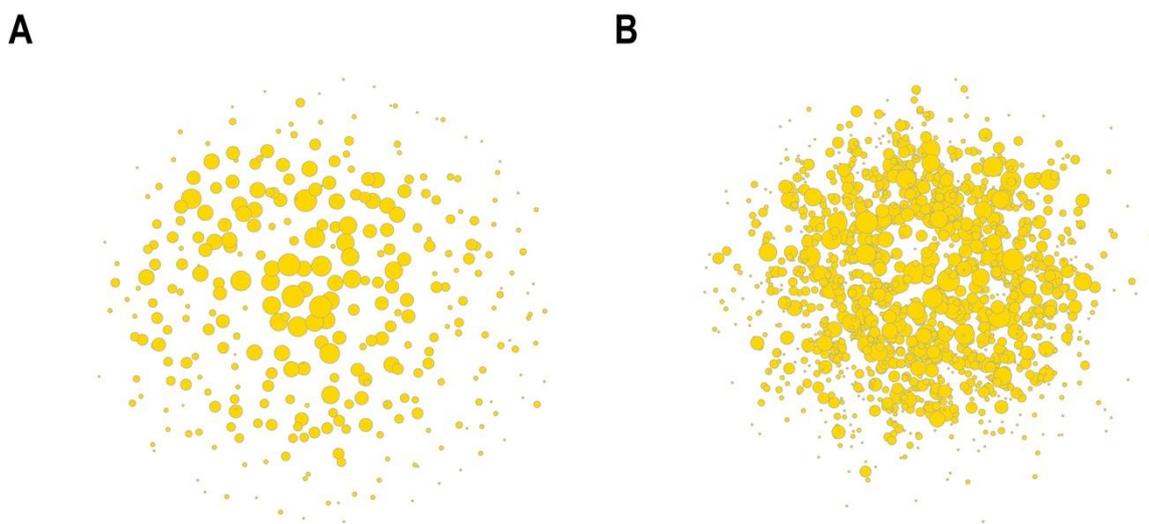
Administrators made efforts to correct alleged mischaracterisations of the group or their cause and were determined to rectify various 'inaccuracies' reported by the Australian news organisation Channel Seven. For example, these posts repudiated descriptions of the rally as a 'clash between right wing and left wing protesters' or 'an anti islam [sic] RALLY', and denied claims that weapons were 'confiscated' from TBC members. Instead, administrators accused the media of bias reporting due to failing to acknowledge that 'cowardly members of Antifa' 'were carrying weapons' and '[t]he only clashes were between the communist/anarchist children and the police'. In solidarity, followers deplored the journalist said to have reported the story by calling 'that channel 7 reporter...a twit', or generalising their grievance and canvassing all news media as disingenuous, such as '[i]t is high time the median presented the news in truth and accuracy' and 'the media has a lot to answer for with their half truths [sic]'.

#### 4.1.6. Days Following

In the days following the event, user comments continued to condemn or joke at the media's mislabelling of the event, as one comment described how the media had 'reported [the rally] as pro and anti-migration protests' and an 'anti-gay march lmaooo [sic]'. However, feeling as though the group's intentions were mistaken and their intended effect misguided, others urgently reasserted the group's intentions, objectives, and concerns, ranging from anti-immigration and anti-Islam, to a fear of losing cultural superiority—for example, 'we are proud to be Australian and don't want our traditions eroded due to political correctness and appeasing refugees'. However, TBC administrators and users responded with indignation and hatred for other remarks regarding the event. For instance, Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF), the radical left anti-fascist network that organised the counter-protest, posted a description of the rally that called into question whether TBC could organise a public rally in the future. Administrators took this as a challenge, broadcasting a diatribe with a slew of pejoratives and various action-orientated threats such as 'we would march right over top of them' and 'these fools attempting to block our marches and take our space'. Posts containing these apparent affronts and aggressive assertions were proceeded with mocking yet empowering comments about how the out-group 'would not have the slightest chance of stopping us' and for 'you proud Australians' to '[n]ever be intimidated by them' because 'you most definitely have nothing to fear'. Whether online or offline, direct contact with an anti-fascist identity group elicited intense vitriol and evoked the most aggressive and violent solutions from TBC followers.

#### 4.2. Quantitative User Analysis

Findings from the quantitative user analysis reflect what was reported in the qualitative time series analysis. In illustrating the number of users active in the TBC Facebook page in the two weeks before the march (A) and the two weeks after the march (B), with the size of each node representing the number of other pages in which users were also active in, we identified 328 unique users who interacted with the TBC Facebook page in the two weeks before the rally (Figure 1). In the two weeks after the rally, there were 1384 unique users who interacted with the Facebook page, a considerable increase of 321% percent. Similar to what was observed at the rallies, wherein members of other groups attended the march, members that were active in the TBC Facebook page were also active in all other Facebook pages within the dataset. In contrast to this increasing trend, it was found that the number of active users who interacted with other Australian far-right Facebook pages generally decreased over the same time period (Table 1). These findings suggest that TBC's online activity attracted people who shared interactions with others in adjacent but related far-right groups pages on the platform.



**Figure 1.** Map of users active two weeks before and two weeks after the march. (A) shows users active two weeks before the march. (B) shows users active two weeks after the march.

**Table 1.** Number of users active in other Australian far-right Facebook pages before and after the march.

Group Names	Before	After
Reclaim Australia Rally	150	82
Soldiers of Odin Australia. Main Page & Melbourne Division	117	32
Neil Erikson/Nationalist Uprising	82	24
Australia—‘Love it, or Leave’	72	49
Aussie Angels Against Sharia	55	36
PDLA Patriots Defence League—Australia	55	37
Aussie Pride—No Islam—No Shariah Law	49	45
Stop the Mosque in Bendigo/Stop the Mosques Australia	41	41
Australian Department of Public Enlightenment	32	11
Eureka Youth League	19	1
Nationalist Alternative Australia	16	2
Infidel Brotherhood Of Australia Resistance	12	14

In another analysis, we represented the number of new users who interacted with the TBC Facebook page per day over all of 2017 (Figure 2). While there were minor, intermittent spikes in the number of new users during this timeframe, on the day of the march, there was a striking increase of 693 users who interacted with the TBC Facebook page for the first time. However, despite the large increase in new interactions, this did not translate into sustained engagement on the TBC Facebook page (as shown in Figure 3). After an initial spike in commenting activity in which users new to the page outpaced the users that were active on the TBC page prior to the march on the day of the march, engagement quickly returned to pre-march levels.

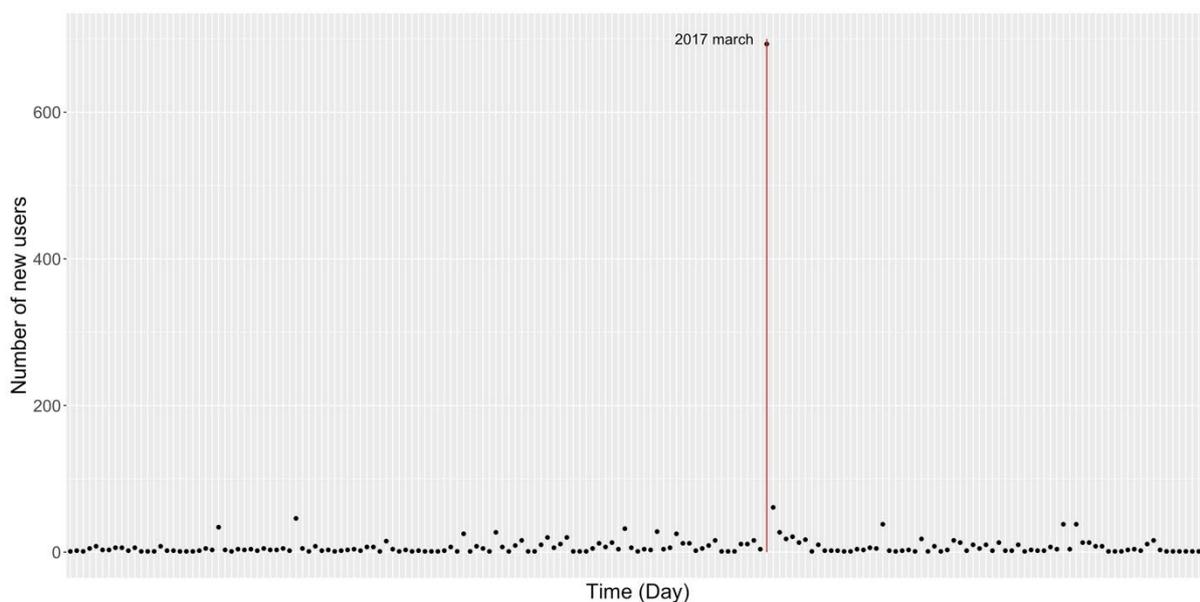


Figure 2. New users’ interaction with the TBC Facebook page in 2017.

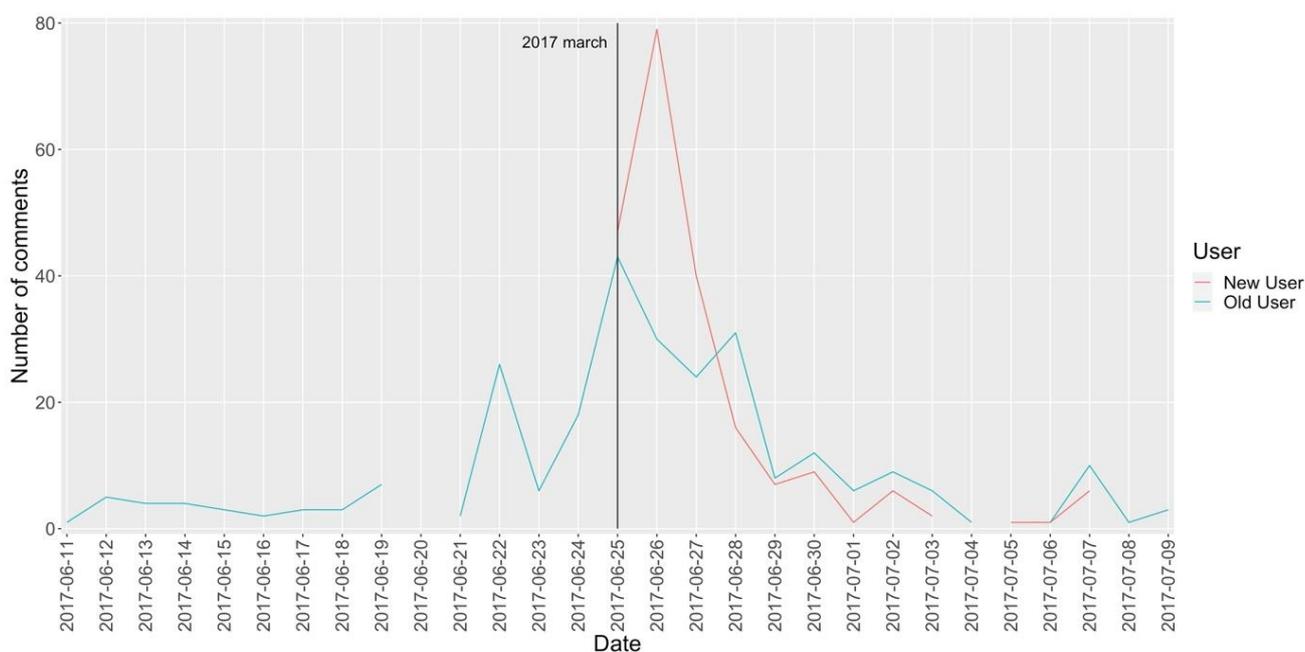


Figure 3. Number of comments made by old and new users in the two weeks before and after the 2017 march.

### 5. Discussion

Examination of TBC’s online and offline activism has conveyed how Australian far-right extremist groups can connect and coordinate their online messaging with their offline activities. Based on these findings, we highlight how the online activities, in seeking to mobilise participation in offline events, raised expectations of a widespread social movement that were ultimately frustrated. By the time that the 2018 TBC March commenced, the attendance had dropped to around 70 people, and the broader far-right movement appeared to go through a reorganisation phase, with more emphasis placed on realigning within a more extreme social context, adopting more extreme and openly neo-Nazi ideology, and new action-orientated activities to advance the extreme-right cause.

### 5.1. A Lack of Momentum

Although there was evidence that attempts to mobilise offline were intensifying online, there was an insufficient transmission of this momentum. The inability to coordinate sustained momentum between online and offline settings may be, in part, due to their contextual differences. Both the online and ethnographic observations highlight the value of advertising one's commitment, congeniality, and cooperation in these spaces. However, the group's online space is hosted by a social media platform that facilitates transient connectivity but does not guarantee or require interpersonal connection or consensus. In the other, the group's offline space is hosted in a public, metropolitan setting and centred around a communal activity that provides a vivid display of commitment, but again does not necessarily mobilise even close to the amounts of people that engage online.

Unlike the online space, the offline event carries a promise of physical exertion, social and emotional contagion, and the looming prospective of political aggression, if not violence. While the online space allows for fantasy and the imagining of 'what will be', the offline space must contend with the reality of poor turnouts, the lack of effervescence, and the possibility of confrontation, arrest, and other physical or social consequences of participation. Represented in both the online and ethnographic data, these experiences invite individuals who may not necessarily be long-term, 'committed' members of the group, but are content with becoming temporarily immersed in a social phenomenon larger than themselves. Although there was scant hostility between far-right groups, the lack of internal unity and movement cohesiveness incapacitated their ability for cross-group mobilisation. Instead, individuals seemed to remain frustrated and uncomfortable in each other's presence.

While the online space encouraged the idea of being on the cusp of an historical moment, the offline reality undermined this fantasy. Having a larger number of online followers on Facebook does not necessarily result in greater mobilisation success for offline events. For instance, the TBC Pride March in 2017 attracted a higher number of people than their 2018 Flag March, despite the number of TBC Facebook followers being higher in 2018 than in 2017. Another assumption underlies the motivation used to mobilise followers between settings. In anticipation of the 2018 Flag March, TBC grounded their mobilisation strategy on the ambiguous aim of bolstering or at least making others aware of their 'nationalistic pride'. Without a clear and achievable obstacle or objective to create momentum around, TBC's less-than charismatic leadership was unable to imbue their followers with the impetus required to mobilise. This is illustrated well when compared to their counterparts' efforts at coordinating their online messaging with their offline activism. For instance, in the following year, another far-right rally held in St Kilda, Victoria hosted a comparatively larger and more energetic crowd of participants because the organisers leveraged pre-existing concerns about so-called "African gang crime" in Melbourne (Wilson 2019). For those who attended, this issue at least provided a tangible 'problem' and generated motivation around an achievable (though ostensible) objective of preventing further crime.

Mounting tensions around TBC's perceived lack of efficacy during online conversations, and the vivid, anticlimactic realities of their offline potential, appeared to ignite a shared atmosphere of frustration. As a result, awkwardness, apathy, and discord suffused TBC and adjacent far-right groups when they stepped into Melbourne City those years ago. Since then, a course correction was necessary for administrators and actors in these groups to strategically adapt their online and offline operations for greater impact and move toward more action-orientated expectations.

### 5.2. Increasing Radicalisation (to Violence)

The research team drew on the Behaviour Indicators Model (BIM) to evaluate whether the broader far right in Victoria could be assessed as radicalising towards violence. The BIM informs radicalisation awareness raising across the Australian

Government and community sectors (Australian Government 2015), and is designed to help understand signs of possible radicalisation amongst individuals. In this study, it was useful to broadly apply the three key behavioural categories of Social Relations, Ideology, and Criminal/Action Orientation to the analysis to consider whether there were signs that the far right in Victoria was becoming a more radical milieu. The BIM seeks to track increasing levels of intensity collectively across each of these three domains.

Drawing on the BIM, in conjunction with our online and offline observations, we identified developments that pointed to an increasingly radical social milieu among the far right in Victoria. This is not to say that individuals within TBC were deemed radicalised, but, following the TBC Australia Pride March, there was an increasing overlap and cross-pollination between groups that had defined themselves based on 'patriotism', an aggressive form of nationalism, and those that openly subscribed to national socialist or white supremacy ideologies. For instance, following the Australia Pride March, the United Patriots Front splintered into the Lads Society, who maintained a veneer of 'patriotism' while including several well-known neo-Nazis. More recently, these groups have morphed again, with key members setting up other explicitly neo-Nazi groups in Australia, becoming the subject of several exposés that capture discussions of their goal to build a white ethno-state in Australia, physical and weapons training, and celebration of the Christchurch terrorist attack.

Victoria has also witnessed increasingly extreme expressions of ideology, including statements that openly reject parliamentary democracy as a legitimate form of government, expressions of authoritarian attitudes, and the endorsement of violence. Consistent with this and with some mention in the online data, there has also been a noted shift away from viewing police as 'protectors' to viewing police as 'enemies'. The process of ideological radicalisation has also been made visible by more frequent and open expressions of White pride, White victimhood, and claims of White 'genocide'. Such rhetoric, loosely based on biological racism and concealed in 'innocence' or neutralised in nationalism discourse (Barker 1981; Every and Augoustinos 2007), has been a key trademark of the more extreme white supremacy groups, rather than the patriot or nationalist rhetoric of groups such as TBC. At the same time, this white victimhood narrative was mainstreamed to the point where it was discussed in the United States' Senate and normalised in the United States' media, which the Australian far-right milieu readily consumes (Ballsun-Stanton et al. 2020). Such developments may have coincided in ways that contributed to the perceivable shift from radicalisation toward violence: the increased popularity of white genocide narratives in the Australian far right, but also the de-stigmatisation and mainstreaming of these narratives internationally. Such rhetorical shifts suggest a gradual ideological radicalisation within the Australian far-right milieu and some segments of Victoria's far right, which, following the period of the Australia Pride March of 2017, seemed to be slowly gravitating toward adopting and endorsing more openly racist and extremist right-wing ideologies and promoting the use of violence to bring about political change.

Finally, following the 2017 Australia Pride March, the researchers noted that there has been a move away from a primary tactic of building a broad social movement based on the idea that far-right groups are a vanguard movement representing the voice of a silent majority, and toward smaller, more 'action-orientated' vigilante groups. For example, by early 2018, core TBC members were holding private meetings with prominent white supremacy far-right figures to discuss vigilante-style responses to so-called 'African gangs' in Melbourne. Although this is considered a counter-factual racist moral panic perpetuated by certain politicians and mainstream media outlets, the manufactured threat of 'African gang violence' was used to justify far-right mobilisation as a legitimate response to an alleged crime spree that both police and politicians were supposedly failing to contain (Benier et al. 2021). Also consistent with this was the behavioural tactic of increasing public stunts, such as storming local council meetings, disrupting 'liberal' church services, and publicly harassing and antagonising political opponents. These findings substantiate the view that the Australian far-right movement saw an increase in radicalisation in the

years prior to the Christchurch terrorist attack, and although radicalisation was not measured against individuals within TBC, the group's online and offline activism are characteristic of the trend from radicalisation to violence.

## 6. Conclusions

Taken collectively, in the time since the TBC Australia Pride March in 2017, changes within the social, ideological, and action-orientated domains of the broader far-right movement pointed to an increasingly extreme and emboldened far-right radical milieu. The movement(s), group(s), and individual(s) morphed and adapted from a social movement strategy toward a tightly controlled vigilante form of activism. This vigilante approach was used temporarily by the Victorian far right to support their other community-building efforts based on ideological commitment to white supremacy and national socialism. It is important to note that the claims made in the current manuscript are not generalisable; there is no direct line between the 2017 March organised by TBC and a specific change in tactics in the broader extreme-right movement or where the expression of online frustration was causally translated into specific instances of offline behaviour; the empirical data presented here do, however, represent a window into a period that preceded more significant change and violence.

Since the Australian Pride March of 2017, there have not only been the terrible events of Christchurch, but, as of March 2022, there has been a growing number of individual arrests predicated on extreme-right motivations and charged as either part of counter-terrorism investigations (Australian Government 2022) or for directly engaging in extreme-right terrorism (New South Wales Police Force 2022). This marks a significant increase since the first person charged, and subsequently convicted, under Australian counter-terrorism legislation in relation to extreme-right activity, was former TBC member Phillip Galea. Beyond those charged under Commonwealth counter-terrorism legislation, there have also been several non-terrorism charges brought against members of the Australian extreme right, including serious violent crimes such as assault and murder, as well as possession of illegal weaponry (Sarakibi et al. 2022). The period represented here, and the subsequent further radicalisation within the far right, points to the need for more sophisticated responses to the extreme right than relying on disruption and prosecution through a law-enforcement-led response. From this perspective, these findings have practical implications in security discussions about the techniques and strategies used by far-right extremist groups for multimodal mobilisation—specifically, how the Australian far-right extremist group TBC converged their social media messaging with their offline mobilisation leading up to, during, and following a public event. Although security practitioners may already monitor such online engagement, there are documented cases demonstrating how this online engagement translates into the perspectives and behaviours of participants at far-right extremist events. Understanding the efficacy of these techniques and strategies in traversing online and offline spaces to mobilise members and supporters will provide practitioners with a quality case study example of multimodal mobilisation in the Australian far-right context.

While a police response is appropriate once the criminal threshold has been crossed, the time outlined here arguably represents a missed opportunity for a multilayered approach where the problem can be addressed at various stages, rather than waiting until people are committed to undertaking acts of extremist violence. At a broad level, we need to accept that the kinds of political and social rhetoric that demonise people based on their religion, race, or sexuality are dangerous. A whole-of-society approach can contribute to defending the principles of democracy, in schools, in our public institutions, and in Australian corporate media. When people are heading towards violent action, we need to have a greater capacity for individually tailored and well-resourced programs to divert people away from engaging further with the extreme right. These programs need to be funded to remain consistent with 'at-risk' individuals over an extended period, building skills and motivation to disengage from the extreme right. At the policing and intelligence

level, most terrorism investigations in Australia over the last twenty years have been concentrated on the threat from violent Islamist groups, such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (Lynch et al. 2015). We can ensure that the idiosyncratic nature of the extreme right is well understood, so those who are tasked with investigating or identifying the threat have a strong understanding of what risk looks like based on their behaviour and ideology.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was limited due to impracticability of obtaining consent in conjunction with sufficient protection of privacy of social media data and so as not to alter or impact the environment being observed during participant observation.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data is not publicly available.

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