Down the TikTok Rabbit Hole: Testing the TikTok Algorithm's Contribution to Right Wing Extremist Radicalization

By

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“In just eight years, 2010 to 2018, the world has seen the extreme right move from being outside the corridors of power to the centre of power itself.” (Bello 2019:123)

“The rise of the alt-right is both a continuation of a centuries-old dimension of racism in the U.S. and part of an emerging media ecosystem powered by algorithms.” (Daniels 2018:61)

ABSTRACT

Using a new moderately conservative TikTok profile, and insight from an auto-ethnographic exploration, this study suggests TikTok's loose guidelines, inaction, and recommendation algorithms have the potential to contribute to an individual's radicalization process. The platform's recommendations, after watching a thousand videos, were increasingly radical in nature, in content, and in tone, ultimately sending the profile into conspirational echo chambers. I suggest this trend, and the ensuing echo chambers, challenge individual protective factors for radicalization, contribute to banalize fringe and far-right narratives, and thus warrant additional research and investigation. This is particularly true as I observed substantial bridging between narratives, starting from mainstream conservative political material toward antivaxxer material, hypermasculinity, TikTok's Hatescape, a conspiracy rabbit hole, socialization and education on hate or dissidence, and even some calls for and demonstration of violence. The platform progressively recommended a significant variety of hateful, far-right, and conspirational themes and narratives, with the potential to appeal and play upon an equally variable range of vulnerability factors and cognitive openings. Likewise, content creators appear to know how to navigate TikTok's lacking enforcement of community guidelines and play upon current events, feelings, and emotions. The literature suggests that radicalization is a fluid process where actors' involvement can vary in role and activity, and in its (il)legality. From my observations, I conclude with the need for further research and studies on comment sections, in their role in education, participation, and socialization in potentially radicalizing actors. I further suggest paying additional attention to, and would recommend empirical research of, the change in individuals' activities on- and offline as a result of their socialization on the platform.

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LIST OF ABREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ADL	Anti Defamation League
AWD	Atomwaffen Division
EDL	English Deference League
FYP	For You Page
INCEL	Involuntary Celibate(s)
IVEE	Individual Vulnerability to radicalization, their exposure to radicalizing moral contexts, and the emergence of radicalizing settings.
ISD	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
IRL	In Real Life
ISIS/ISIL	The (so-called) Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
RWE	Right Wing Extremism/Extremists
SIR	Susceptible, infectious, or resistant
VPN	Virtual Private Network

NOMENCLATURE

Alt-Lite	"A 'lighter' form of the alt right, called the alt lite, adopts somewhat the same repertoire of actions but is distinguished from the alt right in rejecting violence and extremist views." (Tanner and Campana 2020:264)
Alt-Right	"(T)he 'alt right' consists more accurately of 'an amalgam of conspiracy theorists, techno-libertarians, white nationalists, Men's Rights advocates, trolls, anti-feminists, anti-immigration activists, and bored young people'." (Tanner and Campana 2020:264) "Alt right activism relies on trolling and other attention-getting activities. Irony and (dark)humor – generally aimed at immigration and feminism – are common and often involve the diffusion of memes in an attempt "to capture lurkers" attention and to win their hearts and minds." (Tanner and Campana 2020:264)
Atomwaffen Division (AWD)	A neo-Nazi group, est. 2016. Its members have been connected to multiple acts of lone actor violence and murder.
Brandon/Let's go Brandon	Let's go Brandon is code for F*ck Joe Biden.
Bridging narratives	Bridging narratives foster the creation and expansion of a toxic discursive context through situational alliances and coalitions.
Boogalo Boys	The boogaloo movement, circa 2019, is an anti-government extremist group. The term boogaloo is a reference to a future civil war.
Cloaked Websites	Sites published by individuals or groups who conceal authorship to disguise deliberately their identity, and present or alter the truth in form or with the appearance of a 'legitimate,' reliable, or proper source of information.
Conservative Movements	"Conservative movements should be distinguished from right-wing or far-right movements. (They) 'support patriotism, free enterprise capitalism, and/or a traditional moral order . . . for which violence is not a frequent tactic or goal. Conservatism may be broadly defined 'as a defense of three principles: free market capitalism, traditional values, and anticommunism (which was later expanded to encompass strong national defense more broadly)'." (Tanner and Campana 2020:263–64)

English Deference League (EDL)	Is an English far-right extreme group that believes British society is under attack by Muslim extremists.
Extremism	"[T]he advocacy of a system of belief that claims the superiority and dominance of one identity-based 'in-group' over all 'out-groups.' Extremists propagate a dehumanising 'othering' mind-set and use any means necessary, including hate speech or acts of violence, to justify their radical or fanatic political, religious or cultural views." (O'Connor 2021:8)
Far-right / Right Wing	"[R]ight-wing or far-right movement reject conservatism, considering it as too much focused on economic issues, deregulations or tax cuts – all described as 'small bourgeois concerns' – and not enough engaged with the issue of race, promoting white nationalism and, to some extent, white supremacy. In that regard, right-wing and far-right groups promote the end of non-white immigration. In a nutshell, these groups – which the alt right is the most representative – consider conservatives as weak and responsible for what is labelled a 'white genocide'. Many of these groups promote grass-root activism, relying on social media to help encourage action." (Tanner and Campana 2020:264)
Far-Right accelerationism	Is a belief that societal collapse should be accelerated, brought forth, by any means necessary "so that a fascist, ethnostate can be developed in its place." (O'Connor 2021:9)
For You Page (FYP)	TikTok's main mean to discover and connect with others, a feed of video content.
Hate	"[B]eliefs or practices that attack, malign, delegitimize or exclude an entire class of people based on immutable characteristics, including their ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Hate actors are understood to be individuals, groups or communities that actively and overtly engage in the above activity, as well as those who implicitly attack classes of people through, for example, the use of conspiracy theories and disinformation. Hateful activity is understood to be antithetical to pluralism and the universal application of human rights" (O'Connor 2021:8)
INCELS	"[I]s short for 'involuntary celibate' and refers to online groups of men who feel that they cannot enter sexual relationships and express hatred toward women accusing

	them of sexually manipulating or humiliating men." (Weimann and Masri 2020:2)
La Meute (the Wolf Pack)	A French-Canadian far-right group, founded by two Canadian Force veterans that grew quickly after Justin Trudeau was elected (Lamoureux 2019).
Loneness	"(A)n outcome of changing relational configurations during a lone actor's radicalization, rather than as an inherent quality of these individuals." (Schuurman et al. 2019:773)
Lone wolf (actor)	The terminology of the lone actor (over the lone wolf) avoids neglecting the importance of small cells, dyads, or triads, of actors committing terror attacks, or organizing or consulting with one another, with peers, or with influential leaders, peers, or organizations.
Proud Boys	A right-wing extremist group with a violent agenda. Primarily misogynistic, Islamophobic, transphobic, and anti-immigration. According to the Anti Defamation League, they have 119 chapters across 46 states in the US. They also have international chapters in Canada, Britain, Ireland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Australia, and the Philippines.
QAnon	"[A] decentralized ideology rooted in an unfounded conspiracy theory that a globally active "Deep State" cabal of satanic pedophile elites is responsible for all the evil in the world. Adherents of QAnon also believe that this same cabal sought to bring down President Trump, whom they saw as the world's only hope in defeating it." (West, Juneau, and Amarasingam 2021:19)
Radicalization Process	The radicalization process is a complex human socio-environmental process of individual vulnerability to radicalization, exposure to radicalising moral contexts, and the emergence of radicalising settings (Bouhana, Bowles, and Pepys 2020).
Radicalization (to violent ext.)	The process by which an individual acquires the propensity to engage in acts of violent extremism, of terrorism.
Red Pill(ed)	Reference to the movie, *The Matrix,* and the protagonist's choice between the blue pill (maintaining the illusion), and the red pill (learn unsettling and mind-altering truth). This term is borrowed and applied for conspiracy theorists, and claims to 'have been red-pilled,' finding out the hidden truth, the true nature of a particular situation.

Right Wing Extremism	The valorizing of inequality and hierarchy, especially along racial/ethnic lines. Signs of ethnic nationalism linked to a mono-racial community. As well as the adoption of radical means to achieve aims and defend the imagined community. To it, we can often observe elements of nationalism, xenophobia, exclusionism, traditional values, and anti-democratic tendencies (Perry and Scrivens 2019:3–7).
Sheeples	People deemed docile, sheepish, foolish, or easily led.
Stormfront	Created by former Alabama Klan boss, Don Black, in 1995, it was the first major hate site on the internet. It is still active, and includes many regional subforums.
Terrorism	There are no universally agreed definition on terrorism. We henceforth often talk of terrorist acts, as per the UN security council's: "criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death of serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population." (United Nations Security Council 2004)
Violent Extremism	Unlawful extremist behavior regardless of ideology. Individual willingness to engage in illegal and violent actions to achieve political ends.

INTRODUCTION

"(W)ith research concerning online radicalisation, due to the lack of systematic empirical evidence, there is little consensus of the actual scope of the risk" (Corner, Bouhana, and Gill 2019:124)

Radicalization processes are an expression of unresolved social conflict. They reflect and should force us to question how strong (or weak) social cohesion really is, and why individuals or groups come to assume confrontational positions – especially when they legitimize the use of violence (Meiering, Dziri, and Foroutan 2020:1). In this thesis, I hope to present a general consideration in regard to and stress the importance of further research pertaining to far-right radicalization on and in TikTok's digital ecology. I suggest that the global rise of the right and the mainstreaming & banalization of far-right narratives and discourses pair efficiently with (and is also accelerated by) TikTok's loose and permissive guidelines and regulations, as well as its lack of tangible measures to prevent the proliferation of extreme content. To assess these claims, I created a TikTok profile and engaged with a thousand videos suggested by the application's recommendation algorithms, the 'For You Page' (FYP). In this quasi-self-ethnographic study, I noted that the platform's recommendations were increasingly extreme in narrative, themes, and tone. Secondly, I noted by the end of the study the formation of an echo-chamber of content. Ultimately, I suggest, based on my observations and self-ethnographic experience, this incremental pathway toward an echo chamber of far-right and conspirational material that in their current state, and considering the current climate of the rise of the far-right, TikTok's guidelines and (in)actions are prompt to challenge (in particular here, conservative) users' protective and vulnerability factors. These challenges, I found, are emotional, play on current events, are echoed in an increasingly contained bubble, and present and casually promote far-

right and conspirational narratives, contributing to their normalization. Below, I briefly introduce TikTok, conduct a literature review of the radicalization process, and describe my methodology and ensuing results. Afterwards I discuss my findings in more detail, more specifically on observed themes and conspiracy theories, feelings and emotional play, and the observed desired sense of community and belonging. Finally, I offer day-by-day auto-ethnographic remarks, set out some limitations of the study, and conclude with general implications of the research.

WHAT IS TIKTOK?

If you are like me, immeasurably older beyond your time, this section is for you. TikTok is an exceptionally trendy mobile social video platform developed and owned by its parent Chinese internet technology company, ByteDance. The app's popularity is reflected by its market share growth since release, its global downloads well surpassing over 2 billion hits on Apple's App Store and Google Play alone (Chapple 2020). On the app, users, influencers, and content creators create, discover, share, and comment on short videos. The app has a culture of rapid consumption, scrolling and sharing. At launch, videos were restricted to a maximum length of fifteen seconds. This was subsequently increased to up to a minute the subsequent year, three minutes in July 2021, and, this February 2022, was once more increased to its current maximum format, allowing users to produce and share videos that extend to up to 10 minutes (Goodwin 2022; Vincent 2022). The application offers a variety of features to encourage and ease both user interaction and experience, such as their Duet and Stitch video editing[1,2], the use of hashtags, tagging features, filters, and various other user-friendly effects & montage capabilities.

[1] The Duet video feature "allows you to post your video side-by-side with a video from another creator on TikTok. A Duet contains two videos in a split screen that play at the same time." (Duets 2022)
[2] The Stitch video feature "allows users the ability to clip and integrate scenes from another user's video into their own. Like Duet, Stitch is a way to reinterpret and add to another user's content, building on their stories, tutorials, recipes, math lessons, and more." (New on TikTok: Introducing Stitch 2020)

Millions of daily users participate on the platform by consuming or sharing videos or memes, intended to be funny, impressive, or inspiring content. However entertaining, the platform is renowned to be poorly managed in respect to the infringement of its, although existing, poor, and under-enforced community guidelines. My work falls into and follows the recent and growing academic interest on TikTok's loose community regulations, and the company's inaction vis-à-vis the growth or removal of extremist content on the platform (Little 2021b; O'Connor 2021). The weak enforcement of its guidelines has made TikTok a relatively popular and safe harbor for extremist and hate groups, including but certainly not limited to: numerous States' propaganda machines, and independent extremist groups such as the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), Involuntary Celibates (INCEL), accelerationists, Atomwaffen Division (AWD), the English Deference League (EDL), the Boogaloo Bois, and the Proud Boys (Clayton 2020; Cox 2018; Little 2021b; O'Connor 2021; O'Connor and Wheatstone 2020; Weimann and Masri 2020; Wells 2019).

FYP

The For You Page (FYP) is a feed of video content, and TikTok's main mean to discover and connect with others. It is "central to the TikTok experience and where most of our (TikTok's) users spend their time" (How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou 2019). According to TikTok's own newsroom, recommendations on the feed are based on a number of factors, such as: user interactions (videos liked and shared, accounts followed, posted comments, and created content), video information (hashtags, captions, sounds), and with less importance, device and account settings (language preference, country setting, device type) (How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou 2019; Little and Richards 2021).

Spreading Hate, on TikTok

"Far-right extremists are generating their content on a variety of online platforms and increasingly also utilizing a wider range of new media technologies for their purposes. A range of relatively new and highly accessible communication "applications" is another component of this trend. One of them is TikTok." (Weimann and Masri 2020:3)

As established above, TikTok is a new platform typically targeting a younger audience, compared to other social media platforms. The platform has limited guidelines and mechanisms to prevent the distribution of harmful content[3]. Hate speech on TikTok largely flew under the radar until December 2019, when Motherboard reported that it had found examples of "blatant, violent white supremacy and Nazism" (Weimann and Masri 2020:5). The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) found in 2021 hundreds of videos promoting white supremacy, featuring support for extremist or terrorist individual or organization, footage related to the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack (over thirty instances), content originally produced by ISIS, and holocaust denials (O'Connor 2021). O'Connor found that content was inconsistently removed on TikTok, and that simple evasion tactics to avoid takedowns was very effective. I present the various categories of hate found in the ISD's analysis of 1,030 videos in Table 1. Olivia Little of Media Matters, suggests TikTok algorithms can prompt users to follow extremist movements[4], promoting homophobia and anti-trans violence, and leading users between and toward more extreme conspiracy and far-right content (Little 2021b, 2021a, 2021c; Little and Richards 2021).

[3] Except perhaps if you intend to talk about Xinjiang and the Uighur cultural minority.
[4] Including Three Percenter, QAnon, Patriot Party, and Oathkeeper, all far-right or conspiracy theory movements.

Table 1 ISD's Hatescape, in Numbers

Category of hate & extremism	No. of videos
Promoting white supremacy	312
Glorifies an extremist individual/group/ideology	273
Features extremist symbols embedded in media	150
Antisemitic	153
Anti-Black	139
Anti-LGBTQ+	90
Anti-Muslim	81
Uses COVID conspiracies/misinformation to attack/ threaten/stigmatise a person or group of people	74
Misogynist	58
Anti-Asian	41
Terrorism footage	26
Anti-migrant/refugee	25

(O'Connor 2021:13)

Little found a "number of seemingly harmless conspiracy theory TikTok accounts appear to be peddling dangerous misinformation to their unknowing audience" (Little 2021a) including extremist misinformation. They found many apparently harmless conspiracy theory accounts, for instance (mostly) covering celebrity conspiracy theories, conspiracies about Atlantis, or flat earth superstitions, were in fact camouflaging more extreme conspiracy theories, for instance anti-Semitic conspiracies, anti-vax, COVID-19 denial, and QAnon content, or were linking and leading users to more extreme content, either within or outside the accounts themselves. Little cites how for example following a flat earth conspiracy theory account lead to recommendations for anti-vax conspiracy accounts, QAnon content to anti-vax conspiracy account, COVID misinformation to QAnon accounts, and COVID misinformation to anti-Semitic conspiracy

accounts (Little 2021a). With Abbie Richards, Little explored 360[5] FYP recommendations following engagement with transphobic content (Little and Richards 2021). Their study found that after interacting with anti-trans content, TikTok's "recommendation algorithm populated [their] FYP feed with more transphobic and homophobic videos, as well as other far-right, hateful, and violent content." (Little and Richards 2021)

The rise of the Far-Right is a recognized threat to Western societies, although perhaps still underestimated (Bello 2019; Daniels 2009; Morin and Aoun 2021). TikTok has been of particular interest to researchers because of its popularity, underregulated nature, and loose community guidelines resulting in the platform acting as a potential vector or tool for the transmission of extreme and fringe ideas. I suggest these guidelines, and the company's inaction, allow the platform's algorithm to recommend users increasingly radical content, and push them "deeper" down a conspirational rabbit hole.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our lives are now, arguably, intimately digital. The large variety of not only superficial but also deeply intimate activities we perform online would have been nothing short of incredible if dreamed-of even a half century ago. The Canadian, and that of most Western nations', political spectrum has equally altered. Two decades ago the far and extreme right was fringe, outside the political spectrum, it now creeps and even sits in the middle of the conversation (Bello 2019). This section presents a thorough review of relevant literature. In doing so, it will, hopefully convincingly, explicitly, and implicitly establish the relevance of my thesis. I will present the relevance of my work in the context of the presence and proliferation of the far-right in Canada,

[5] 103 anti-trans or homophobic narratives, 42 misogynistic, 29 containing racist narratives or white supremacist messaging, and 14 endorsing violence.

on- and offline. I will then focus on presenting the digital-side of the far-right, and its use of the cyberspace. For this, I will focus on their presence on public and mainstream platforms, hence excluding their use of exclusive or hidden websites and platforms. The subsequent section will present and build upon a literature review of radicalization leading to violent extremism. These sections aim to draw a compelling foundation for the discussion and analysis below.

Relevance: The Right, not so Far from Home

"Far-right violence and terrorism are a growing threat to Western societies. Far-right terrorist attacks increased by 320 per cent between 2014 and 2019 according to the 2019 Global Terrorism Index." (Weimann and Masri 2020:2)

The 2021 Capitol Hill insurrection was coordinated on Telegram and Twitter. The "Unite the Right" Alt-Right rally in Charlotteville Virginia, in 2017, was mostly organized online. On May 14, 2022, Payton Gendron shared a 180 pages accelerationist manifesto online, while murdering innocents in a grocery store. He was inspired by the actions and digital manifesto of Anders Breivik's own terrorist attack in Norway, in 2011. Before murdering three RCMP officers in June 2014, Justin Christian Bourque was known for ranting anti-establishment rhetoric online. Al-Qaeda has been digital since the late 1990s. Martinlutherking.org is owned by white supremacists[6]. The so-called Islamic State use to Snapchat and live stream. Brenton Tarrant prepared his attack, learned about his target, and purchased weapons online, before live-streaming the first part of his shooting in a Christchurch Mosque. Dylan Roof engaged with like-minded individuals and 'was educated' online regarding a fictitious 'Black-on-white violence epidemy.' In Canada and abroad, QAnon has, throughout the Covid 19 pandemic, spread like

[6] The website is now for the most part offline, but has been at various time a cloaked white supremacist tool of misinformation about the life of MLK (Daniels 2009). It was originally registered by Don Black, creator of White supremacist website and forum, Stormfront in 1999 (Daniels 2018).

wildfire[7]. TikTok recommended to users on their For You Page (FYP) sponsored advertisement for the so called 'freedom convoy' in Ottawa[8] (Battersby and Ball 2019; Brugh et al. 2019; Daniels 2009, 2018; Jewkes and Yar 2010; Perry and Scrivens 2019). If those examples are not convincing enough, as a justification to explore digital pathways for radicalization, bear with me a tat longer. Upfront and twofold, I want to shed light on why we (should) care about right wing, especially far-right, ideologies and extremism. Because, firstly, of their exclusionary and dehumanizing nature. Beliefs of exclusions are by design and definition dangerous. They present an existential threat to the social contract, *la promesse du vivre ensemble*, and threaten to feed into either perpetual reactionary cycles of violence or, dreadfully so, the permanent exclusion of vulnerable populations, and/or that of their rights and privileges. Second, and building upon the previous answer, granted, by it- or themselves, ideologies do not, if unmanifested, fringe, or 'dormant,' necessarily warrant to worry us. However, in the case of far-right ideologies, in Canada and elsewhere, the literature suggests an acceleration, a proliferation, and a surge of extreme ring wing ideas, which transpire tangibly in an increase of hate-based violence, hate speech, as well as the creep of said ideologies (or components of) into the mainstream conversation. This is why, because of the challenge(s) far-right movements pose to systems of checks and balances, the protection of individual freedom, the rule of law, the freedoms of press, religion, speech, and assembly, or the hallmarks of free and fair elections, for the many but also for the few, that I suggest scholars, politicians, educators, rights activists, and other parts of civil society should pay close attention to and care about changes in the social, here digital, ecologies

[7] On this, West, Juneau, and Amarasingam report an increase in membership from 02/02/20 to 08/07/20 of 7,016% in their page membership (West, Juneau, and Amarasingam 2021:22).
[8] Based on the research below, and personal observations.

of far-right extremisms (Bello 2019; Bérubé and Campana 2015; Miller-Idriss 2020; Morin and Aoun 2021; Tanner and Campana 2014, 2020; Townsend 2022).

White supremacy, the most lethal form of extremism in the United States, and its most popular form of far-right extremism, was the leading ideology in "[t]he vast majority (81 percent) of the forty-two extremist-related murders in 2019 [in the United States], with another 9 percent committed by other right-wing extremists." (Miller-Idriss 2020:19) The number of hate groups in the United States doubled to over a thousand after the election of President Barrack Obama, and while it declined to 784 in 2014, it "rose to a record high of 1,020 in 2018. White nationalist groups alone increased by nearly 50 percent in 2018, from 100 to 148." (Miller-Idriss 2020:19) In contemporary Canada, three classes of right wing extremists surface: white or ethno-supremacists, including skin heads and neo-Nazis; anti-authority extremists; and so called lone actors[9] (Perry and Scrivens 2019). Within and between these groups, in addition to the themes directly implied, matters of 'religious rights,' anti-feminism, homophobia, and hypermasculinity are the most common in Canada.

The pace of far-right attacks has been and is still rapidly accelerating[10] (Bérubé and Campana 2015; Miller-Idriss 2020; Tanner and Campana 2014), and so has membership. For example, 75,000 to 100,000 people are affiliated in the United States with supremacist extremist groups, not including fringe peripheries. In Germany, there are according to federal authorities 24,100 known white supremacist group members, with 12,700 considered potentially violent. In September 2019, 17,000 fighters from Western Countries traveled to Ukraine to fight, mostly for

[9] The term, as well as its distinction with its precursor the "lone wolf" will be defined in the section below, titled "Social Ecology & Lone Actors."
[10] For instance, following the 2019 El Paso shooting, in the four weeks that followed, forty arrests were made for plotting mass shootings, with a dozen linked to far-right ideology(ies) (Miller-Idriss 2020).

white-supremacist groups (Miller-Idriss 2020:20–21). There were, as of 2019, between 82 and 101 known right wing extremist (RWE) groups active in Canada (Table 2) (Perry and Scrivens 2019:45). Not only was a record number of hate crimes and attacks noted in the previous decades in Canada and the United States, but there has also been, as noted by the Anti Defamation League (ADL), an all-time high (2019) of 2,713 incidents of reported white-supremacy propaganda, doubling the already inflated numbers of 2018, which saw an increase of 182 percent from 2017. Maxime Bérubé and Aurélie Campana, 2015, found 264 occurrences of hate-based violence committed by far-right extreme individuals, groups, or groupuscules in Canada between 1977 and 2010. Respectively finding 119 crimes of religious exclusion, 116 of racial exclusion, and 29 of homophobic exclusion, with violence against a person (assassination, armed assault, and unarmed assault) leading with 31% of the crimes, violence against property (bomb/explosion, and arson) at 17%, and symbolic violence (disruptive pranks and vandalism/sabotage) at 52% (Bérubé and Campana 2015:225). Between 2014 and 2019 there has been over one hundred deaths in "the United States and Canada at the hands of white-supremacist extremists." (Miller-Idriss 2020:19). Bérubé and Campana found that, as of 2015, right wing extremism in Canada was highly fragmented, mostly disorganized, explaining the relative lower increase, comparatively to other Western nations, and a need to prepare and respond to increasing trends in far-right violent activity. Accurately, and following earlier trends and predictions, Samuel Tanner and Aurélie Campana, 2020, observe that "(h)ate speech has become increasingly visible in the United States, France, and Canada. Right-wing groups not only disseminate discourse that targets minorities, which they believe are the source of many kinds of societal problems, but also use digital media to attempt to destabilize democratic practices, such as election processes." (Tanner and Campana 2020:262) Echoing these scholars,

Argentino and Amarasingam suggest in West et al. that we not only see, in Canada and other Western democracies, a change in political climate and an increase in membership but also an increase in levels of engagement within these groups (Argentino and Amarasingam 2021).

Table 2 Distribution of right-wing extremist groups in Canada

Region	Estimated number of groups	Estimated number of members per group	Target community
Maritimes	6–8	10–15	Aboriginal Black
Quebec	20–25	15–25 to 80–100	Aboriginal Jewish Immigrant Muslim LGBTQ
Ontario	18–20	3–5 to 15–25	Aboriginal Black Jewish Immigrant Muslim LGBTQ
Manitoba	8–10	5-10	Aboriginal Black
Saskatchewan	6–8	5–10 to 40–50	Aboriginal Immigrant
Alberta	12–15	10–15	Aboriginal Black Jewish Immigrant Muslim Asian LGBTQ
British Columbia	12–15	5–10	Aboriginal Black Jewish Immigrant Muslim Asian LGBTQ
Total	82–101		

(Perry and Scrivens 2019:45)

Online spaces are important to the growth of far-right movements. The digital space is used to widen exposure to, and amplify, extreme content and far-right ideas, facilitate communication for fringe ideologists, "broadening networks; building resources that support activism, violence, and movement growth; and bridging online connections with off-line engagements and networks." (Miller-Idriss 2020:140–45) Right-wing groups in Canada have also traditionally been using digital spaces for their confidentiality features. Groups and groupuscules, such as *Hammerskins, Blood and Honour, Volkfront, La Meute, and National*

Vanguard, host their own private discussion forums, in addition to networking on sites used by the broader public (Perry and Scrivens 2019). Other less centralized agglomerations of like-minded RWE navigate private, semi-private, and public digital spaces for similar reasons and purposes, such as the conspiracy theorists of QAnon. Since their digital birth, RWE have constantly grown their numerical footprint, using digital spaces to: set up recruitment platforms, propagate, create or build upon a culture of hate[11], disseminate misinformation[12], establish communication channels, and creep fringe and far-right narratives onto mainstream platforms (Babb and Wilner 2021; Daniels 2009; Tanner and Campana 2014, 2020). Moving into mainstream platforms and learning how to navigate legal and private rules of usage is a honed skill that has allowed far-right groups to establish more accessible echo chambers for its adherent, users, and potential recruits (Miller-Idriss 2020). An accurate representation of this phenomenon can be found in *La Meute,* a far-right vigilante group in Quebec. La Meute has been using private Facebook groups to choregraph "a program of societal control and the development of an exclusivist identity not only for Quebec but for Canada" (Tanner and Campana 2020:263), to gather people around its pro-white and anti-immigration narratives, present itself as the 'protector' of the nation, of Quebecer and Canadian values, against 'an Islamic invasion,' white replacement. They foster a vigilantism of the 'other' on social media, set in-group boundaries, foster anti-multiculturalism, fear, and resentment, help mobilize its members, encourage members & recruits to commit to IRL (in real life) and digital activities, and foster further involvement. "Considering the number of 'likes' and 'smileys' [call to actions-] types of

[11] Through, in part, creating and sharing hate content, such as music and videos – solidarity through 'hate culture,' and music; popularizing RWE ideologies (Perry and Scrivens 2019).
[12] Including cloaked websites, sites by individuals or groups who hide their identity(ies) deliberately (Daniels 2009).

comments generated" (Tanner and Campana 2020:275), the literature suggests wide levels of agreement of their members to fringe, potentially violent calls to action.

Far-right groups on social media hence, in Canada and elsewhere, form, present, and tailor to clusters of individuals characterized by polarized opinions, information bubbles, and echo chambers. On mainstream platforms, these clusters contribute to foster a sense of community, emotional spaces where members feel included, understood, and listened to. Similarly, these potentially radicalizing spaces work to normalize or banalize otherwise (or previously) fringe ideas, introduce radical ideas progressively in small doses or ready-to-consume information packets of increasingly extreme content. This helps ease content consumers to radical 'discussions,' while also pushing mainstream conversations further right. Bharath Ganesh presents the alt-right's visibility online as a participatory culture of users and influencers that playy on the emotional dispositions of the audience. These (pre)dispositions are weaponized through three flows: "the affirmation of white victimization, processes of legitimization, and the reinforcement of rectitude" (Ganesh 2020:914), creating and feeding into an environment that aims to resonate and confirm feelings and dispositions of the audience[13]. Normalizing and banalizing fringe material, according to the literature, presents ordinary individuals with more frequent encounters of extreme ideas, making engagement with the far-right more fluid and frequent, relabeling extreme ideas (for instance forced deportation and ethnic cleansing into re-migration), and make hateful expression appear more acceptable (Miller-Idriss 2020).

[13] Given "similar frames of nativism and anti-liberalism in global far-right communication, white thymos can be expected to be observed in other contexts, though its relative salience and specific flows are likely to be different" (Ganesh 2020:915). This also correlate with subsequent parts of the literature review, on bridging narratives.

Political Radicalization

"Family, social networks in school and after graduation, peer groups, and mass media are powerful socialization and learning contexts in which opinions form and change. Multiple agents of socialization can intervene at different stages in the socialization process, including socialization to radical ideas and practices." (Tanner and Campana 2014:23)

Violent political radicalization, radicalization leading to violent extremism, as a concept and field of study has leaped forward drastically since the events surrounding the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 (9/11). Pre-9/11, the field was already seeing a steady evolution, extreme political dissidence was (widely) for instance no longer understood as a simple physical or psychophysical phenomena, a disease of body and mind conveniently utilized to explain cases of extremism by authorities (Kundnani 2012; McCauley and Moskalenko 2017). The scale, magnitude, and significance of the 9/11 attack worried and captured the interest of the academic and political spheres, equating in a desire and substantial effort to understand, limit, and ideally prevent similar disasters. In this section, I introduce the work and contribution of various experts to the literature. This review of the evolution and state of the concept includes but is not limited to its early contributors, such as Walter Laqueur, Fathali Moghaddam, Peter Neumann, Marc Sageman, and, Quintan Wiktorowicz, as well as that of some of their more contemporary counterparts, Maxime Bérubé, Aurélie Campana, Sammuel Tanner, John Horgan, Olivier Roy, Max Taylor, Paul Gill, Bettina Rottweiler, Emily Corner, and Noémie Bouhana.

Early models.

Peter Neumann and Walter Laqueur, in their respective work, stressed the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in tackling terrorism and radicalization to political violence. They attempted to re-define the concept (Kundnani 2012), bridging older terrorism studies with a subsequent iteration, while stressing and introducing the importance of: non-state actors, the

cultural background (although mostly religious background, in their case), while lying out a basic framework of cultural and psychological (pre)dispositions to political violence (Laqueur 2004). Although useful to the evolution of the field in the early 2000, early models to violent radicalization often present limiting constraints of an otherwise complex process.

Early models were often self-limiting by their understanding of terrorism as: nearly exclusively influenced by theological factors (commonly Salafi Islam), presenting frequently mutually exclusively horizontal (peer-based) *or* vertical (hierarchies, top down) models of recruitment and engagement, and focusing mainly on *root causes* to violent extremism, in a linear fashion. This is exemplified by the then NYPD four stages model of radicalization toward violent extremism (NYPD 2007), presented below as Figure 1, where an actor must be "at risk" and display vulnerabilities (pre-radicalization), self-identify through exploring Salafi Islam, present a cognitive opening, as a catalyst, progressively intensify their beliefs, and ultimately, reach the "Jihadization", the operational phase of the process.

Figure 1 The NYPD's Radicalization Process Model, 2007

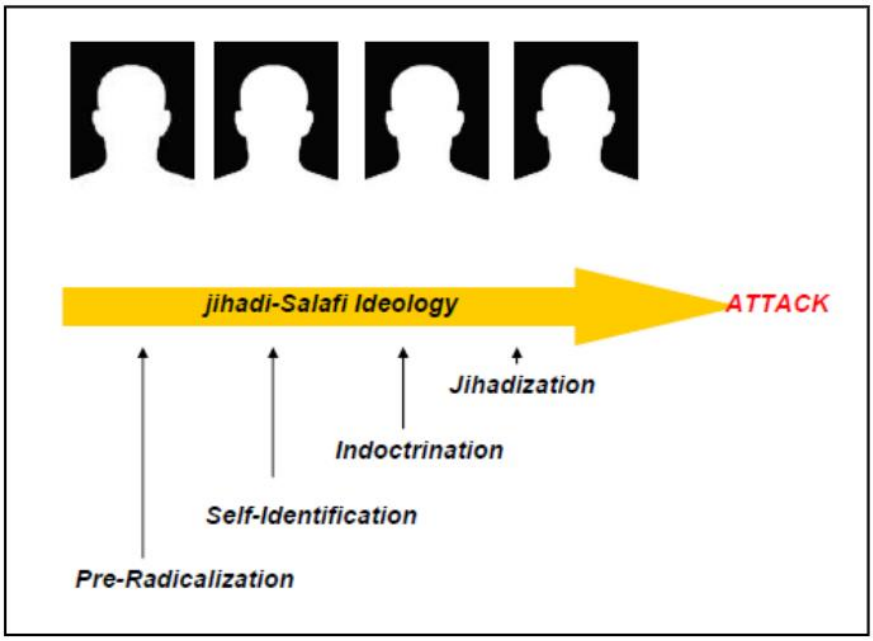


Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4 present similar models, respectively proposed at the time by Marc Sageman (2004, 2008, 2008), Paul Gill (2008), and Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004), followed by Figure 5, Moghadam's Staircase to Terrorism (2005). For concision, and to avoid repetition, Taarnby's eight-stage recruitment process, and McCauley and Moskalenko's twelve mechanisms of political radicalization have been omitted. Their contribution should be acknowledged, as their models propose additional "operational steps" in the radicalization process. They are ultimately however less thorough and heavily dependent on Sageman's work (Christmann 2012; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008).

Figure 2 Sageman's 2007 Four Stages (Prongs) Semi-Linear Model

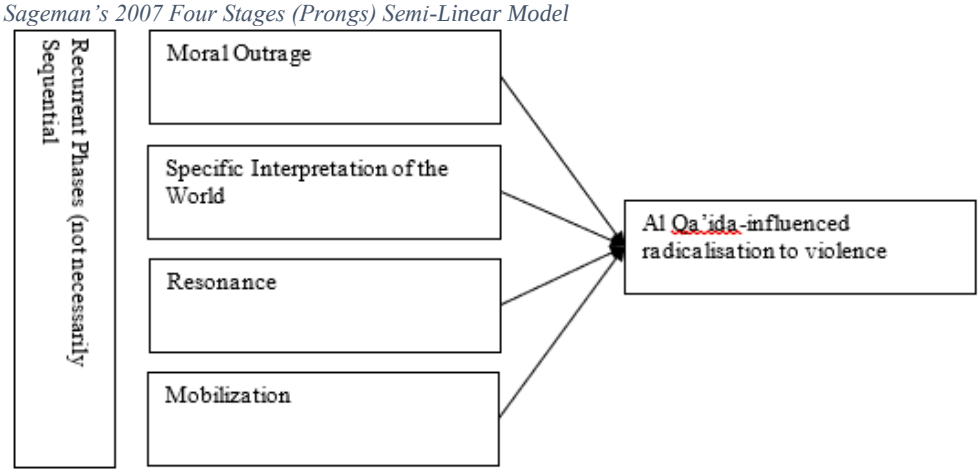


Figure 3 Gill's Suicide Bomber Pathway

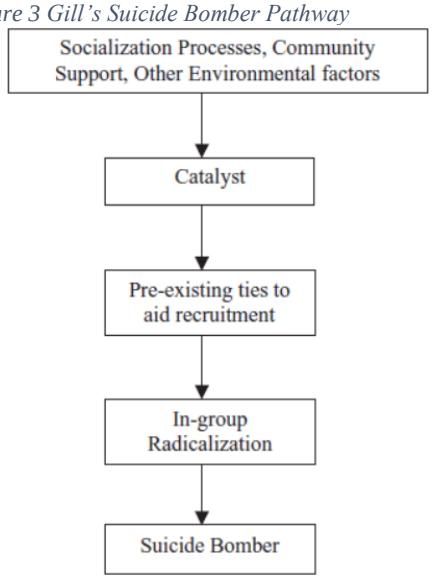
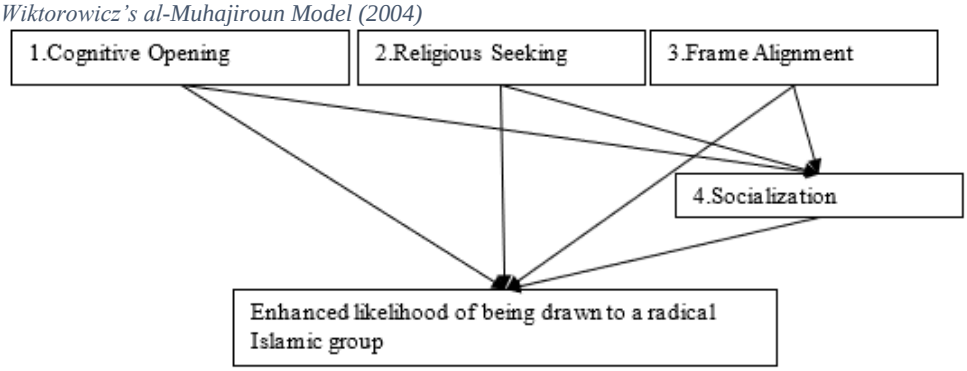


Figure 4 Wiktorowicz's al-Muhajiroun Model (2004)



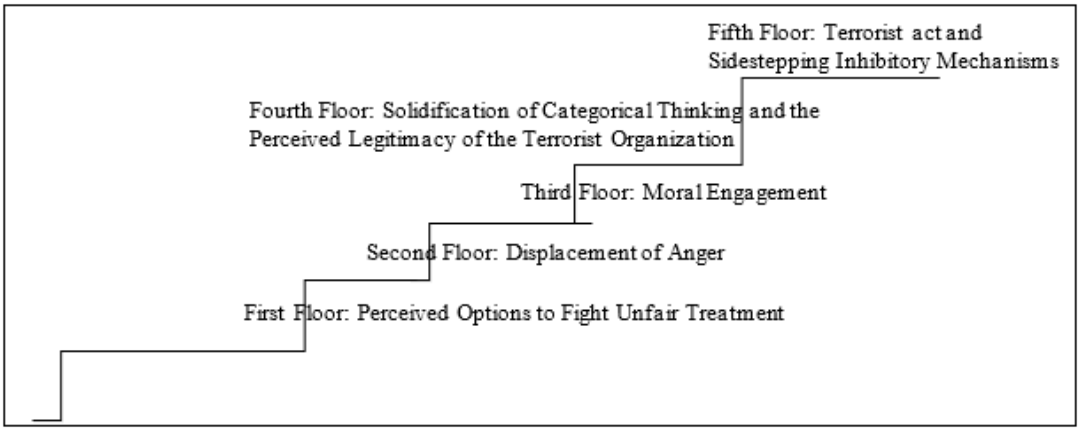
These authors advanced the literature by proposing and conceptualizing linear and semi-linear models with clear trajectories for radicalized or radicalizing actors. Sageman has been recognized as and was pivotal in rejecting the significance of wide economic and political conditions (*greed*) to the radicalization process, also breaking away from religious arguments as the *sole* cause of terrorism, reintroducing the agency of violent actors into the field of study. He alternatively favored an interpretative structural approach. A weakness in Sageman remains the importance attributed to jihadi terrorism as a socialization process of kinship and relationships toward *accepting Salafi ideology* (Kundnani 2012; Sageman 2004). Gill presented a pathway model charting a trajectory necessary for suicide terrorism. His model included the introduction of a (or many) catalyst(s) (proximal) event(s) as propelling actors toward joining terror groups. Not unlike Sageman's model, Gill's work interprets pre-existing ties in the radicalization process as primordial. Although Gill's suggested pathway is restrictive to pre-existing ties, and does not attribute significant enough attention as to the internal development of the actor, nor elaborates on their environmental factors, he pioneers in introducing the "fascination factor" provided by the internet in the glorification of violence. In his early work he also implicitly proposes the potential for "diagonal" recruitment. Even though he does not introduce the concept itself, the work hints at the potential for recruitment to happen (sometimes simultaneously) horizontally *and* vertically (Gill 2008). Wiktorowicz for their part shared Sageman's views on two points.

First, on his theological-psychological understanding of the process, in which "radical religious beliefs, activated by group dynamics or cognitive openings, transform individuals into terrorists" (Kundnani 2012:18). Secondly, on political and economic circumstances as "insufficient to account for radical activism" (Kundnani 2012:17). Wiktorowicz followed a socialization and cognitive opening approach, which would include extensive debate, and prolonged exposure to a movement's ideas (Christmann 2012; Kundnani 2012; Wiktorowicz 2004). Their contribution was at the time, and is still to a degree, significant based on its empirical study of radicalization.

These models interpret in their own ways radicalization as a progressive escalation that results in violence if and only if a series of "steps" are systematically (or semi-systematically) achieved, a series of boxes checked. Early models understood violent extremism as a radicalization 'checklist' of sort. Fatali M. Moghaddam, in *The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration* (2005), makes use of a simple metaphor to represent the process as a climb to 'higher floors' in a narrowing staircase. The staircase is "leading to the terrorist act at the top of the building" (Moghaddam 2005:161) and, crucially, "whether someone remains on a particular floor depends on the doors and spaces that person imagines to be open to her or him on that floor. The fundamentally important feature of the situation is not only the actual number of floors, stairs, rooms, and so on, but how people perceive the building and the doors they think are open to them." (Moghaddam 2005:161) Moghaddam stresses the importance and subjectivity of individual circumstances, in interpreting and navigating their grievances, coupled with displacement of aggression, blame, and an interpretation of one's social, legal, and economic environments as being illegitimate in their procedures and systems of rules. For the grieving actor, this is a perceived lack, or blockage of social mobility, an exclusion from political decision making (Christmann 2012; Moghaddam 2005). Although still quite linear, Moghaddam's model

values and presents the subjective experience of the actor in a complex sociological ecology. Not unlike the previous models, Moghaddam at the time valued and simplified recruitment vertically, engagement coming from the/a terrorist organization.

Figure 5 Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism



In reaction to these early models, before moving to procedural models of radicalization, McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) provide a somewhat (semi-linear) 'Two Pyramids Model.' The model has its own admitted flaw, but importantly contributes to the literature by introducing and distinguishing the 'action pyramid' from the 'opinion pyramid.' They highlight the importance to separate action from opinion in radicalization. Briefly, the "base of this [opinion] pyramid are individuals who do not care about a political cause (neutral); higher in the pyramid are those who believe in the cause but do not justify violence (sympathizers); higher yet those who justify violence in defense of the cause (justifiers); and at the apex of the pyramid those who feel a personal moral obligation to take up violence in defense of the cause." (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017:19) The action pyramid has a base of "individuals doing nothing for a political group or cause (inert), higher in the pyramid are those who are engaged in legal political action for the cause (activists), higher yet those engaged in illegal action for the cause (radicals), and at the apex of the pyramid those engaged in illegal action that targets civilians (terrorists)."

(McCauley and Moskalenko 2017:20) The authors point out that neither pyramids are stairway models. Individuals can therefore skip levels in moving up and down.

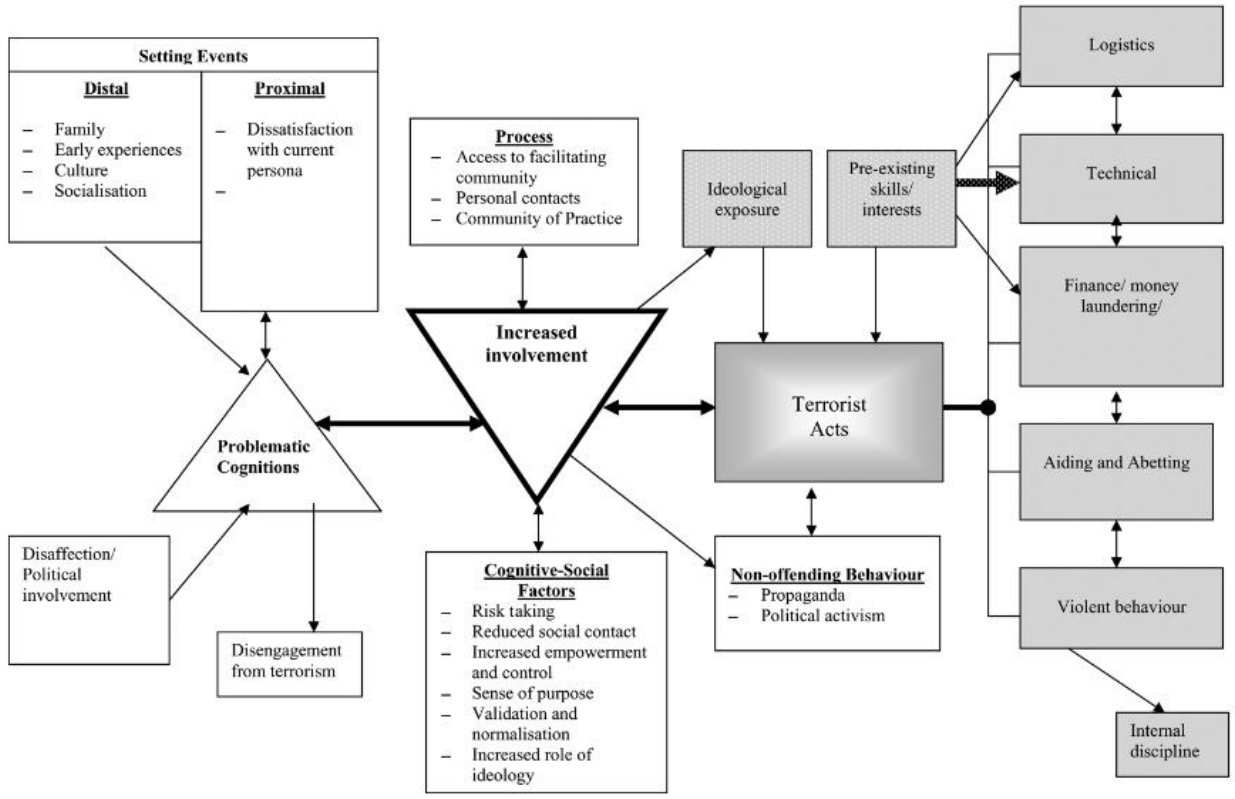
Procedural radicalization.

As introduced, this 'linear' wave of models transitioned from and supplanted the previous (a) assumptions that political violence and extremism was a psycho-physical disorder, as well as the (b) taken-for-granted importance of economic and political root-causes, recognizing progressively that economic and political grievances are usually widely shared by a much larger population, and hence do not accurately represent determining factors in political violence, *le passage à l'action* of only a handful of participants. It ultimately (c) inspired the introduction to the literature of psycho-social procedural models. As highlighted, these linear models however generally lacked a comprehensive overall approach to the concept, signified by the absence of a convincing explanation for the use of violence over other means. Furthermore, linear, and semi-linear models lacked the flexibility offered by procedural models. They also often focused, explicitly or not, on a teleological-psychological legitimacy or justification of violence by using radical religious beliefs as proxy for causes of violence; too often narrowly intertwined, ultimately unconvincingly, with Salafist Islam.

I now move away from linear and semi-linear models, whilst still acknowledging the contribution of key authors. In this essay, I favor instead procedural models. I accept and agree with procedural models for the flexibility and thoroughness they offer. My understanding of radicalization leading to violent extremism, is largely shaped by the work of Max Taylor and John Horgan. Their 2006 procedural model of terrorist involvement, represented in Figures 6 and 7, and described below, is pivotal in understanding the intricacies of radicalization leading to violent extremism. I have to various degrees been inspired and developed my understanding of

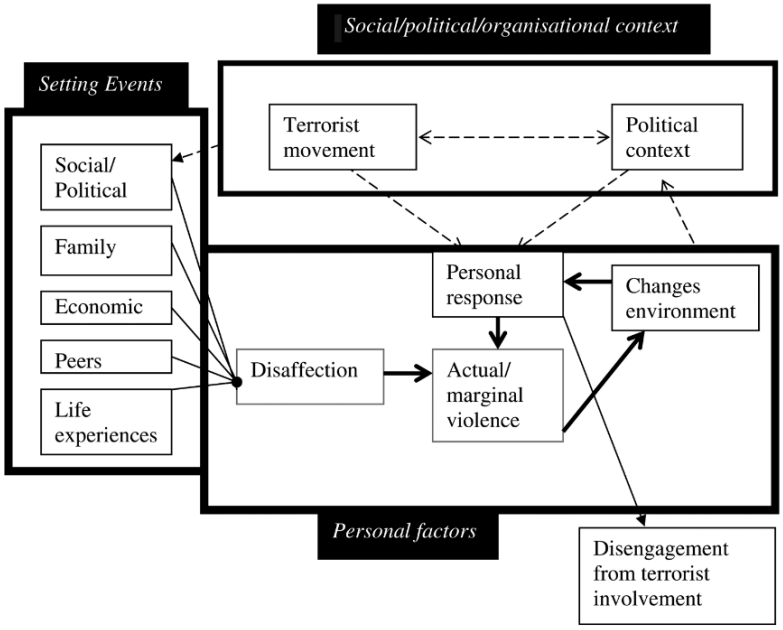
the radicalization process from the collective work of Caitlin Clemmow, Noémie Bouhana, Paul Gill, Emily Corner, Bettina Rottweiler, Bart Schuurman, Lasse Lindekilde, Stefan Malthaner, and Francis O'Connor (Clemmow, Bouhana, and Gill 2020; Corner et al. 2019; Rottweiler, Gill, and Bouhana 2021; Schuurman et al. 2019). Noémie Bouhana will especially be considered for her contribution to the modern understanding of vulnerability factors and the importance of the social ecology in the radicalization process.

Figure 6 A Diagrammatic Model of Terrorist Involvement from Taylor and Horgan



(Taylor and Horgan 2006:590)

Figure 7 Involvement with Terrorism from Taylor and Horgan



(Taylor and Horgan 2006:591)

In their work, which includes case studies and empirical research, Taylor and Horgan present a procedural model that stress the importance, and reflect the evolution of the literature toward, pathways over profiles, and routes over roots (Horgan 2008; Taylor and Horgan 2006). Linear and semi-linear models relied heavily in assumptions and profiling about not the development of the violent extremist but more so about their static qualities. Taylor and Horgan aimed to respond, in part, to the following omissions, (Horgan 2008:84):

- "(T)he gradual nature of the relevant socialization processes into terrorism;
- a sense of the supportive qualities associated with that recruitment (e.g., the "pull" factors, or lures, that attract people to either involvement in terrorism in a broad sense or that are used to groom potential recruits);
- the sense of migration between roles (e.g., moving from fringe activity such as public protest to illegal, focused behavior); and
- a sense of the importance of role qualities (e.g., what attractions does being a sniper hold as opposed to becoming a suicide bomber, and how do these qualities become apparent to the onlooker or potential recruit?)."

And although "highlighting these limitations still does not answer the critical question: why does one person become involved in terrorism and the other does not?", "it might (however)

be useful to identify predisposing risk factors for involvement in terrorism" (Horgan 2008:84). Some of these risk factors have been included, as a reference, and gathered from Horgan's 2008 work, as Appendix A (Horgan 2008:84–85). I accept their proposition that profiling is limited in usefulness, and that instead the (1) *process* of violent radicalization and (2) the *meaning of engagement* with that process to the individual terrorist should be favored (Horgan 2008:93; Taylor and Horgan 2006:597). Furthermore, in the analysis below I will stress and accept the following assumptions, gathered from their work: there is not *one* route to terrorism, but a multitude of individual routes, these routes and activities change over time, in nature and in interpretation – in other word, it is a process, not a "one way" path – observing and studying potential routes to engagement also instructs about disengagement, hence give additional relevance to my work. Furthermore, terrorism is assumed to work at a political, individual, and social level. As it is a procedural phenomenon, future engagement is affected (weakened or strengthened) by previous and present engagement and action. An increased involvement in a social/political/organisational context will give engagement a direction, (especially if expressed through ideology) in exerting control over behaviour (Taylor and Horgan 2006:597).

Inspired by the criminal literature, Taylor and Horgan propose looking at trajectories for the development of the individual in a sequence of transitions. Trajectories include an entry point, a success point, and the element of timing, with life events themselves embedded in the trajectory as transitions (Taylor and Horgan 2006:589). Change in life events can be longer term more complex processes of change, the slower creep of distal events, or more sudden critical points, proximal events. The authors also include and refer to, as represented in Figure 6 above, the relevance and potential contribution of notions like community of practice, rule governance, and ideology in understanding "the role and informal transmission of practice and knowledge" in

terrorism (Taylor and Horgan 2006:590). Figure 6 illustrates, in a general sense, the centrality of the effect(s) on cognition, and subsequent behaviour, of a multitude of factors, in a fluid multidirectional fashion. Figure 7 develops the process further and "illustrates the processes that might underpin forms of terrorist involvement, particularly initial and later stages of involvement." (Taylor and Horgan 2006:591) The figure focuses and identifies three 'critical process variables' that "might relate to both the development of and engagement with, terrorism" (Taylor and Horgan 2006:591). In their example, they relate and elaborate on the interconnected relation and importance to early involvement (in extreme political activities) of setting events (distal factors/events), unchangeable (but not uninfluenceable), as part of the individual's socialization into family, society, work, religion, and culture. Although these offer very little predictive value on their own, they precede and contribute to behavior and decision matrixes. Personal factors relate directly to the context (psychological and environmental) experienced at the time of involvement (based on, and proper to, the particular iteration of involvement), and the social, political and organisational context refers to the external social context, and its expression outside of the individual. The authors stress in their procedural model the importance of actor agency, reason, and the relative influence of these various factors within and between actors, in their own pathway to terrorism involvement (Taylor and Horgan 2006:591–93).

Rottweiler et al. (2021) support this approach, and present distal and proximal factors as a 'structural equation model.' The model, presented below as Figure 8 presents distal (perceived individual and collective strains leading to anomia [loss of normative orientation]), and proximal factors (legal cynicism, self-control, and exposure to extremist settings) as explaining susceptibility to extremism (Rottweiler et al. 2021). Their empirical national (German) cross-sectional survey showed that vulnerability to extremism was related to "low law-relevant

morality, low self-control and exposure to extremist settings." (Rottweiler et al. 2021:15) In addition to demonstrating the importance of 'contextual accounts' in the radicalization process, over individual characteristics, their research further suggests the importance to address risk factors for extremism early, to "avoid personal alienation and legal cynicism." (Rottweiler et al. 2021:15) They, not unlike Taylor and Horgan, stress the importance of risk aversion/tolerance to risk, which in turn can and will influence the type of involvement in extremist behavior, in the individual context and pathway, at different times.

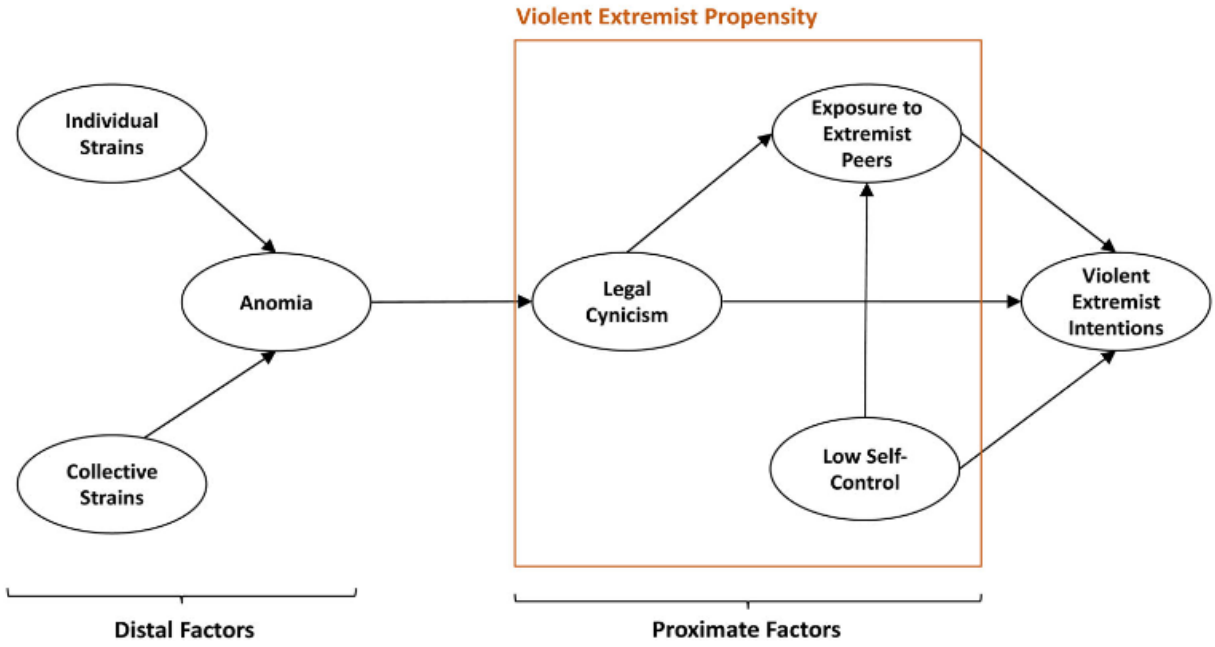


Figure 8 Rottweiler et al.'s Structural Equation Model (Rottweiler et al. 2021:4)

Social ecology & lone actors.

"Most of our respondents identified moments or influences in their lives that played a role in their radicalization, although no one spoke about a transformative event that suddenly and radically transformed their opinions and practices. Rather, environmental mechanisms shaped social disposition, political orientation, and behaviour over the long-term." Tanner and Campana, on their interviews with actual or former members of oppositional groups (2014:23).

The last set of accepted assumptions for my work is inspired from ongoing research, current debates, and on the continuing relevance of this field of research, theoretically and practically. First, it is important to, in order to move away from the aforementioned almost unilateral early focus on 'theological terrorism,' and accepting the underlying assumptions presented above, to consider and analyze pathways over roots/profiles. I also recognize the increasing presence of lone violent actors, politically or otherwise motivated, often referred to as 'lone wolves.' I however choose to, in accordance to Clemmow et al. (2020) and Schuurman et al. (2019) to refer to these actors as lone actors. This move, as so accurately presented in the literature, serves to take us away from implications of "a (perceived) high level of cunning and lethality that is often not present among these individuals. Moreover, (the use of 'lone wolves') perpetuates a sensationalist term that originated with American right-wing extremists. We also avoid the oxymoron of "lone wolf packs."" (Schuurman et al. 2019:771–72) On this note, the terminology of the lone actor avoids omitting the importance of, in these attacks, small cells, dyads, or triads, of actors committing terror attacks, or organizing or consulting with one another, with partners, or with influential leaders, peers, or organizations. Referring to 'lone actors' over 'lone wolves' hence does not take away from and recognizes the importance of social ties. "Increasingly, what were once largely interpreted as single perpetrator attacks in the context of right-wing political violence are now conceptualized as international, interrelated phenomena." (Meiering et al. 2020:3–4) An inability to develop and maintain lasting social ties might prevent lone actors from recruiting into or joining terror groups. They might indeed be *lonely*. In spite of their loneliness, lone actors are still at a or multiple points in their radicalization process engaged in short term, or in touch with individuals, organizations, groups, or groupuscules of like-minded peers (Schuurman et al. 2019). Schuurman et al. have empirically

studied ‘loneness’ from a relational perspective, in lone actor radicalization, to identify varying degrees and types, “vis-à-vis radical milieus and groups in on- and offline settings.” (Schuurman et al. 2019:772) They maintain loneness should ultimately be seen as “an outcome of changing relational configurations during a lone actor’s radicalization, rather than as an inherent quality of these individuals.” (Schuurman et al. 2019:773) For most lone actors, the literature suggests hence higher loneness closer to, or in the act of violence, *le passage à l’acte.* In their three years study, Schuurman et al. observed, “86 percent of lone actors communicated their convictions to others and 58 percent also provided indications of actual violent intent. That this occurred not days or weeks, but months and years before the intended attack further underlines that lone actors are often far from stealthy or undetectable beforehand.” (Schuurman et al. 2019:774) For my analysis, looking at right wing extremism, and pathways to right wing (violent) extremism(s) on *social* media, this distinction is critical.

Quest for sense: psychological mechanisms, in a social ecology.

Accordingly with the literature, I support the importance of the narrative in the social environment. I also recognize the importance of peers, or their absence, from the social ecology. I reject the assumption that extreme violent radicalism is rooted in nihilism and a ‘culture of death.’ So far, I have presented and stressed the importance of understanding radicalization as a procedural non-linear process with various types of engagement and involvement, varying in manners, roles, and intensity. I have also stressed the significance of the politico-social environment, and that of social interactions in both radicalization and de-radicalization, recognizing that even so-called lone actors are (still) inherently social, even in their loneness. The process of radicalization leading to political violence henceforth is so far understood and conceptualized as an inherently individual ‘pathway,’ a psychological process, in a social

ecology. Oluf Gøtzsche-Astrup points to eight psychological mechanisms involved in said process that experts weight and evaluate with different importance (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018:17–23; Morin and Madriaza 2021:32–33):

i) Radicalization is based on motivations rather than a utilitarian risks and benefits calculus.
ii) Radicalization is rooted in psychological mechanisms, not psychopathological[14];
iii) Negative life experiences act as "triggers," in a quest for sense, and answer fundamental questions.
iv) A feeling or loss of sense.
v) A change in social identity toward a single social group, removal of plurality.
vi) Small group dynamics are conductive to extreme behaviours.
vii) A (pre)disposition, perhaps amplified, to anxiety, aggression, and, impulsivity.
viii) The implication of "sacred" values, the role of ideology in the final stages of radicalization.

To complement and add tangibly to the understanding of these mechanisms, I will briefly look at contributions to the literature pertaining to vulnerability factors in a wider social ecology. The perceived legitimacy of the use of violence, as a result, in part, of weak social cohesion, will be also covered. Corner et al. (2019) diligently warn us for a need to approach and interpret research and statistics pertaining to vulnerability factors flexibly, to avoid a static approach while interpreting results (especially in the common occurrence of small[er] sample size[s]). They, along other authors cited above, recognize the role of loneliness and isolation, as well as the significance of the socio-political environment. Isolated individuals tend to be more vulnerable

[14] A more important incidence of psychopathology exists for lone actors only, but its role is more intricate, pointing mostly to the isolation and loneliness it sometimes creates. Corner et al. (2019) build upon Bouhana and Wikström's (2010, 2011) theoretical foundation, and Gill's (2015) lone-actor terrorists dataset. The authors observe the complex role of psychopathology in the development and behaviour of (lone actor) terrorists. Corner et al. (2019)'s result point to psychopathology as one of several contributing vulnerability factors, and, "depending on the circumstance, it is a catalyst, an inhibitory factor, and even a consequence. Psychopathology seems to play a significant role across the process of becoming a terrorist and is both a precursor to, and a consequence of changes in social settings." (Corner, Bouhana, and Gill 2019:127) They attribute this contribution to the process based on the isolation from friends, community, and peers, that often results from medication of psychopathology, hence in certain cases, projecting the actor further down the proverbial 'rabbit hole.'

and opened to a *(re)mise en question*, a renegotiation, of their ideological framework, which can lead to deeper questioning, and, finding themselves, at various paces, suddenly or progressively, cut off from support structures, hence open to membership with *a* small(ler) (single) group. Entry into a new core group also opens the door to "reorientation and breaking contact with one's previous social circles" (Meiering et al. 2020:4), potentially leading to more isolation. Concordantly with the eight mechanisms stressed above, the individual's ability to live in, as well as participate into and be offered legitimate and tangible political and social opportunities in their social environment, their social construct, helps to the recognition of the '*promesse du vivre-ensemble*,' the social contract and that of its perceived functional and legitimate mechanisms for justice, self- and communal advancement, and realization (Brunet 2021; Morin and Madriaza 2021). To which we can add to and observe the potential of this challenge, question, or renegotiation of the self in relation to the perceived (absence, or fragility of the) social contract, the creation of a *malaise* as lived and interpreted. In turn, the self can find validation, answers, and resonance to these new questions, as well as reinforce the familiar illusion of a singular identity; having to 'make a choice' in navigating and constructing its identity (Aoun and Blanchet 2021; Sen 2006). This process arguably eases the creation or delimitation of the/an 'other,' conveniently situated at the intersection of perceived 'problem(s),' grievances, and dehumanization. The perception of the violent solution as sole solution presents itself and is apparently more prone to arise throughout the realization of the eight psychological mechanisms heretofore mentioned.

Notably, actors, when considering a violent solution, or other forms of radical involvement, such as previously stated when covering Horgan and Taylor above, embark on a quest for sense and meaning for the (perceived and expected) return of said meaning, of power.

This pursuit aims to answer an 'overwhelming' or 'insurmountable' sense of powerlessness in, and contextualized as the rules of engagement of an evolving social contract in an equally changing social and political environment (Brunet 2021). The challenge to this '*promesse du vivre ensemble'*, is an example of negative distal and/or proximal circumstance(s) that open the door to more renegotiation of the identity. The violent solution is manifested as a narcissist mission with the extra appeal of being an "easy" (violent) solution, a desire to destroy on the outside what one cannot tolerate or comprehend on the inside (Brunet 2021). For instance, in Western societies and pertaining to far-right ideologists, we at time observe, among other factors, the impact of the return of the religious in the previous laicizing liberal state(s). The return of the religious is relevant, mixed with other social, economic, and political conditions, in its ideological function. It not only affects one's theological identity, but also the hereby absence of religiosity of the other, or their non-religious civic ethos. The literature does not suggest a causal relationship between radicalization and religion, but stresses the importance, especially in this age of the extremes, of *religiosity*. Religiosity is importantly distinguished and relevant in not only the actor's own interpretation of their faith, or their acceptance of 'an' interpretation of their faith, but also in the relationships and interactions an individual can therefore have (or not have) with other religious or secular members of, or directly with, their community(ies).

Advancing the conversation on the role of religiosity, Roy and Kepel debate on Islam and radicalization. Roy argues we see in Western Europe and elsewhere an islamization of radicality, recognizing radical actors to choose a narrative in their quest for answers, and frame(s) of actions and reference; a plausible response to the vacuum created by the retreat of other 'mainstream' reactionary ideologies. On his part, opposing Roy, and less believably, Kepel proposes a supposed radicalization of Islam, particularly related to Salafi Islam (Putz 2016; Roy 2016). Roy

implies young jihadists (in France and Belgium) would still be radical actors even in the absence of Islam in their lives. He suggests that specific forms of radical involvement are chosen based on their availability, and the actors' experience. In other words, the young actor faces a cognitive opening and subsequently choses, out of 'available' answers, an ideological frames that resonate with his preconditions, and he would, in the absence of a radical narrative of Islam, simply turn toward another narrative. This is supplemented by but also feeds into: a redefinition of the individual's religiosity (we often see the absence of formal religious education in French radical actors, evidenced by the often-popular decontextualized use of select passages from the Quran), the importance of community, of the brotherhood, and a generational clash (represented in religiosity and in youth culture). Roy's take on Jihad radicalization in France and Belgium hence highlights the importance of pre-existing factors in the social ecology, and of the psychological process of the individual, where the actor chooses a radical frame *after* developing legal cynicism, losing faith in the social contract.

Whereas his aforementioned contributions hold merit, Roy however views, less believably, contemporary violent extremism anchored in nihilism. In accordance with Morin and Aoun, amongst others, I reject the nihilist hypothesis, which he extends, but does not limit, to suicide attacks and shootings (Morin and Aoun 2021; Roy 2016). Roy proposes that contemporary youth have a fascination with death, as a mean and end goal, and hence bluntly disregard their own as well as others' lives. He roots his argument in part in a generational critic, a quest for violence and sexuality, and in a morbid fascination based in video games, martial arts clubs, and popular cultures. I reject this heuristic technique to a complex phenomenon, but recognize its intention. I equally disagree with the so-called novel characteristic he attributes to contemporary 'morbid' extremism. I find this erroneous, as if other historically violent groups, to

name a few, communist vanguards, the IRA, early Maoists, or Marxists revolutionaries, even without suicide tactics/attacks, were anything but conscious of the fragility of their lives, and in turn did not willingly and consciously through their beliefs and actions at time sacrificed their lives[15]. To that I would add that, in critique to his argumentative, there is a self-defeating element in considering religious-based morbid extremism as nihilist as, indeed, suicide attacks and jihad is often advertised as and believed to be a "ticket" to the after*life*.

Rolling back, Bouhana et al. (2020) present an individual-level model to contribute to our understanding of the social ecology. Their "IVEE framework is built around three levels: a person's individual vulnerability to radicalisation, their exposure to radicalising moral contexts, and the emergence of radicalising settings." (Bouhana et al. 2020:3) The model was adapted for the purpose of their study into a state-transition model, inspired from a basic SIR (susceptible, infectious, or resistant) model. The original model as well as the computerized model are included below[16]. The model considers the individual's morality and ability to exercise self-control to change based on the *susceptibility to selection* (radicalizing moral context) and their *cognitive susceptibility*. Exposure is defined as the individual's *activity field*, "the configuration of different settings to which a person is exposed during a given time period" (Bouhana et al. 2020:4). The settings in question can be physical and digital, and their features will influence if it is more of less likely to develop into the (extremely rare) radicalizing setting (Bouhana et al. 2020). The process by which this can happen, the final level of the model, *emergence*, suggests

[15] This even fits with Roy's own admission, to a degree, that certain contemporary rationales/radicalities are adapted by convenience, in replacement to those in decline, accepting that actors could have chosen these ideologies, if available.

[16] For the sake of expediency, I have limited my exploration to the working of the IVEE model and its understanding of the social ecology. Details on the models are not presented but are contextualized, in previous and subsequent sections.

radicalizing settings offer to their audience, individuals prone to terrorism, the perceived privacy they require, or desire to commit illegal acts.

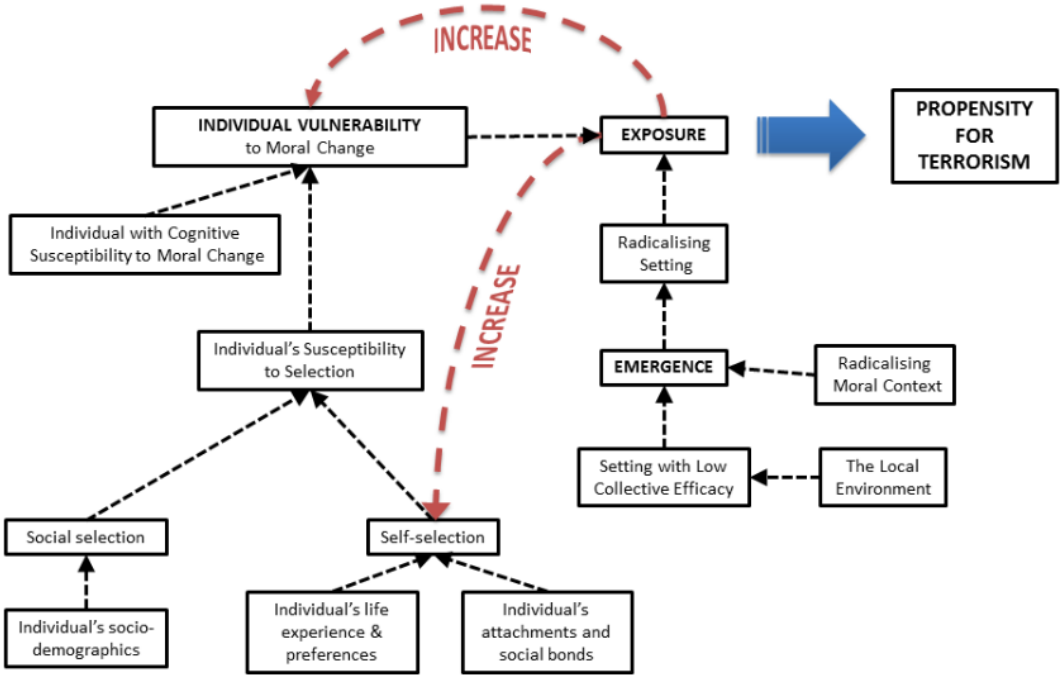


Figure 9 Bouhana and Wikstrom's IVEE model of radicalization (Bouhana et al. 2020:5)

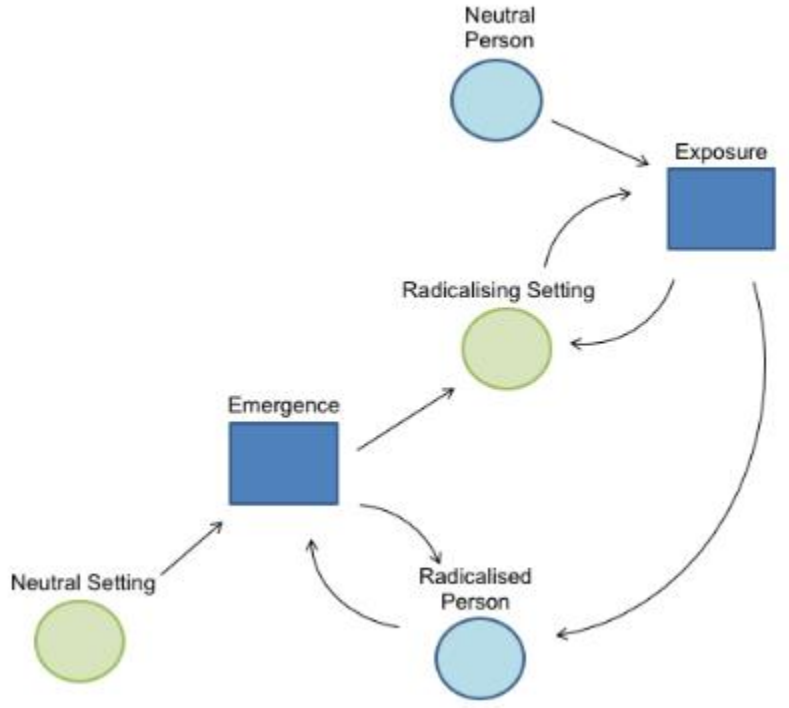


Figure 10 State-transition model of the radicalization process (Bouhana et al. 2020:6)

The group and the narrative.

Meiering et al. (2020) look at *bridging* narratives of resistance, heroic masculinity, and anti-feminism[17] in order to contribute to our understanding of group radicalization. They look at mechanisms and development conditions within groups (social bonding), bridging between groups, and in relation to society (social linking) (Meiering et al. 2020). The literature demonstrates that confrontation(s) with state power(s) and various forms of repression are particularly conducive to trigger mobilization, especially when authorities and their actions are abusive or perceived as unjust (Meiering et al. 2020). It also presents concepts, such as *co-radicalization* (group interactions contributing to their mutual radicalization, further, for instance, through social dramatization, banalization, and misdirected acts of prevention), *reactive co-radicalization* (interactions among radicalizations), subcultures, countercultures, oppositional group culture, pop culture, and cultural hegemony. Kellershohn in Meiering et al. (2020) suggest that "(t)hrough (looking at groups' use of pop culture), we can identify the trend of radicalized groups seeking to increase their appeal to the outside world." We can see alt and far-right actors' goal is "to create inroads into the general social discourse and the middle-class milieu in order to gradually attain "cultural hegemony" (Kellershohn 2016). Using this strategy, groups are able to reformulate, intensify and spread radical content for radicalization processes; in so doing, they assume the role of a catalyst." (Meiering et al. 2020:7) Meiering et al. hence advance 'narrative bridging' as a concept of interest, in observing the role of the narrative not only inter-group, but also in interactions and intra-group 'alliances.' On this, "(o)ne element that is both dangerous and novel with regard to such bridging narratives is that radical groups are increasingly turning

[17] More precisely, through two collections of "closely interconnected narratives," "antifeminism along with gender constructions such as masculism, heroic and toxic masculinity and femininity as a reproductive function; and, second, the dispositif of resistance, which expresses itself in vigilante terrorism." (Meiering, Dziri, and Foroutan 2020:8)

to pop-cultural elements to have a greater impact on the overall social discourse as well as the middle-class milieu." (Meiering et al. 2020:14) Meiering et al. suggest bridging narratives foster the creation and expansion of a toxic discursive context through situational alliances and coalitions (sometimes *a priori* unlikely ones), strengthening hostiles narratives that legitimate the use of violence toward vulnerable populations. A noteworthy consequence of this 'process of normalization,' is the sentiment "among group members that they are acting as a silent majority, ultimately setting up an environment that favors violent measures." (Meiering et al. 2020:14)

The central role of 'community,' of camaraderie, the strong cohesion, and trust of the group is stressed by Tanner and Campana, in "the process of ideological acceptance. Music, symbols (tattoos, clothes, flags, posters, etc.), and activities (boozeups, shows, activities involving violence, etc.) are strong conveyors of meaning" (Tanner and Campana 2014:31) Even though *a priori* the direct role of the internet in recruitment is uncertain, far-right forums' confidentiality and anonymity features, the mainstream creep of far-right conversations, ideologies, and narratives, paired with the conducive ability of the web and social media, affirm a need to conduct additional empirical research.

Internet and radicalization.

"The far-right's online presence had developed over three decades, using bulletin board systems, websites, online forums, and more recently, social media. Social media has "algorithmically amplified, sped up and circulated a political backlash by White voters that the alt-right has exploited ... , making extreme viewpoints more tolerable in public discourse" Daniels (2018) cited in Weimann and Masri (2020:3)

The literature on the role and impact of the internet in the radicalization process is inconclusive (Mølmen and Ravndal 2021). The topic has not settled, and is much less advanced

than other themes presented above. Séraphin Alava in Morin and Aoun (Alava 2021) point indeed to the literature's current inability to establish a clear correlation or causation between the internet and radicalization leading to violent extremes. While specific effects remain to be proven, we can easily and safely accept the internet as just another potential space for radicalization. The internet primarily acts as a replacement to older communication technologies; but, due to its unique and transformative nature, indeed warrants additional attention. Alava suggests the internet enables a more visible presence of extreme content, coordinated 'troll' groups, and the increasing mainstream and open presence of hate groups attempting to share their ideologies publicly (on social media, for instance).

I hereby relate Alava's account of current discussions on the topic. First, on '*the dark side of the cyberspace*,' the author suggests that nothing online imposes or forces violence. However, within the cyberspace one can find and gain easy (-ier than before, at least) access to any content imaginable. This includes hate hubs, chat platform, and one can, indeed, through encrypted messaging, get in touch with existing radical or terror-based groups or like-minded individuals. Second, on *violent extremist components online*, violent extremism is made visible in many digital spaces, in many fashions, modes, and actions. This includes but is not limited to groups and individuals' ability to use the internet as: (i) a propaganda tool (through videos, revendications, communication channels, documentaries) to share the 'relevance' of, banalize or make credible extreme ideas; (ii) a tool of influence to weaken mainstream ideas or reinforce their own (encroachment on the 'mainstream,' as mentioned above)[18]; (iii) a recruitment tool; an operational (encrypted) means of communication, in or outside the group; (iv) an organizational tool, to coordinate actions; and (v) bridging more easily with other groups, bridging and social

[18] Banalization and mainstreaming to reduce barriers of entry to the ideology or group (Miller-Idriss 2020).

linking (Alava 2021:153–54). The literature suggests that these 'components' of the extreme online, have fostered and allowed individuals to aggregate, and, in some cases, most noticeably for conspiracy theorists, the far-right, incels, and the alt-right, grow their presence on- and offline. *Recruitment* online grants a new vector of approach for vulnerable populations. Information and misinformation now travel faster, and more intimately than before. Pertaining to *conspiracy theory and regimentation*, the discourse of rupture, appeal to the individual[19] by drawing upon and acknowledging their lived experiences. It is a progressive process of 'understanding,' of feeling heard, often mixed with a sense of inclusion to the new group in contrast to the deaf ear of previous or outside groups in the social ecology. According to Alava, conspirationism shares some of the following characteristics (Alava 2021:160–62):

1. A use of rhetorical tools for denouncing an invisible clique, presence, cabal, or organization that has been bamboozling the entire world for decades, or more.
2. The impossibility to refute these theories.
3. The inversion of the burden of proof.

These characteristics are shared and substantiated upon by Marc-André Argentino and Amarnath Amarasingam in West, Juneau and Amarasingam (2021), summarizing Michael Barkun's work (West et al. 2021):

1. "nothing happens by accident: the world is governed by intentionality, there are no accidents or coincidences, and whatever happens is by design.
2. nothing is as it seems: evil forces are constantly trying to deceive the world, and so what may appear as benign is actually a cosmic threat.
3. everything is connected: building on the first two characteristics, it follows that seemingly disconnected events and occurrences across human history form a seamless pattern that can be unearthed through diligent research." (Argentino and Amarasingam 2021:18–19)

[19] The author particularly refers to the youth, based to their increased vulnerability.

For Alava, in the case of youth, there is a transformation radical of the self, a *changement du soi, la perte de la carapace ancienne*, a revolution of the mind that leads to a quest or at least a cognitive opening to reconsideration of not only the self, but also a *remise en question* of the world, as it now needs to be seen from a new lens, to be discovered on and by their own accord, as opposed to that of their parents or guardians. Which henceforth allows, in this time of redefinition and vulnerability, conspiracy theories to echo with said psychological quest(s). This, I suggest, and it will be elaborated upon in the discussion below, holds relevance past adolescence and youth. I believe that there is an argument to be made that any major individual, or even societal, requestioning or quest for sense can replicate the observed adolescent vulnerability and, in this neoliberal late capitalism age of the extremes, we observe large-scale, deep, and meaningful quests for sense, *remises en question.* Lastly, the author presents a *discursive process of digital regimentation*. Figures 11 and 12, below, represent Alava's digital French jihadist radicalization target and schema. Alava's work supports a need to further explore the field, as even if there are currently no proven radicalization vectors online, there exists lasting and tangible endeavors at recruitment online.

Guri Nordtorp Mølmen and Jacob Aasland Ravndal suggest the internet primarily facilitated radicalization through "information provision, as well as amplifying group polarization and legitimizing extreme ideology and violence through echoing." (Mølmen and Ravndal 2021:1) They further provide insight as to the importance of an offline-push on the process. Most importantly, they advance that the internet alone cannot drive the radicalization of individuals (Mølmen and Ravndal 2021:19).

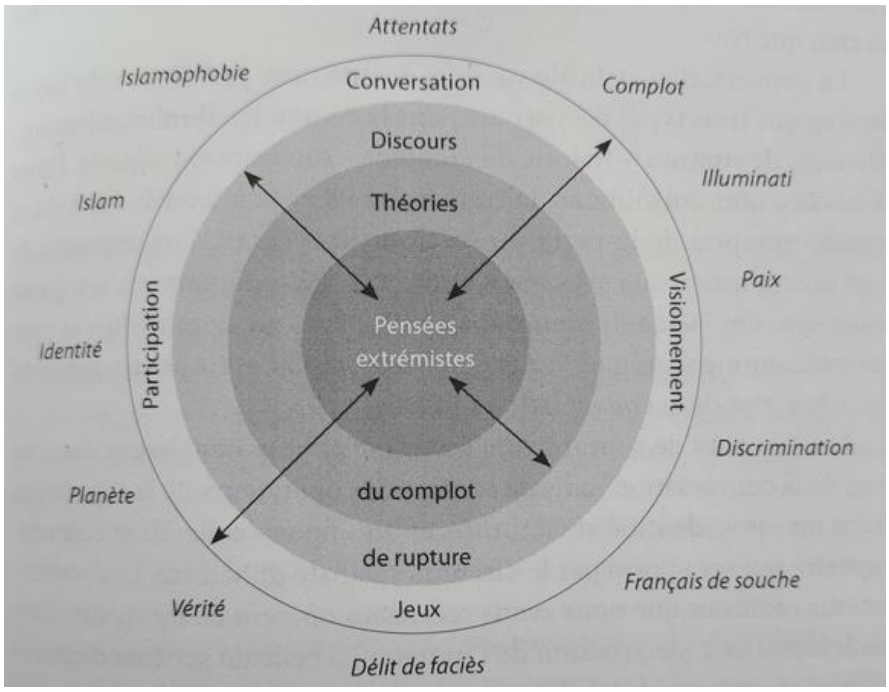


Figure 11 Digital Regimentation Target (Alava 2021:163)

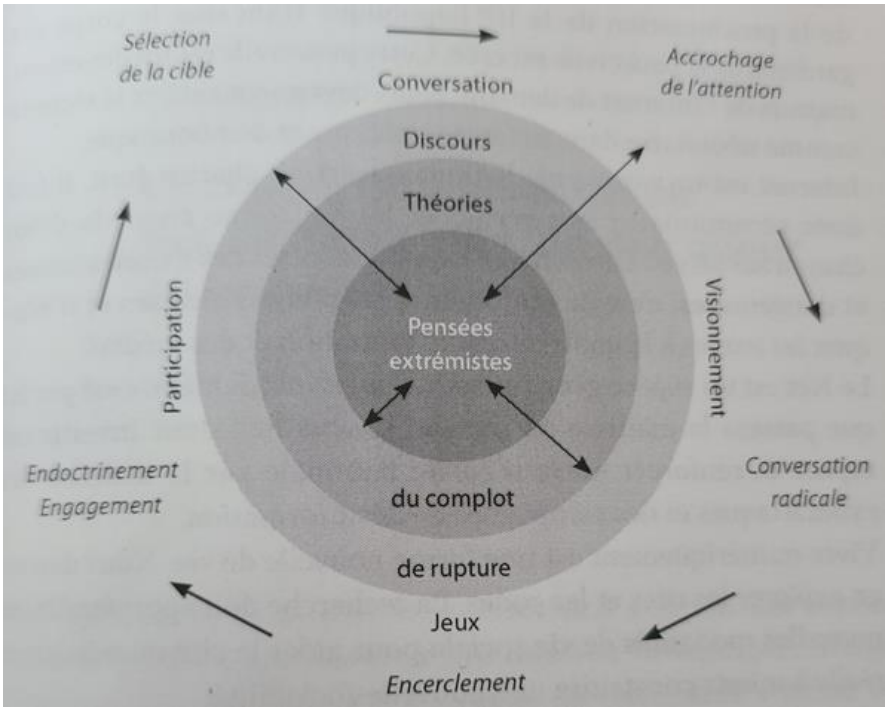


Figure 12 Digital Regimentation Schema (Alava 2021:165)

Algorithmic radicalization.

We might all be six degrees of separation away from knowing Ryan Reynolds or Keanu Reeves, but how many clicks away are we, unknowingly, or not, from extremist content? Dylan Roof, the self-proclaimed white supremacist who murdered nine African American in a Charleston Church in 2015, made clear in his manifesto, and in his interviews with FBI investigators, the importance of a *single* very specific Google search he ran, on 'Black-on-White crime,' in changing his vision of the world. This search led him to the "Council of Conservative Citizens, which, like other white-supremacist groups uses a tactic of framing an "epidemic of black-on-white crime[,] […] arguing that the media and government are censoring crimes committed by Blacks against whites by describing them as isolated events and not classifying them as hate crimes." (Miller-Idriss 2020:148) Former "alt-righter" Caleb Cain's YouTube history revealed a spiral of increasingly more extreme content. As presented above, the focus of this thesis, and the self-digital ethnography with it, is to stress the importance and relevance to observe and decorticate further digital pathways to radicalization toward violent (far-right) extremism. Also, as presented in the section prior, I accept the internet to potentially have a role in radicalization, but also consider it, alone, to be largely insufficient to radicalize. Algorithmic radicalization is a problem much bigger and complex than search engines bias or misdirection. As for the internet of things, algorithms are, of course, not responsible for radicalization on their own. Algorithms do however dictate a large array of recommendations in our digital experience; guide and influence us in our navigation of the endless digital sea. This means that they have the potential, if left unregulated, to "guide casual or coincidental viewers to extreme content that they might otherwise not have encountered." (Miller-Idriss 2020:149) Jesse Daniels suggests "[t]he rise of the alt-right is both a continuation of a centuries-old dimension of racism in the U.S. and part of an emerging media ecosystem powered by algorithms." (Daniels 2018:61)

White nationalists and far-right extremists have taken advantage and learned how to weaponize this emerging ecosystem. As the innovation opportunists they are, in accordance with the literature, White nationalists "see the "race-less[20]" approach of platforms and the technological innovation of algorithms as opportunities to push the "Overton window," the range of topics tolerated in public discourse." (Daniels 2018:62)

In sum.

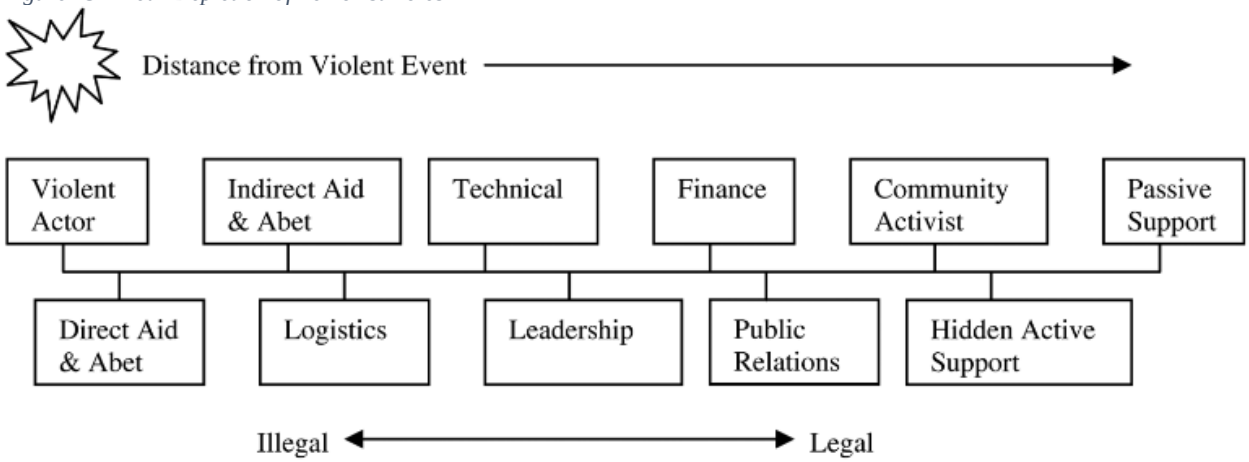
- Routes over roots and profiling. There is more than one individual pathway, I favor in my understanding a psychological approach that considers the actor's social ecology;
- Pathways and activities change overtime, as well as their lived experiences and their significance within the wider social ecology, and the individual experience;
- Political extremism and terrorism involvement include a spectrum of actions and activities – not just direct violent extremism. Other activities are relevant and included in pathways to terrorism and extremism, see Figure 12 below for Taylor and Horgan's representation (also otherwise present in a different fashion as Figure 6 above);
- Again, from Taylor and Horgan, presented below as Figure 13 and Figure 14, I accept that the nature of individual involvement is temporal, not static, within and outside of an organization. Terrors or altogether violent actors can occupy multiple roles over time, or at once, pertaining to their ideology, organization (if organization there is, loosely and concretely), and social ecology;
- Following the literature, I reject the so-called mainstream typology of the 'Lone Wolf,' favoring instead the 'Lone Actor' typology. I accept these actors as part of wider organized ideological movement. They often happen to have ties to such personal, political, or operational networks;
- I reject delinquency, madness, and nihilism, and favor instead a political explication for (most) terror activity. The often apparently irrationality of these acts, I suggest instead reflects "an inability to read and comprehend motivators issued from foreign references or are seen as incomprehensible, from a modern occidental standpoint (such as

[20] Despite all evidence that race is coded into digital platforms and technology.

martyrdom; creating the kingdom of god), rather than a total absence of legitimacy for the use of violence"[21] [my translation] (Crettiez 2021:87);

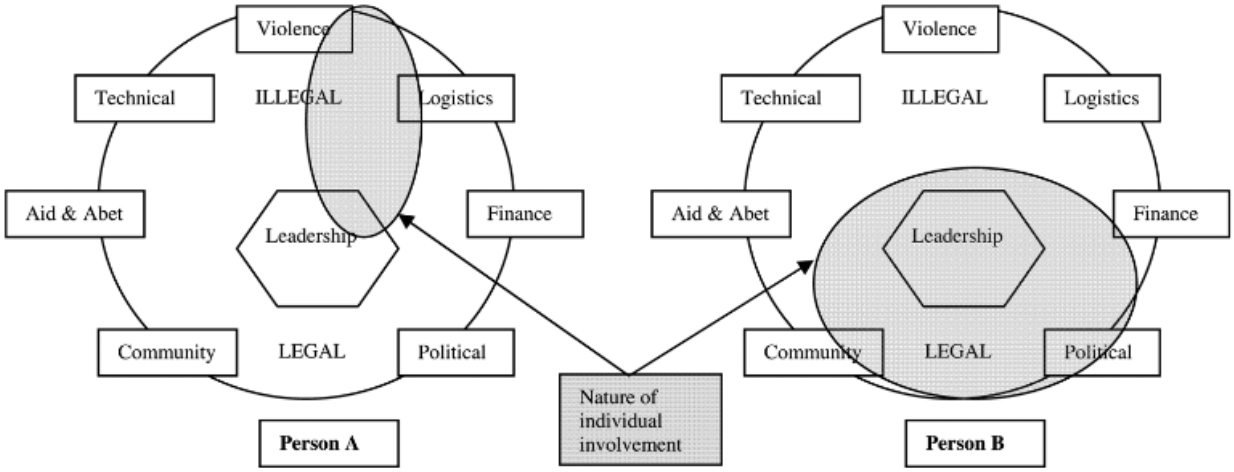
- There is a need for more empirical data, to draw additional pathways, or *parts of* said pathways. This is especially true for digital radicalization and radicalization.

Figure 13 Linear Depiction of Terrorist Roles



(Taylor and Horgan 2006:596)

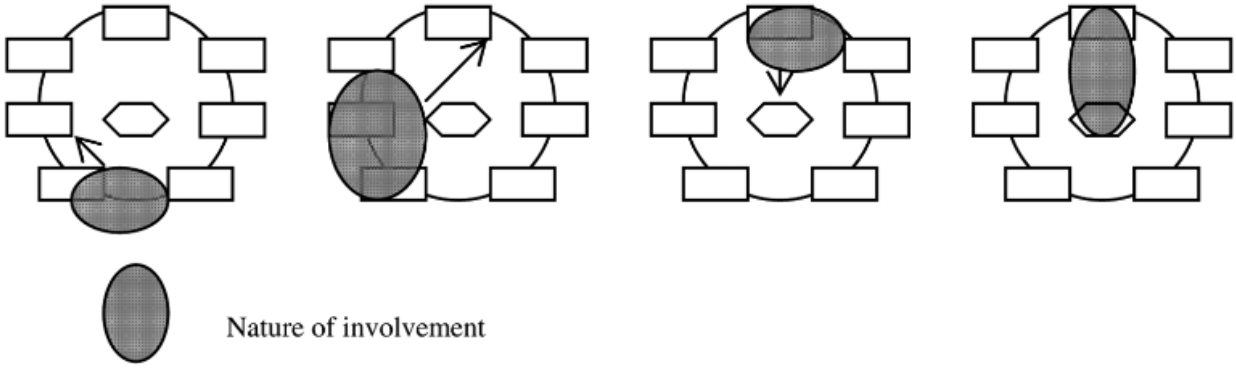
Figure 14 Relationship Between the Individual and Different Terrorist Roles



(Taylor and Horgan 2006:596)

[21] (…) une incapacité à lire des motivations issues de références éloignées ou peu compréhensibles à la modernité occidentale (« mourir en martyr pour Dieu »; « faire advenir ici-bas le règne d'Allah ») qu'une absence totale légitime de la violence.

Figure 15 Nature of Involvement



(Taylor and Horgan 2006:596)

METHODOLOGY

To reiterate, my primary interest in this master's thesis is to observe the hypothetical evolution and trajectory in the nature of the content presented to moderately politically conservative TikTok users through the app's FYP algorithmic recommendations. More precisely, I created a sample profile and engaged with, complied, and analyzed recommended content. Through this profile, I engaged with a thousand videos recommended through the FYP. Throughout the experiment I measured observed content for relevance to the study, or discarded it, and, if relevant, subsequently codified it based on its subject matter.

Engagement

I define engagement as a quadripartite procedure. Engaging with content is here forth conceptualized as (i) fully watching and (ii) "liking" the relevant video, (iii) following the account that shared or posted the video (be they or not the original content creator), and finally (iv) opening and spending thirty seconds to a minute browsing the profile of the account. This last step also served as a tentative exploratory expedition, of sort, as at time profile pictures, descriptions, or headlines on pined or shared videos reveals underlying themes of accounts, and/or additional data on the current state of the relevant digital landscape. This methodology

and definition of engagement are inspired from and based upon the limited information available from both TikTok's News Room (Anon 2019), pertaining to their algorithmic behavior, as well as relevant studies conducted by media matters (Little 2021a, 2021b; Little and Richards 2021). Engagement was done with and only with videos recommended and found through TikTok's FYP, that fit with a(n subsequently increasingly) extreme narrative, anticipating changes in suggested content.

Use of Profiles

Prior to the study, I conducted three preliminary exploratory iterations of the experiment to evaluate the relevancy of the suggested work, its feasibility, and, finally, to hone down its methodology. The first profile (Profile 0a, Robert Tremblay, 9/9/1991, M) measured the relevance of the project, purposefully omitting any notetaking. Through this first profile, I consumed 500 videos, and observed a progressive shift in tone in the content I examined, confirming preliminarily the significance of this current endeavor. The second preliminary profile (Profile 0b, Peter Wood, 9/9/1991, M) was meant to evaluate the feasibility of the project. The profile was a first attempt at data gathering and note taking, to evaluate the viability of the project with the allocated time frame and available resources. As a result of this second run, I significantly trimmed down the amount of data gathered per video, and improved my "viewing habits," and screening methodology. Throughout this run, I examined and took notes on another 500 videos, reconfirming the previously noted relevance of the experiment, yielding throughout similar preliminary results. The third and final pilot profile, that of John Huntington (Profile 0c, 9/9/1995, M), sharpened and improved further upon my previously time consuming and data

heavy methodology. For this profile, I initially examined another 554 videos[22], noting the information most relevant to this study, as well as limited meta data. I later removed for my final iteration of the experiment, any meta-data gathering, which I deemed unnecessary for practical reasons, based on the permitted scope and scale of the work, as well as its desired timeline. To circumvent this hurdle, and as a remark for later endeavors, I could have developed or searched for a widget to automatically gather relevant meta data. I however decided that, although interesting and relevant, for the purpose at hand and in the limited setting of the study, it would not add significantly to the results and analysis. For the final, and most relevant iteration of the experiment, noted as Profile 1 (Robert Stevenson, 9/9/1993, M), I followed and learned from previous iterations and prioritized the most relevant data, disregarding meta data, and ultimately watched exactly a thousand videos.

I made these four profiles with a handful of considerations in mind. First, every profile was male, as violent extremists are predominantly males, and hence represent a particular interest for the literature of radicalization factors leading or contributing to the escalation toward violent extremism. All three pilot profiles, and the resulting final profile were uniformly in the same age range (25-30 years of age), using September 9th as their birthdates, the most common North American birthdate (tied with September 19th). I chose for the profiles common Canadian first and last names, prioritizing Anglo-Saxon names. I did not for this experiment use a Virtual Private Network (VPN), nor an emulator or virtual machine. Henceforth, and although the profiles were not in their design explicitly Canadian profiles, they were immediately recognized as such by TikTok's geotracker. To foster, and in an attempt to best represent an initial

[22] This initial sample of 554 videos was later extended, after the full study was conducted. I extended the sample by later visioning another 146 videos, summing up to 700 videos. This allowed me to compare some statistical results, and trends for relevance of content. These results and discussion remarks are presented below.

"conservativeness," the profiles in the beginning followed fifteen or sixteen mainstream relatively popular conservative TikTok accounts, with little or no variation between themselves. The profiles, and the accounts they follow, are presented in Table 3 below. These accounts were followed and consulted for an approximate duration of thirty seconds to a minute during their respective setup. I did not at the time interact any further with their content. I consciously avoided extremist accounts for the initial setup, as not to further influence algorithms.

Table 3 Profiles

Profile 0a - Robert Tremblay, 9/9/1991, M	**Profile 0b – Peter Wood, 9/9/1991, M**	**Profile 0c – John Huntington, 9/9/1995, M**	**Profile 1 – Robert Stevenson, 9/9/1993, M**
Dr.Jordan.Peterson	Dr.Jordan.Peterson	Dr.Jordan.Peterson**	Thedailywarhistorian2***
louderwcrowder	louderwcrowder	louderwcrowder	louderwcrowder
donaldtrumppage*	donaldtrumppage*	donaldtrumppage*	donaldtrumppage*
tpusaofficial	tpusaofficial	tpusaofficial	tpusaofficial
Alyssamariiee1	Alyssamariiee1	Alyssamariiee1	Alyssamariiee1
NRA	NRA	NRA	NRA
todayisamerica	todayisamerica	todayisamerica	todayisamerica
unitedstatesnewsnetowrk	unitedstatesnewsnetowrk	unitedstatesnewsnetowrk	unitedstatesnewsnetowrk
oldrowofficial	oldrowofficial	oldrowofficial	oldrowofficial
resistthemainstream	resistthemainstream	resistthemainstream	resistthemainstream
Dailywire	Dailywire	Dailywire	Dailywire
Danawhite	Danawhite	Danawhite	Danawhite
The_ricky_taylor_	The_ricky_taylor_	The_ricky_taylor_	The_ricky_taylor_
Jardinedane	Jardinedane	Jardinedane	Jardinedane
Katandk9	Katandk9	Katandk9	Katandk9
		Republican.patriot45	Republican.patriot45

*Unofficial pages
**Jordan Peterson's account was removed, as some of his content seemed to be borderline "fast-tracking" results (which also bears relevance, as an observation)
***Account was banned, but a new iteration (thedailywarhistorian3) surfaced in its stead.

It is also of significance to note that the experiment was conducted on a factory-reset ZTE Axon cellphone. I created the four profiles using individual matching e-mail addresses generated prior on said device. I did not use this device, the e-mail addresses, nor the TikTok profiles for any other purpose.

Data Collection & Coding

I conducted data collection for pilot profiles (0a, 0b, and 0c) over the cumulative timespan of three working weeks. This included a period for preliminary analysis and the

aforementioned pivots to the methodology. I performed the final experiment over the course of five days, three consecutive days, starting on February 28th, 2022, March first and second, as well as two additional non-consecutive days, March fourth and seventh. Correspondingly, I watched 507 videos on the first day (February 28th), 91 on the second (March 1st), viewed 203 on the third (March 2nd), and respectively 47 (March 4th) and 152 (March 7th) on the penultimate and latest day of the experiment. These results are summarized in Table 4. As expected, and matching pilot runs, I was faster at consuming and recording content on earlier days, due to the lower density of relevant videos, and because of their average shorter length[23]. The fourth day was only significantly less productive for outside reasons, resulting in fewer hours spent on data gathering.

Table 4 Experiment Calendar

Day	Date	Daily Videos Watched
1	2022/02/28	507
2	2022/03/01	91*
3	2022/03/02	203
4	2022/03/04	47*
5	2022/03/07	152**
Total		1,000

*Videos watched on these two dates were slightly lower based on outside obligations.
**Videos also became on average significantly lengthier in the course of the experiment.

I systematically consumed content by scrolling through TikTok's FYP. I first and foremost marked down every video as either being relevant (YES), might be relevant (MAYBE), irrelevant (NO), a live video (LIVE), or as sponsored content (SPONSORED). I engaged, definition provided above, with relevant videos only. I considered content relevant if it related to one or several of the following criteria, overtly or covertly, in no particular order: more-than-mainstream conservative content, some or many determinants of hatred (touching on, for instance, misogyny, racism, homo- or transphobia), other forms, in various degrees, of

[23] Although I did not record the length of videos, I confidently advance videos were progressively longer, averaging at first the TikTok most common time format of 15-16 seconds, increasing to well over a minute or two, to ultimately, by the end of the study, including a significant number of 8 to 10 minutes videos.

extremism (accelerationism, conspiracy theories, glorification of war and violence, hypermasculinity), and/or represented dissent, or direct, or called for, violence. Results I classified as "Maybes" were only partially engaged with. Those were videos I watched entirely, without further engaging actions. Maybes could debatably relate to the study, but relevance was not as clear. These videos were often harder to classify. Irrelevant videos did not touch upon relevant themes. *Live videos* were seemingly random. They included and depicted a large array of haphazard content, comprising of but not limiting themselves to tarot readers, content creators eating various foods and dishes, answering their audience's questions, or were simply dark screens, users with connectivity issues, struggling to connect. Exempt from limited occurrences, live videos did not relate to the conversation at hand. I classified TikTok's sponsored videos and only took further notes when their content related to the study at hand. Most sponsored videos were generic corporate advertisement, or showcased TikTok's less-known features. Seven sponsored videos, out of the 101 consumed in the final run of the experiment, were directly relevant to the study, sponsored content fitting in at least one relevancy factor. I tagged these videos as "Sponsored", but engaged with them, described their content, coded, and included them in the analysis. Every sponsored relevant video surfaced in later parts of the research.

As I was conducting the study, I took notes and briefly described every video consumed concurrently to marking their relevance. On a given day, for every relevant and semi-relevant video, I noted the account associated with it, and subsequently tagged content with keywords representing its main themes, its message, public figures cited, and/or any other key elements. Videos at first largely met TikTok's most common time format, approximately fifteen seconds in length and, the further the research progressed, the lengthier the content turned out to be, requiring more time for consumption, note taking, and codification. After completing data

gathering, the consumption of the one thousand videos[24], I confirmed results by verifying and uniformizing keywords, line-by-line, compiled, and then coded the acquired data. I determined and established overarching coding categories inductively out of the content observed. I aimed through codification to present the content as an exhaustive and comprehensive list of the videos' main themes, transform the data into a set of meaningful themes. Through codification, I organized results into the following six overarching categories: Conspiracy Theory, Current Events and Civil Responsibility, Extremism, Geography, Public Figures, and War Themes. A single video was associated with at least one of these categories, though many ultimately covered and directly or indirectly related to many categories and/or themes. The observed themes are non-exclusive, and often overlapped, especially during longer videos in later stages of the observation.

> *i. Conspiracy Themes* were predominant, of various intensity nature, tone, and subjects.
> *ii. Current Events and* (perceived) *Civil Responsibility* is a wide topical category that regrouped many, mostly current, events and a perceived sense of responsibility and call for participation or action.
> *iii. Extreme Content* is where I have categorized content directly pertaining to extremism, clear and overt themes relating to hatred, stern dissent, and where I equally as transparently noted serious themes calls for violence. Fourthly, I also tagged
> *iv. Geographical Locations,* or vague references to the States as reified actors. This category was for the most part mutually exclusive with Public Figures – in my second coding I however merged some public figures and geographical locations, considering their direct significance and close relation (e.g., President Vladimir Putin and Russia, President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukraine). I reserved this category for, the most part, incidences where there was a direct absence of public figures, but a reference to a nation-state was clear. For instance, references of Boris Johnson were coded as a

[24] This number is semi-arbitrary, but was ultimately informed by the progression of the pilot and final runs.

v. Public Figure(s) and not as "United Kingdom". As mentioned, the only exception to this was when the State and the actor/public figure were merged and considered as one, as was for example the case with President Xi Jinping and China; used interchangeably. After coding the content, I re-coded themes for relevance as and if needed, grouping comparable results together. I put in the last and sixth categories what I perceived was content in direct relation to

vi. Warlike material, War Themes. This category *excludes* direct and clear conflicts (e.g. invasion of Ukraine). They represent general war scenes, non-specific, and a glorification of violence. They often well-paired with hypermasculine warrior-like content.

Throughout the final round of the study, I also gathered and compiled self-ethnographic notes, presented in the discussion and results below. For these, I gathered in the course not only of the five days of examination, but also in the days between, where applicable, my observations and wrote down the bulk of my emotions, feelings, states of mind, thoughts, along with coping and defense mechanisms. The previous pilot explorations (profiles 0a through 0c), as well as previous research I have conducted, including but not limited to my experience observing radical extremists on Stormfront and similar forums helped inform this decision.

RESULTS

Key Results

- I observed a steady increase of relevant content throughout the experiment. I also noted a substantial increase in intensity in the content.
- These increases were the clearest at and between 500 to 700 videos consumed.
- Excluding live videos, and sponsored content, at the latest bracket of a hundred videos, nearly 93% of new videos were relevant to the study and met the predetermined standards. 85% at the penultimate bracket.
- I extended the final pilot profile (Profile 0c) to 700 videos, and it supported key results.
- Justin Trudeau, COVID 19, the 2022 so-called freedom convoy, and conspiratorial content were the most observed themes. Ukraine (and President Zelensky), the WEF (and

Klaus Schwab), President Biden (Brandon), Russia (and President Putin), as well as Tyranny and Patriotism followed subsequently.

- The profile reached a relatively deep conspirational core, observed increasingly conservative and conspirational themes, anger, feelings of alienation, and showed at time deeply rooted hatred. It however did not, for the most part, enter TikTok's *Hatescape*[25].
- In sum, the results do demonstrate a pathway toward more radical content that warrant further investigation.

This section presents the data gathered and coded from the experiment. To reinforce the validity of primary results, I will also in this section present key results from the latest iteration of the pilot profiles, noted above as "Profile 0c". I will present the results from the experiment by first introducing the overall distribution of relevance noted in consumed videos. I will also present results in percentage of relevant content in brackets of fifty, and then of a hundred videos. I will conclude this presentation by producing the main themes and topics observed during the experiment.

Out of the 1,000 videos examined, 328 were relevant, 462 were not, I classified 58 as maybes, 101 were sponsored videos, and 51 were live content. Table 5 presents the total occurrences of videos (n=1,000), classified by relevance. Additionally, Tables 6 and 7 show the progressive relevance, per, respectively, brackets of 50 and 100 videos.

Table 5 Content by Relevance

Relevance (Yes, No, Maybe, Sponsored, Live)	**Occurrence**
Yes	328
No	462
Maybe	58
Sponsored	101 (11)*
Live	51
Total	n=1,000

*Sponsored includes eleven results relevant to the study

[25] By "Hatescape," I refer to Ciarán O'Connor and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's in-depth analysis of extremism and hate speech on TikTok.

*Table 6 Results, Brackets of Fifty**

	YES	NO	SPONS.	LIVE	MAYBE	Checksum
50	0%	86%	12%	2%	0%	100%
100	0%	86%	12%	2%	0%	100%
150	2%	82%	6%	8%	2%	100%
200	0%	84%	2%	10%	4%	100%
250	2%	88%	0%	2%	8%	100%
300	12%	70%	10%	2%	6%	100%
350	6%	58%	10%	4%	22%	100%
400	12%	66%	4%	6%	12%	100%
450	10%	62%	12%	8%	8%	100%
500	8%	72%	10%	2%	8%	100%
550	22%	46%	12%	2%	18%	100%
600	46%	24%	12%	8%	10%	100%
650	64%	14%	14%	6%	2%	100%
700	54%	22%	12%	8%	4%	100%
750	60%	20%	12%	6%	2%	100%
800	70%	8%	14%	6%	2%	100%
850	68%	12%	10%	8%	2%	100%
900	66%	12%	12%	8%	2%	100%
950	78%	6%	12%	2%	2%	100%
1000	76%	6%	14%	2%	2%	100%

n=1,000

Table 7 Results, Brackets of a Hundred

	YES	NO	SPONS.	LIVE	MAYBE	Checksum
100	0%	86%	12%	2%	0%	100%
200	1%	83%	4%	9%	3%	100%
300	7%	79%	5%	2%	7%	100%
400	9%	62%	7%	5%	17%	100%
500	9%	67%	11%	5%	8%	100%
600	34%	35%	12%	5%	14%	100%
700	59%	18%	13%	7%	3%	100%
800	65%	14%	13%	6%	2%	100%
900	67%	12%	11%	8%	2%	100%
1000	77%	6%	13%	2%	2%	100%

n=1,000

From Tables 6 and 7, I note a clear upward trend in the relevance of observed content, particularly in the range of 500 to 700 videos consumed. In that range, the percentage of relevant videos increased from 9% to 59% (in brackets of a hundred), from 8% to 54% (in brackets of

fifty). Pertaining only to relevant and irrelevant content, this percentage goes up to 77.22% by the 700 videos mark. Table 8 uses the same data as Table 7, results per 100 videos, but compares however only the ratio of relevant and non relevant videos (YES/NO), excluding MAYBE, LIVE and most SPONSORED videos. Sponsored videos *with relevance* have been included ([YES+ SPON. REL.])/[YES+NO+SPON. REL.]). Figure 16 presents results from Table 8 as a graph.

Table 8 Relevant Videos, Excluding Irrelevant Sponsored, Live Videos, and Maybes

	Relevance
0	0.00%
100	0.00%
200	1.19%
300	8.14%
400	12.68%
500	11.84%
600	50.00%
700	77.22%
800	82.72%
900	85.00%
1000	92.86%

n=1,000

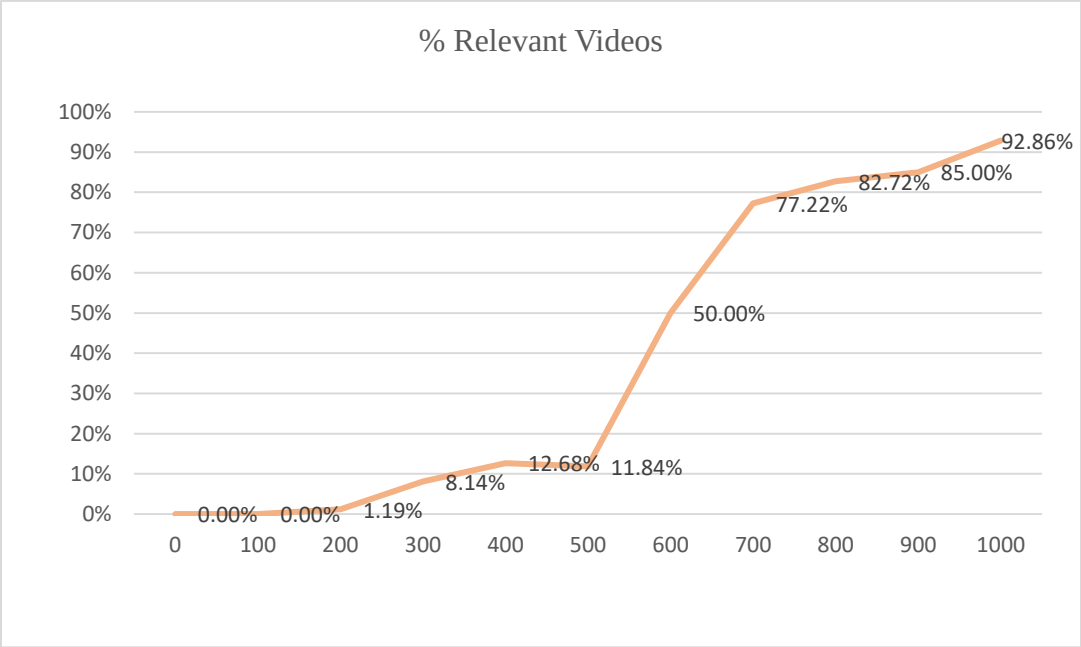


Figure 16 Percentage of Relevant Videos, Based on Table 8

The results presented in Tables 5 to 8 are supported by initial observations gathered from the final preliminary run (Profile 0c), presented below as Tables 9 and 10. I originally stopped this pilot run, at 554 videos and subsequently, during analysis, returned to the profile to extend the sample to 700 videos, the aforementioned observed critical point for relevance. This allowed me to reach and cover in this final pilot profile the "most-relevant" range, where the biggest changes in relevance were observed in the experiment itself. At 700 videos, Profile 0c counted 202 relevant videos, 403 irrelevant videos, 80 sponsored, and 16 live videos. It should be noted that at the time of the initial pilot explorations I had not recognized a need for and incidentally not implemented a grouping for "Maybes". The more careful engagement in the experiment itself could potentially, have led to a somewhat slower increase in relevance compared to the final pivot run. Even then, as highlighted, simply adding "Maybes" to the number of recorded relevant content yields comparable results in both iterations of the experiment. Both runs had at that point encountered only three relevant sponsored videos. I have included a side-by-side comparison to results from Profile 1 at 700 videos in Table 11.

Table 9 Results from Profile 0c, Brackets of Fifty

	YES	NO	SPONS.	LIVE	Checksum
50	0.00%	88.00%	12.00%	0.00%	100.00%
100	0.00%	90.00%	10.00%	0.00%	100.00%
150	4.00%	90.00%	6.00%	0.00%	100.00%
200	2.00%	92.00%	6.00%	0.00%	100.00%
250	8.00%	88.00%	4.00%	0.00%	100.00%
300	16.00%	78.00%	6.00%	0.00%	100.00%
350	16.00%	70.00%	14.00%	0.00%	100.00%
400	24.00%	64.00%	10.00%	2.00%	100.00%
450	40.00%	40.00%	12.00%	8.00%	100.00%
500	46.00%	30.00%	12.00%	12.00%	100.00%
550	40.00%	36.00%	14.00%	10.00%	100.00%
600	64.00%	18.00%	18.00%	0.00%	100.00%
650	72.00%	8.00%	20.00%	0.00%	100.00%
700	70.00%	14.00%	16.00%	0.00%	100.00%

n=700

Table 10 Results from Profile 0c, Brackets of a Hundred

	YES	NO	SPONSORED	LIVE	Checksum
100	0.00%	89.00%	11.00%	0.00%	100%
200	3.00%	91.00%	6.00%	0.00%	100%
300	12.00%	83.00%	5.00%	0.00%	100%
400	20.00%	67.00%	12.00%	1.00%	100%
500	43.00%	35.00%	12.00%	10.00%	100%
600	52.00%	27.00%	16.00%	5.00%	100%
700	71.00%	11.00%	18.00%	0.00%	100%

n=700

*Table 11 Side-by-Side Comparison, Profile 1 and Profile 0c, at 700 videos**

Relevance (Yes, No, Maybe, Sponsored, Live)	Occurrence
YES	119 (202)
NO	430 (403)
SPONS	64 (80)**
LIVE	35 (16)
MAYBE	52 (0)
Total	700 (700)

*Profile 1 (Profile 0c)
**Both numbers include three relevant sponsored videos

As stated, a clear upward trend in relevance exists for both data sets (Profiles 0c and Profile 1). A somewhat earlier and marginal (when including *maybes*) increase is also noted in the pilot data set. Both sets indicate an increase in relevance over time, after only a few hundred videos consumed by the respective profiles. I offer in Appendix B, in the form of a table and a chart, the results of the first coding, categorized following the above-mentioned coding methodology. I organized and present results under the six overarching categories, and included the various themes noted throughout the experiment. As mentioned in the methodology section, I coded the data a second time, merging similar themes, and/or themes with lower occurrences, to allow a concise presentation of relevant results. Subcategories from the second round of coding are available in the appendix, as Appendix C. Table 12 presents the results of this second round of coding by overarching categories.

*Table 12 Themes by Overarching Categories**

Overarching Categories	Results
Conspiracy Themes	174
Events and Responsibility	219
Extremism	26
Geography	126
Public Figures	249
War Themes	28

*After 2nd round of coding

Top results refer or relate directly to, or mention directly, in decreasing order: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the so-called freedom convoy and trucker movement, COVID-19, "popular" conspiracy theories, President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukraine, the WEF and Klaus Schwab, President Joe Biden, Russia and its President, Vladimir Putin, Tyranny and Patriotism, and President Donald J. Trump. Table 13 below provides an overview of these results.

Table 13 Top Results

Theme	Results
TRUDEAU, JUSTIN	87
CONVOY & TRUCKERS	80
COVID-19	79
CONSPIRACY	76
UKRAINE & ZELENSKY, VOLODYMYR	69
WEF & SCHWAB, KLAUS	55
BIDEN, JOE	50
RUSSIA & PUTIN, VLADIMIR	46
TYRANNY & PATRIOTISM	45
TRUMP, DONALD	32
WAR THEMES, EXCL. UKRAINE	28
MEDIA (traditional)	19
DEMOCRATS (AOC, Harris, Obama, Whitmer, H. Clinton, Nancy Pelosi)	18
OTHER (Matt Walsh, Piers Morgan, Elon Musk, Jordan Peterson, Rittenhouse, Joe Rogan, Ben Shapiro, Mark Zuckerberg, Rockefeller, Epstein, Fullner)	15
CORPORATE (non-covid; big oil, 1%, Globalists)	13
FREELAND, CHRISTINA	12
CONSERVATIVES & REPUBLICANS (Bush, Baber, Bomber, Ford, Scheer, Poilievre)	11
GENERATIONAL CRITIQUE	11

MISC. CONSPIRACIES (Operation Lock, Jewish Conspiracy, Aliens, White Pages)	11
VACCINE FIGURES (Bill Gates, Anthony Fauci)	11
HYPERMASCULINITY and MISOGYNY	10

In addition to the gradual and constant increase in relevant videos offered by TikTok's FYP throughout the experiment, I observed within the content a shift in intensity, nature, and tone. The content progressively included more anger, anxiety, questioned the social contract, need for various (new or renewed) forms of community, undertones or direct "call for action," a desire or urgent perceived need for change (often in leadership), lack of recognition of authority, and/or demonstrated and presented gradually more intricate conspiracy theories (also noted through, on average, lengthier videos, at time up to 10 minutes). Arguably, the evolution of the content offers reason to be concerned about the potential trajectory of users. Although the results do not suggest a direct plunge into the Hatescape, it certainly demonstrates a slide into various "depths" of extreme and radical TikTok. An examination of these themes is provided below.

DISCUSSION & LIMITATIONS

In this section I offer an analysis and a commentary on my observations and the results, presented prior. In six parts, I comment on: (1) navigating TikTok down this conspirational rabbit hole; (2) the overrepresentation of conspiracy content; (3) emotion play; (4) community and belonging; (5) I provide self-ethnographic remarks and; (6) implications of my observations. In short, I present a general consideration of where and how algorithms on TikTok, mixed with loose guidelines and a lack of enforcement, could fit in the radicalization process.

Navigating TikTok

Results were to some extent as predicted by the literature. TikTok appears to indeed provide little control and regulation to its content, as demonstrated by how easy it is for creators to avoid permanent bans and share extreme content. Content creators often openly share back up

accounts in their bios, or offered a numerical logical continuity in their handle to find their 'next account,' if they would be banned. Content creators frequently bypassed TikTok's measures by simply censoring their video, or using alternate nomenclature for problematic content. In general, avoidance techniques were simple and akin to that introduced by O'Connor (2021). After and throughout consuming the thousand videos (and similarly for the last pilot profile, seven hundred videos), content became gradually more radical, in number of occurrences (Tables 5 to 11 above) but also in nature. Overall, the content conserved a relatively homogenous subject (white, middle aged male or female), but varied in object, emotional baggage, claims, intensity, tone, and undertone. I noticed later in the experiment sponsored content to at time follow relevant themes.

Far-right themes appeared twenty-six times. These videos touched on or introduced extreme dissent, the great replacement, accelerationism, hypermasculinity, coded Nazi paraphilia or symbolism, misogyny, racism, and trans- or homophobia. The bulk of relevant content related to conspiracy theories, and/or referred to public figures. Conspirational videos in large referred to a perceived need for action, COVID-19, vaccine hoaxes, evil forces, grey eminences and shadow puppeteers, media conspiracy, and implied a lack of randomness in world events.

Although videos themselves were for the most part not extreme in their content, I found comment sections to often (a) be less monitored than the videos themselves, (b) contained significantly more extreme material, (c) signalled overtly and provided context to videos, roadmaps to covert symbolism, (d) presented less evasion mechanisms, and (e) had users engaging and sharing on a variety of connected or not so related topics. Figures 17 to 20 provide examples from non-extreme videos' comment sections, presenting conspiracy theories on current events, targeting elites, COVID 19, or the Trucker convoy. These comment sections, included calls for violence: "*Time to string these bums up", "if it bleeds, it leads, media wants war",*

“bullets”, “sniper, eh? hmmm… ok…”, “do you have one bullet left? Asking for a friend!”, “She will hang for what she has done, a fair trial, of course, with a first nation’s Judge lmao”.

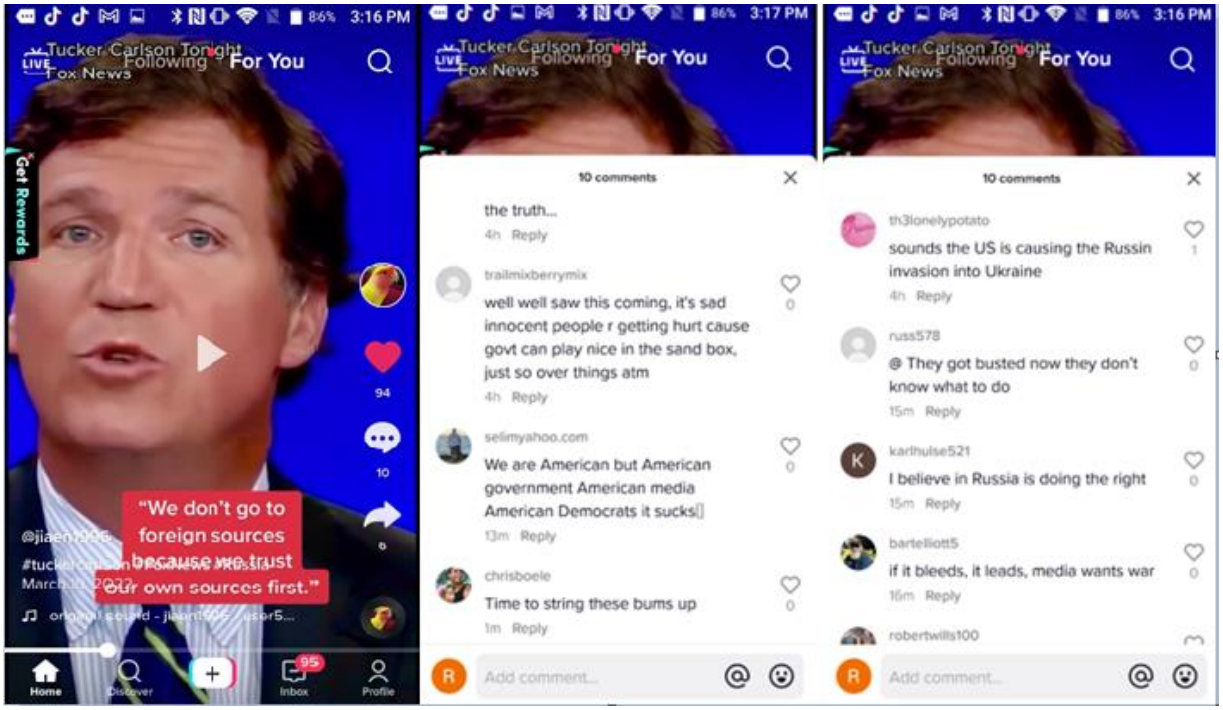


Figure 17 Example of Comment Section

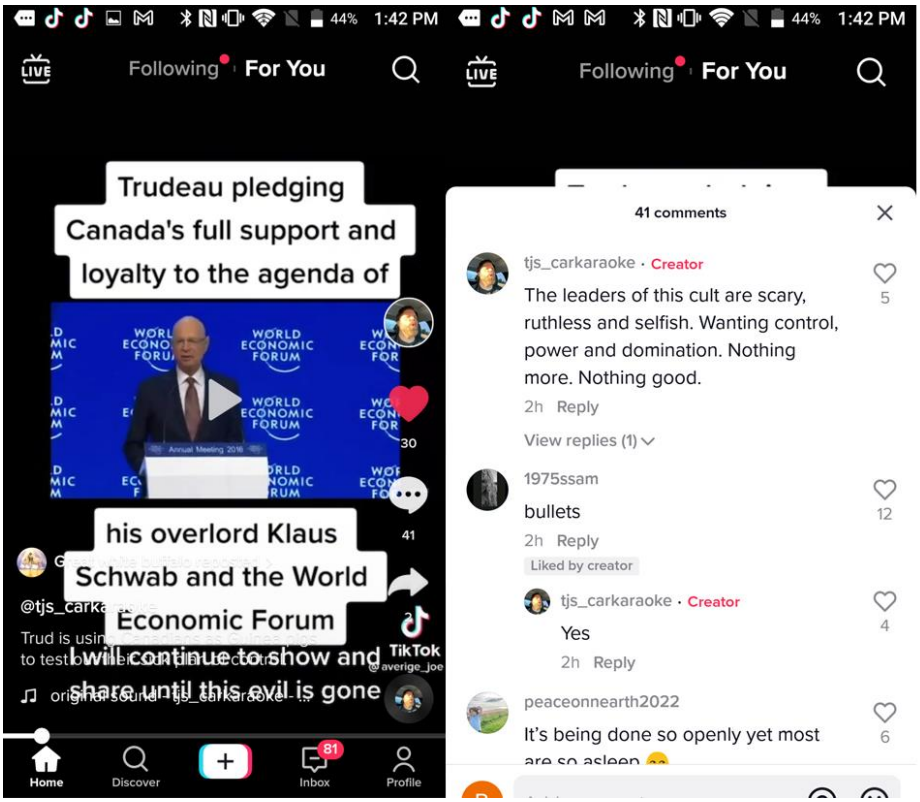


Figure 18 Second Example of Comment Section

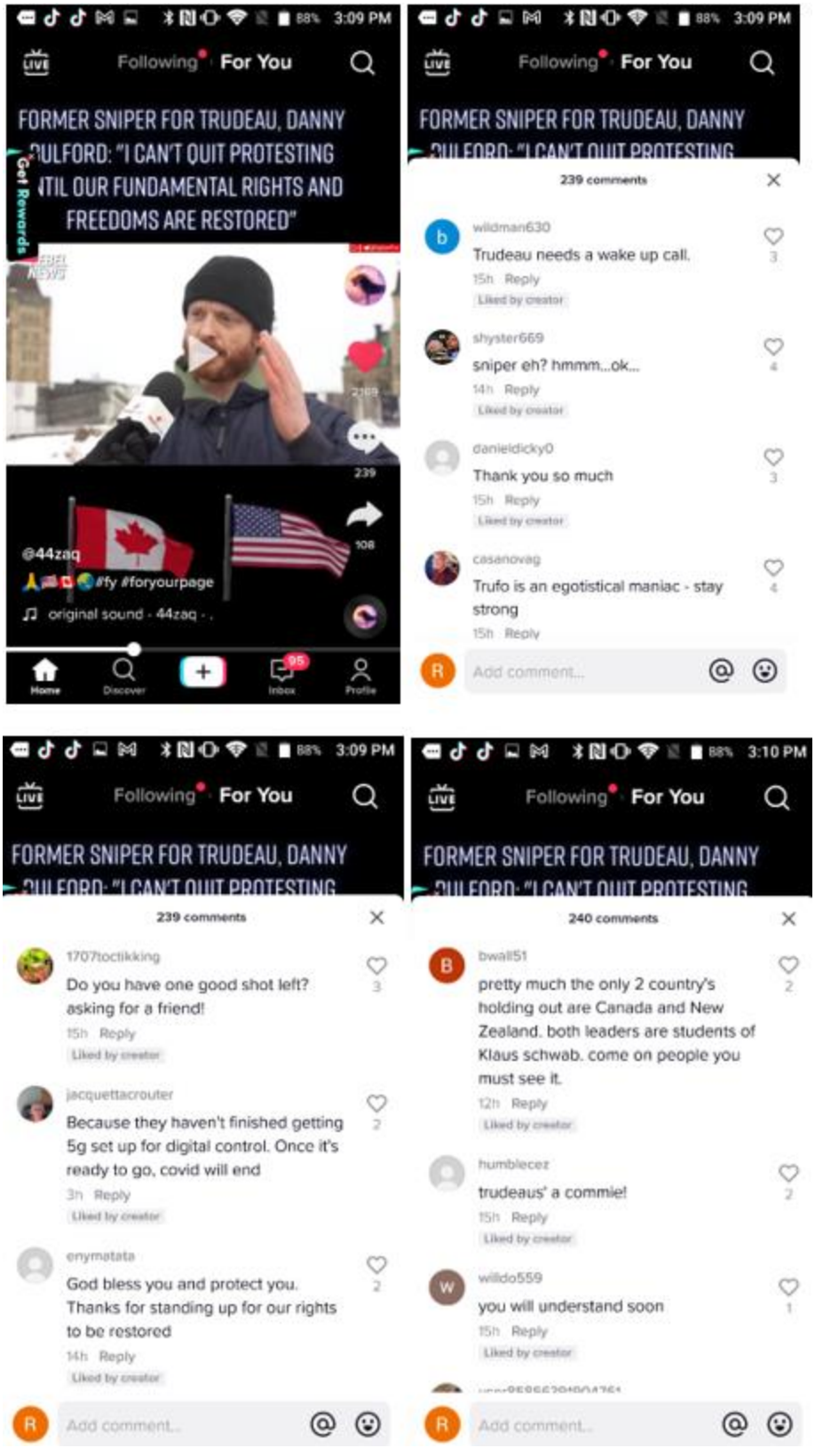


Figure 19 Third Example of Comment Section

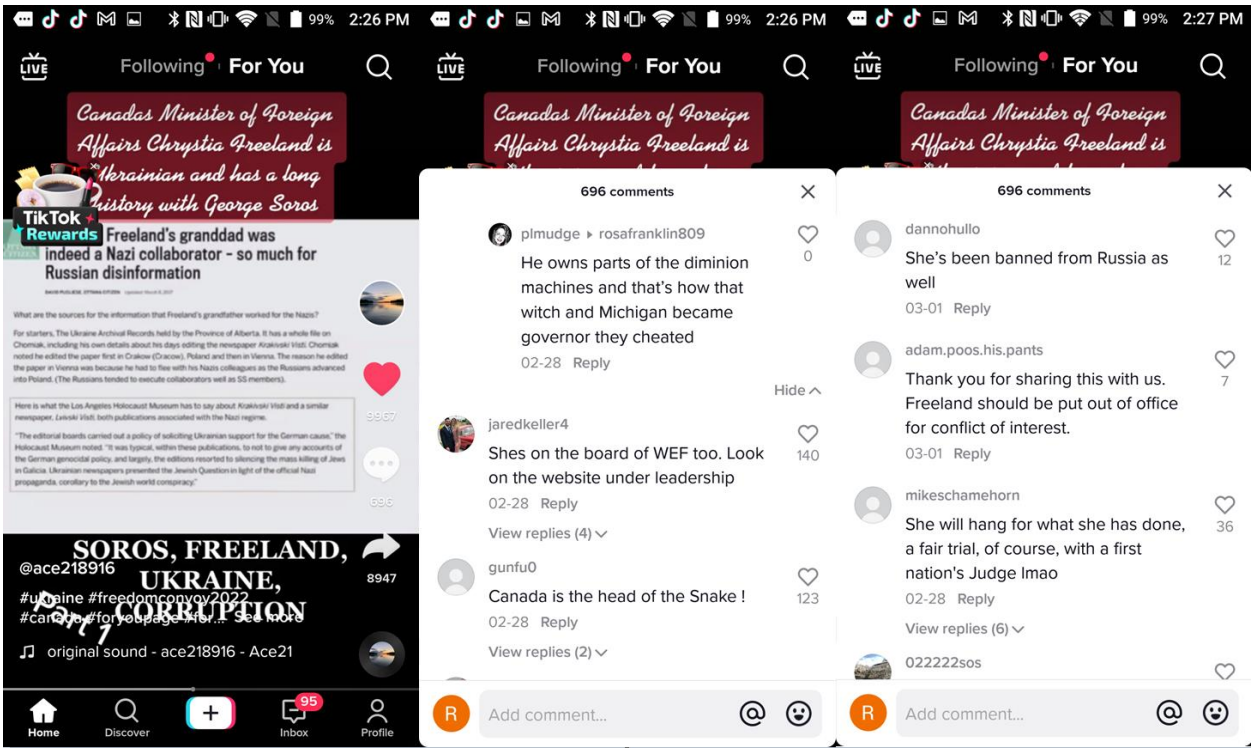


Figure 20 Fourth Example of Comment Section

I henceforth suggest comment sections to be a point of interest for further research regarding pathways to radicalization and extremism. Comment sections appear to be an active social arena where individuals bond, can relate to one another, and gather more information on subcultural elements. Hence, they represent a venue where users can relate to one another, consume material, gain access to, discover, explore critical subcultures, and participate while immersing in, as per my observations and results above, an apparent echo chamber.

Toward Conspiracy

Again, it should be noted that throughout the experiment I saw an evolution in the relevance of content (more frequent), in its presentation (more intense/emotional), and in its nature (bridging narratives). On this last point, I saw connections drawn between and within the presented above themes. The experiment started with profiles following mainstream conservative material, and bridged toward and was subsequently presented increasingly conspirational

content. In Figure 21 below, I provide a general content trajectory, as well as a brief overview of noted theory conspiracies. At first, the experiment profile was subject to 'normal' TikTok material. When relevant content surfaced, I first observed predominantly dissident material, strongly worded disagreement toward either COVID-19 Western policies, Canadian or Five Eyes' politicians, and/or information covering or encouraging participation in the so-called freedom convoy. Swiftly, content, in nature and by their creators, became increasingly conspirational and intense, bridging disagreement either with the COVID response or with current Western governments to vaccine skepticism, to vaccine and COVID conspiracy, to international and national domination, to *éminence grise*-like conspiracy, the new world order, the WEF, and the WHO. Conspirational material evolved and became throughout the experiment more intricate, elaborate, and "all-encompassing." Conspiracies related to perceived, self-claimed, grievances by content creators, distrust with experts (political, scientific, civic, or otherwise), the need to 'do your own research,' as well as red pilling in seeking, finding, and seeing the 'truth.' Additionally, a common undertone I noticed in the narrative and presentation of content was the notion and appeal of the 'common sense,' or of 'normalcy.' On this, I observed and suggest creators desire to appear relatable in their experience; in how they red-pilled. They distantiate themselves from 'sheeples[26]' and link (often conspirational) narratives with a very personal awakening, whereas they also, before, were not aware of everything that is hidden by elites and mainstream media. Content creators present themselves and stress out how 'normal' or 'average' they are. This effort is supported by the literature above and is, I suggest, an important part in the banalization of far-right and/or conspirational material.

[26] People deemed docile, sheepish, foolish, or easily led.

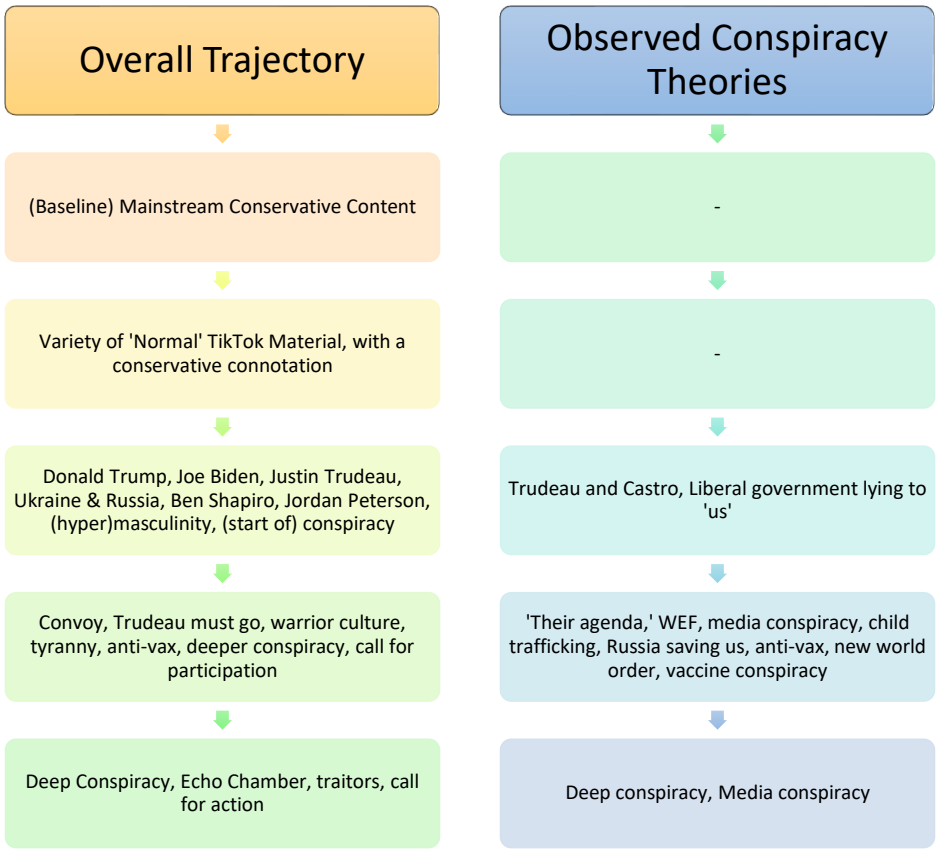


Figure 21 Overall Trajectory, General Themes

Feelings and Emotions

I observed on TikTok a very narrow spread in content creators' demographics. Contrary to TikTok's usual target demographic, most content creators, when revealed, appeared to be middle aged and Caucasian. This also applied to people in comment sections. There were not throughout the study many indicators of profession nor socio-economic status, and most users described themselves as 'simple,' 'average,' 'normal,' having 'nothing special' to themselves. In most videos, content creators displayed, orally, or through subtitles or captions, a narrow but intense array of emotions. They noticeably demonstrated sadness, disbelief, fear, and anger. These interconnected emotions seemed to revolve around an equally openly shared feeling of loss of sense; and an underlining quest for it, for community, as well as a manifested (past or present) renegotiation of their identity. I observed a few shared grievances brought forth by

content creators, most noticeably: the economy and economic downturn(s), a feeling of being unheard, repressed and lied to, a fear of 'where we (Canadians) are heading,' a sense of disbelief in the state of the world, of the mass, a sense of isolation, and, ultimately, a sentiment of betrayal from others, elected officials, and, generally, experts.

Henceforth, I noticed the fostering of emotional spaces for the audience and content creators to feel understood and listened to, relate to one another, ultimately playing upon the emotional disposition of the audience, by projected relatability. I noticed the affirmation of the victimization of content creators, processes of legitimization of narratives, and the reinforcement of rectitude (associated with other aspects, e.g., hypermasculinity, strength, or a generational clash). Although there is nothing conclusive on the matter from the findings of my study, I suggest these emotional spaces are, through consuming content, conversation, and ensuing participation (online: comment section, content creation, sharing, duet & stiches; and offline: meeting in real life, connecting with others, participating in events), budding radicalizing moral grounds. These grounds offer more perceived transparency than other popular social media platforms, opening the door to and presenting more instances of legal cynicism, banalization of and targeted apparent tolerance to risk and violence, and contribute to its audience(s) anomia. These findings are supported by the literature. Ganesh stresses the role of participatory culture online, playing upon emotional disposition. Echo chambers, and the ensuing absence of differing material presented by TikTok, help legitimize and normalize fringe ideologies. Miller-Idriss (2020) stresses the importance of this legitimization process in radicalization and of the ensuing fluidity it can give to extreme narratives. I suggest a future venue for further research in determining specifically which narratives are made, through and in these digital spaces, to be

more fluid and enduring. I found content creators to play upon current events, proximal, distal and collective strains, especially emotional and personal ones, to appeal to a wider audience.

Community and Belonging

Extreme content creators express and play upon a shared apparent need to connect. I have observed a need for community and for camaraderie on their behalf that translates into a quest for sense – the renegotiation of identity, and sacred values, also mentioned in the literature. Meiering et al. (2020) remind us of the importance of the role of social linking. As a consequence of echo chambers and normalization, individuals, particularly (emotional or otherwise) vulnerable individuals are more susceptible to believe they are part of a silent majority. This is especially true in confronting state powers, a theme I have observed predominantly. In playing upon and attempting to foster and appeal to a sense of camaraderie and community, content creators not only relate and potentially exploit cognitive openings, but also work to widen or create these openings. Bouhana noticeably stressed the role and importance of individual vulnerability to radicalization, but also the role of exposure to radicalizing moral contexts and settings.

In this participatory digital environment and community, TikTok's FYP presents not only, to draw upon Taylor and Horgan, additional entry and success points, but subjects users to a community and environment that enables the informal transmission of practices and knowledge, a community of practice. Again, as a further potential research subject, the (in)formality of these community of practice could be explored, for in part organization and collusion. I recommend, from my observations, that TikTok's FYP plays upon and has the potential to reinforce, through the observed trajectory, exposure to radicalizing moral contexts, and subsequent content isolation, cognitive openings to hateful or fringe ideologies.

Borrowing McCauley and Moskalenko's (2017) ‘two pyramids’ metaphor, as well as Taylor and Horgan’s point on the flexibility in action and role for radical involvement, this setting presents individuals with the ‘opportunity’ to move ‘further up’ either or both the action and opinion pyramids, to sympathize with or justify these opinions, become activists, and/or engage in otherwise radical actions, legally or not.

Auto-Ethnographic Remarks

In this section I present auto-ethnographic notes based on my experience as a participant, conducting the study. I suggest that even though my experience here is limited and circumstantial, it holds a degree of relevance in the scope and toward the aim of the study. Throughout the course of the study, and that of the preliminary pilot profiles, I have at times found myself experiencing intense and unexpected emotions. I have occasionally found myself juggling with and navigating the exceedingly wide (and wild) array of claims put forward by content creators. Lastly, I noted upon myself defense mechanisms, voluntarily or not, to the emotions, mood swings, and intermittent questioning that ensued from that progressive and prolonged immersion in conspirational TikTok. This account of my experience is based on my five intensive day of observations, and inspired by my exploratory preliminary research.

Day 0 – inspiration.

My preliminary research to explore the validity of this endeavor inspired me to explore further conspirational TikTok from this near auto-ethnographic observation stance. Preliminary observations inspired me to write this chapter from the gaslighting, sense of alienation of the self and other, and general tiredness that arose from this extensive exposure. These emotions were to say the least mixed, and, even from an educated perspective, brought me to, unaware at the time, spend hours researching and fact-checking various details related to vaccination, the trucker

convoy, and other seemingly random claims pertaining to, up close or from afar, various 'theories' and conspiracies.

Day 1 – a slow entry.

During my first day of observation, I spent a good portion of the morning setting up. Subsequently, I scrolled through the account's FYP for approximately five hours, and documented about 500 videos. Although they sporadically contained extreme material, recommendations were at first not very relevant to study. After a few hours of exploration, I noticed the start of the descent toward conspirational/more extreme TikTok. I noticed the casual appearance of some borderline transphobic content, and the occasional general critique on 'younger generations.' At that time, I did not yet feel tiredness or alienation, perhaps only meagre annoyance, or amusement at content producers and, of course, Dr. Jordan Peterson, Ben Shapiro, and the like, which I increasingly saw presented and was subjected to.

Day 2 – a(n angry) hyper(masculine) slippery slope.

As predicted by preliminary iterations of the study, after the 500 videos consumed the day before, I entered a different environment, accentuated by a much harsher tone. I was presented on that second day much less frequently the random TikTokness of things. Most importantly, after less than an hour of research that day, the general landscape started to alter further. More precisely to include content and claims of the so-called 'freedom convoy,' anger targeted at world leaders, and a general glorification and/or memorabilia of past conflicts (in majority WW2). At this point, comment sections in videos at time showed significant aspects of racism, self-admitted, covert, or overt, transphobia, and anger or targeted aggression. On that day I observed more glorification violence, strong displays of emotions from protesters and content creators, a clear reconsideration of authority, and a soft introduction to conspiracy-theory.

From this point, gaslighting starts to creep in through 'alternative facts,' a claimed necessity to question authority and experts, presented ambiguously without direct reference, causality nor substance to the object(s) of this obligation, and a call to revaluate societal and personal values, considering 'what is happening (to "us"?)' in the world. I noticed, by the end of that second day, that I occasionally requestioned or had to 're-process' arguments and/or presumptions that I either had already accepted or had taken for granted. It was not, per se, that I, at any point, revisited my world views or opinions. It *felt* more akin to an impulse to *confirm* what I knew and accepted as true, either through cognitive revaluation, or by mental gymnastics. Strangely enough, by the end of this day I started to wonder if there was as much an organized left(ish) presence on TikTok as the conspiracy hub seemed to be.

Day 3 – a state of exclusion.

It continued. This time more predominantly than before. Over the 600-700 video mark I found results to represent and accentuate previous observations. War footage became sparser and was largely replaced by misinformation on vaccines, mandates, and oppression. I found myself, as misinformation overtly joined the party, researching Covid facts and, even if so slightly, reconsidering some facts or observations previously recognized. For instance, I researched the numbers of attendees for the so-called freedom convoy multiple times. For the most part, estimates by experts, confirmed by that of past colleagues[27], activists, and friends on the ground were sufficient to confirm and (re)solidify my beliefs. This stresses, I suggest, the importance of community, camaraderie, and news sources in cognitive openings. As a note, it is on that day that I noticed for the first time sponsored (anti-vaxxer and convoy material) relevant content.

[27] I for instance followed and looked at Professor Thomas Juneau's daily accounts on the street of Ottawa, or friends and activists recording their experience there.

After four additional hours of research on that day, started feeling a general sense of exhaustion. Physically, perhaps slightly, but emotionally, quite substantially. A part of this came from continuously having my stance, believes, and perspective on reality challenged in a myriad of various, eccentric, and wild ways, mixed with a desire and need to confirm said reality. A second part of that challenge and exhaustion came from an apparent overrepresentation of content and actors supporting the narratives. A final part of this exhaustion was emotional, the constant overwhelming state of anger on content creators' behalf, as part of a greater emotional play on current event, rationality, and 'core values,' summing up in a perpetual gaslighting. At approximately 700 videos consumed, I noted emotional exhaustion, feeling (more frequently) angry, perhaps more precisely frustrated, which I attribute, in part, to a contagion shared upstream from consumed material. I also observed that although the object of these feelings was very different than that of the subjects of the videos, I shared some root grievances with content creators. We very much disagreed on the causes of these grievances, are very much differentiated in solutions to solve these grievances, but ultimately at times share some grievances in their lived and practical essence. This points and I believe confirms the role of content creators playing on emotions, current events, and distal and collective strains. We could, for instance, agree and share grievances toward the relative increase in cost of living in Canada. I would personally blame this increase to the advance of neoliberal policy, lack of regulations, and a social, political, legal, and economic environment that favors capital holders and the wealthy, at the expense of and coming from a division of the workers. I would advocate for imputability, and tighter regulations. However, observed content creators sharing this grievance, might blame increased costs of living 'on' President Joe Biden and Premier Justin Trudeau, on a secret cabal of world leaders, and on 'cultural incompatibility' with immigrant populations. Their solution might be,

contrary to my suggested reforms, ‘getting rid of’ this cabal, returning to traditional values, or even more ridiculously, electing Pierre Poilievre. Shared grievances, even with different proposed causes and solutions, play upon and work challenge cognitive openings.

By the end of day three, as well as days four and five, I realized I found myself somewhat more impatient. I also, looking back, found involuntary protection and coping mechanisms. Most notably, I realized I was looking at my friends and peers for some form of reinforcement in my beliefs, sharing with or telling them about unbelievable videos and conspiracy theories, telling them of the most far-fetched arguments I observed, and talking through, critically, of some ‘more moderate’ material. These observations so far point to the importance of existing, and perhaps ensuing or newly acquired, support structures, elements, or individuals in relation to identity crafting, even with, as it was my case, strong pre-existing protective mechanisms.

Day 4 – a state of exhaustion.

As mentioned above, the further in the experiment, the longer videos became. With longer videos, and progressing throughout the experiment, I found myself at time numb and exhausted. Some videos required more and increasingly tested my patience. On that day, I found the need and spent more time researching so-called evidence and conspirational content. I also noticed that while on previous days conspirational content was milder, on the penultimate and last day, after over thirty hours of exploration, content was overall more intricate, and had, at time, the initial shock factor. Although I did not believe or consider viable any conspiracy theories consumed, throughout and retrospectively I became curious about various elements of conspiracies, pictures, or footage presented, and out of curiosity desired to find either the original material or reinforce and confirm factual validity. As conspiracies got more intricate, it took more time, effort, and thoroughness to validate and research content.

I suggest, once more accepting the circumstantial nature of my experience, that additionally to testing my individual susceptibility and social bonds, the exposure to this amount of echo-chambered radical content also tested my self-control (patience, emotion plays, individual attachment, legal cynicism, and life experiences & preferences) as well as my ability to research and formulate fact-based scientific opinions through emotion-play and exhaustion. I would suggest that through aggressive and confusing emotional play, the overwhelming amount of information presented, an impression of a silent majority, I was ultimately tested for cognitive openings. By the end of the fourth day, I noticed that I methodically, on each day, would seek confirmation, on- or offline, of my beliefs. Most noticeably, while completing my daily notetaking, I tuned in to comfort and more familiar content, podcasts or twitch streamers.

Day 5 – quite the show (of aggression).

On this last day, I observed a continuity in the previous trends. TikTok's FYP still offered nearly uniquely highly relevant content, with elevated levels of anger. Because of my short break between the fourth and fifth day, I was perhaps more rested, and found myself not as impacted early in the day. However, in the afternoon, the return of exhaustion was accompanied with a familiar mix of emotions. I did not have many videos to watch on that day, closing-in to my targeted thousand videos. I still noticed an increased degree and themes of, concordantly with previous observations and following an upward trend, distrust of expertise, red-pilling, tyranny of the government, conspiracy pertaining to the WEF, a sense of tiredness of 'things as they are,' leading to calls for action, and a need 'to rise.' On this last day, I was presented by the FYP direct calls to violence, including a man showing a handgun, calling for Justin Trudeau to be taken care of, implying he might 'do it himself.' I saw the video reposted, 'dueted,' or 'stitched' a half dozen of times. I concluded my observations exhausted and decided to postpone further

activities for the weekend. Upon completion I realized I had altered, that week, my daily walking, and socializing routine. I, more often than usual, had isolated and avoided friends and neighbors, which could hypothetically, for already vulnerable or somewhat isolated users, thrown into TikTok's conspiracy rabbit hole, translate into a risk of further isolation, of loneness.

Limitations to the Study

There are a few noteworthy limitations to this study. First, this thesis is based on limited samples. The results are based on a sample of 1,000 videos. This limitation is to a degree palliated by the three preliminary profiles (with sample sizes of plus or minus 500 to 700 videos each). The experiment could also be replicated with similar or different starting points, profiles with differing political, social, and cultural characteristics, and larger sample sizes for validity and consistency of results. I conducted the experiment and pilot runs on limited timeframes, over the course of at most eight days per profile. I consider the timeframe as at most a minor limitation, as there is no contrary indication on TikTok's behalf, nor other researchers, as to the FYP's algorithm's behavior on this. An added technical limitation to the study is the absence of information on the algorithm itself. I do not and cannot know *what* the algorithm is doing, only its output. Limitations to the self-ethnographic section have been mentioned above, most noticeably its circumstantial and personal nature. I could have also expanded upon my observations of comments sections. I intentionally limited these observations keeping the scale and scope of this thesis in mind. From my observations, I believe there should be further research and attention posited toward commentary sections as they practically appear to stand as a source of information, a mean of participation, and a forum for conversation and socialization for users.

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

To reiterate, I intended throughout this thesis to explore the possible impact of TikTok's content recommendation algorithms, as well as provide anticipated evidence for a need for further literature and empirical studies on social digital radicalized ecologies. The results of my empirical study, substantiated with self-autographic remarks, support this claim. I have found and suggest that TikTok's FYP algorithms have the potential to and act as, through its inadequate enforcement of community guidelines and the shrewd activities of content creators, a facilitator in bridging certain users to increasingly hateful and conspirational narratives and echo chambers. In this sense, I suggest this pathway to challenge users' protective and vulnerability factors, in their quest for sense, as well as contribute to the mainstreaming and banalization of fringe ideologies and concepts, social linking. As a result of my experiment, I observed a progressive saturation and radicalization of recommended content which culminated, throughout and especially at the end, a near fully saturated conspirational and hateful FYP. This remark also extended, to a lesser degree, to sponsored content.

This increased exposure to ever more radical content, I suggest, is conducive and encourages vulnerable users to constantly revisit and question their interpretation and trust in institutions, experts, and moral frameworks. There is no proven causality nor correlation offered by the results of this experiment. I suggest from my observations and ensuing results that my findings support and are in turn supported by the literature in the importance to conduct further research on digital and algorithmic radicalization, on the role of platform radicalization. I observed emotional play, mainstreaming and banalization of fringe ideologies, an absence of counter, mainstream, or progressive rhetoric, and a clear 'normalized' disregard of scientific evidence. I suggest these challenges, and increased exposure, so easily, to radicalizing spaces and contexts, have the potential to contribute and test users' cognitive opening to fringe

ideologies, as well as introduce (or encourage) them to engage in legal or illegal radical activities. I further suggest, based on my observations, a need to conduct additional empiric studies focused on comment sections, in TikTok's conservative and conspirational ecologies. This would provide insight into users' dynamic consumption, conversational, and participative patterns. Comment sections offer a direct means for users to exchange, gather knowledge, connect, and inquire about digital or IRL events.

During the course of my research, as iterated in the previous section, I took notes and paused to gather self-ethnographic remarks, having, however and admittedly to a lesser degree, participated in the same process I claim to have examined. My experience in part concorded with the literature and offered insights on loneness, the role of emotions, of anger, disbelief, constant requestioning, of conspirational echo chambers, and the importance (and potential vulnerability) to existing peer-structures. I have overall and throughout observed a significant legal cynicism on conspirational TikTok, that closely followed ongoing national and international news (principally here the COVID 19 pandemic, Trucker Convoy, and Russian invasion of Ukraine). I further wonder, and suggest the need for subsequent research on the linkages between digital and IRL activities. We know from the literature the importance of the digital space in contemporary violent radicalization. It could therefore be relevant to gather additional data pertaining to the 'transition' from the digital space toward further IRL or digital involvement. This could, for instance, help and inform further critical entry points for resilience, prevention, and/or deradicalization efforts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Sample of Horgan's Risk Factors for Involvement in Terrorism
(Horgan 2008:84–85)

1. The presence of some emotional vulnerability, in terms of feelings of anger, alienation (often synonymous with feelings of being culturally uprooted or displaced and a longing for a sense of community), and disenfranchisement. For example, some alienated young British Muslims, looking for guidance and leadership that they do not get from mosque leaders because of a perception that the leaders are too old, too conservative, and out of touch with their world, may turn elsewhere for guidance and clarity.
2. Dissatisfaction with their current activity, whether it be political or social protest, and the perception that conventional political activity just does not work or produce results. A related issue here is that violent radicals view terrorism as absolutely necessary. For example, in a video message before blowing up himself and six others in London, Mohammad Sidique Khan employed the language of "war" in urging British Muslims to oppose the British government. The view is that terrorism is a necessary, defensive, and, above all, urgent activity against an offensive enemy perceived as bent on humiliating and subjugating its victims.
3. Identification with victims - either real, in terms of personal victimization (e.g., by the military or police) or less tangible. For European Muslims who become involved in violent jihad, this identification is with Palestinian victims of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, victims in Iraq, or the conflict in Kashmir. In Khan s video testimony, he blamed his behavior on the actions of the United States and United Kingdom: "bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people," identifying with the suffering of Muslims around the world even though he came from Yorkshire, in northern England.
4. Crucially, the person has to believe that engaging in violence against the state or its symbols is not inherently immoral. This belief, while it may be fine-tuned by a religious figure, is usually held by the time the person has decided to become involved to the point of engaging in terrorism.
5. Also important is a sense of reward that the recruit has about what "being in this movement" represents. All suicide bombers, across the world, have one thing in common. They come to believe that they will achieve more in death than they ever could in life, a very powerful motivating factor not only in initial recruitment but also in terms of sustaining that person s commitment to the movement once a member. In practical terms, involvement might result in heightened status, respect, or authority within the immediate peer group, the broader radical movement, and (at least as imagined by the recruit) the wider Muslim community. The clearest answer to why someone wants to become involved in a suicidal mission is that the person seeks the kind of martyrdom and accompanying rewards on display as when violent radical Web sites hailed the 7/7 bombers as heroic martyrs and exalted them as almost pop stars.
6. Finally, kinship or other social ties to those experiencing similar issues, or already involved, are crucial (see Sageman 2004).

APPENDIX B: First Coding

Table 14 First Coding

Categories	**#**
CONSPIRACY THEMES	**158**
CENSORSHIP	3
CONSPIRACY	70
CORPORATE (Non-covid, Big Oil, 1%, Globalists)	13
MEDIA (Traditional)	19
OTHER CONSPIRACIES (Operation Lock, Agenda 2031, Aliens, 2nd Amendment, White Pages)	5
TECHNO CONSPIRACY (Smart Cities, Digital ID, 5G, AI, Basic Income, Credit Score, Communism)	13
WEF	29
WORLD ORGANIZATIONS (WHO, UN, CDC)	6
CURRENT EVENTS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	**213**
BLACK LIVES MATTER	1
CLIMATE CHANGE	1
COVID-19	79
FREEDOM CONVOY AND TRUCKERS	73
IMMIGRATION	4
GENERATIONAL CRITIQUES	10
TYRANNY AND PATRIOTISM	45
EXTREME	**26**
DISSENT & ACCELERATIONISM	5
HYPERMASCULINITY	8
MISOGYNY	2
NAZI	2
RACISM	2
TRANS AND HOMOPHOBIA	7
GEO	**105**
OCEANIA (Australia and New Zealand)	3
CHINA	3
INDIA	1
ISRAEL	1
ITALY	1
NORTH KOREA	1
RUSSIA	30
UKRAINE	64
VATICAN	1
PUBLIC FIGURES	**290**
5 EYES (Ardern, Boris Johnson, Scott Morrison)	7
BIDEN, JOE	50
CANADIAN POLITICS (Singh, May, NDP, Liberals, Greens)	6

CASTRO	2
CONSERVATIVES (Baber, Bomber, Ford, Andrew Scheer)	5
DEMOCRATS (AOC, Harris, Obama, Whitmer)	6
DR. FULLNER	1
EPSTEIN	1
FAUCI	6
FREELAND, CHRISTINA	12
GATES, BILL	5
HISTORICAL (Rockefeller)	1
LICH, TAMARA	3
OTHER (Matt Walsh, Piers Morgan, Elon Musk, Jordan Peterson, Rittenhouse, Joe Rogan, Ben Shapiro, Zuckerberg, Rockefeller, Epstein, Fullner)	12
PELOSI, NANCY	8
POILIEVRE, PIERRE	4
PUTIN, VLADIMIR	16
REPUBLICANS (BUSH)	2
ROTHSCHILD	3
SCHWAB, KLAUS	13
SOROS, GEORGE	3
TRUDEAU, JUSTIN	87
TRUMP, DONALD	32
ZELENSKY, VOLODYMYR	5
CLINTON, HILARY	4
WAR THEMES	**27**
MILITARY (misc.)	13
NATO	2
WW2	7
WW3	5

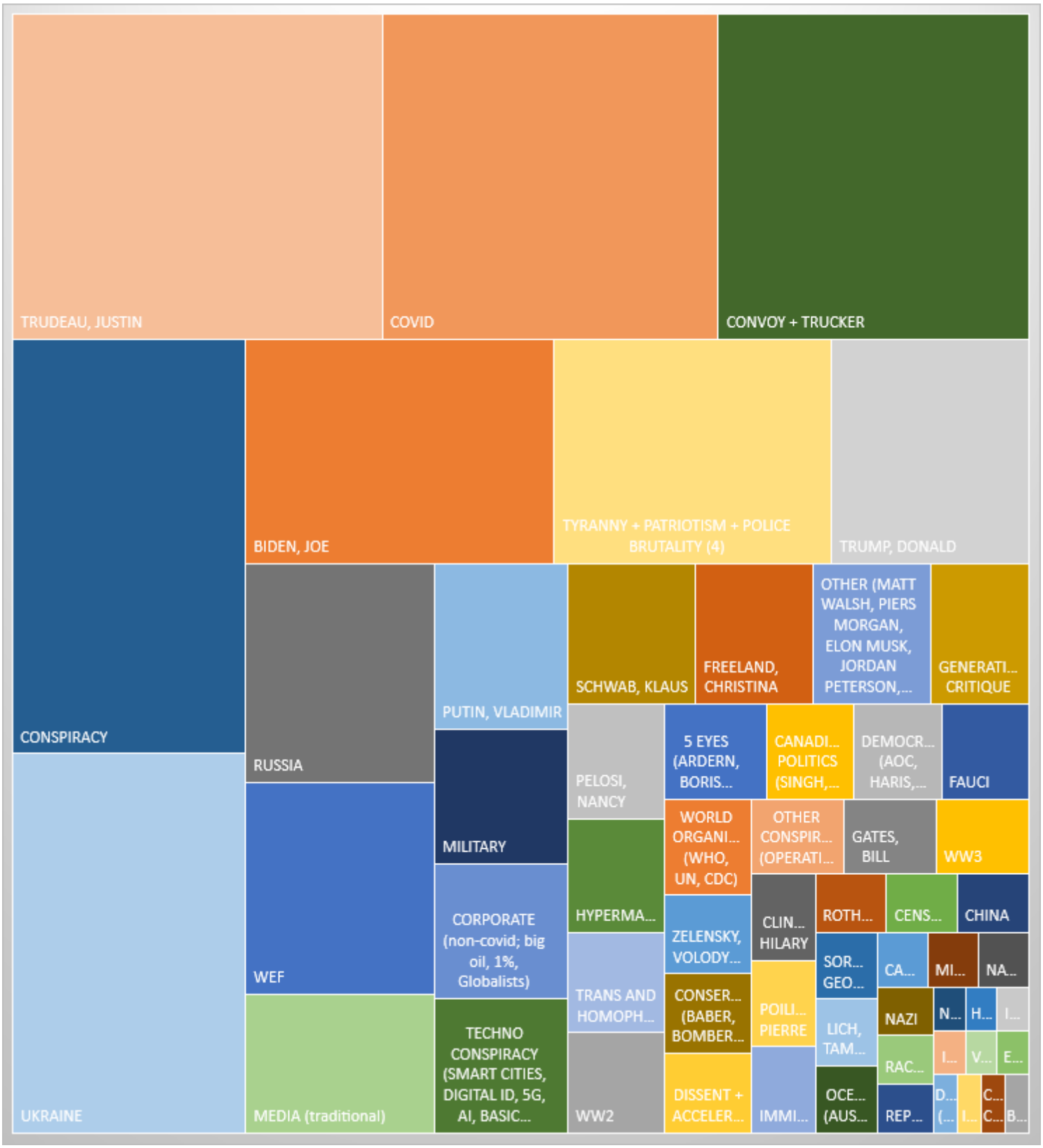

Figure 22 Chart of First Coding

APPENDIX C: Second Coding

Table 15 Second Coding

Categories	***#***
CONSPIRACY THEMES	**174**
CONSPIRACY	76
CORPORATE (Non-covid; Big Oil, 1%, Globalists)	13
MEDIA (Traditional)	19
MISC. CONSPIRACIES (Operation Lock, Jewish Conspiracy, Aliens, White Pages)	11
WEF & SCHWAB	55
CURRENT EVENTS AND CIVIL RESPONSIBILITY	**219**
COVID 19	79
FREEDOM CONVOY AND TRUCKERS	80
IMMIGRATION	4
GENERATIONAL CRITIQUE	11
TYRANNY AND PATRIOTISM	45
EXTREME	**26**
DISSENT & ACCELERATIONIST	5
HYPERMASCULINITY & MISOGINY	10
NAZISM & RACISM	4
TRANS- and HOMOPHOBIA	7
GEO	**126**
CHINA	3
OCEANIA (Australia and New Zealand)	3
OTHER (India, Israel, Italy, North Korea, Vatican)	5
RUSSIA & PUTIN	46
UKRAINE & ZELENSKY	69
PUBLIC FIGURES	**249**
5 EYES (Ardern, Boris Johnson, Scott Morrison)	7
BIDEN, JOE	50
CANADIAN POLITICS (Singh, May, NDP, Liberals, Greens)	6
CONSERVATIVES & REPUBLICANS (Bush, Baber, Bomber, Ford, Scheer, Poilievre)	11
DEMOCRATS (AOC, Harris, Obama, Whitmer, H. Clinton, Pelosi)	18
FREELAND, CHRISTINA	12
OTHER FIGURES (Matt Walsh, Piers Morgan, Elon Musk, Jordan Peterson, Rittenhouse, Joe Rogan, Ben Shapiro, Zuckerberg, Rockefeller, Epstein, Fullner)	15
TRUDEAU, JUSTIN	87
TRUMP, DONALD	32
VACCINE FIGURES (Bill Gates, Fauci)	11
WAR THEMES	**28**

Figure 23 Chart of Second Coding

APPENDIX D: Codes of Hatred
Definitions were gathered from experience, open source, the literature, or the Anti Defamation League. It merely stands as a summary educational addon.

((( )))	"Echo" symbol set around Jewish names online. Has by now, 2022, been removed from the hatescape, after being massively used by Jews and non-Jews to show solidarity and "claim" the symbol back, removing its anti-Semitic purpose (Miller-Idriss 2020)
12	Particularly in the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas. Substitute for the letters AB – Aryan Brotherhood.
14 or 14 Words	Refers to a popular white supremacist slogan "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." Coined by David Lane.
14/88	Combination of the popular "14 words" and "88."
18	Numerical symbolism for the first and eight letters of the alphabet, AH – Adolf Hitler.
311	Common substitution for three times the 11th letter of the alphabet, K – KKK, Ku Klux Klan.
318	Numerical symbolism. The 3 stands for C – C18, Combat 18, a British white supremacist group. The 18 in its name stands for Adolf Hitler.
88	Standing for the 8th letter of the alphabet, H – HH, "Heil Hitler." Often seen on tattoos, online usernames (even mainstream).
Burning Symbols	Popularized by the KKK to instil terror, the burning of the cross or of Neo-Nazi symbols.
Celtic cross	The white supremacist version of the Celtic Cross, which consists of a square cross interlocking with or surrounded by a circle, is one of the most common white supremacist symbols.
Confederate Flag	Still one of the most commonly used symbols of white supremacy, although at times still used by non-extremists.
Day of the Rope	Is a white supremacist slogan referring to mass murders of "race traitors" that occur in *The Turner Diaries*, a novel written by neo-Nazi William Pierce. The slogan is typically used to urge or promise some similar scenario in the real world.
Deus Vult	Moto for 'the Crusade,' against white replacement.
FGRN	A Ku Klux Klan acronym: "For God, Race and Nation."

GTKRWN	GTKRWN is an acronym for a racist and anti-Semitic slogan created by white supremacists: “Gas the Kikes; Race War Now.”
Imperial German Flag	Because Germany has banned the use of most Nazi imagery.
Iron Cross	The Iron Cross, a famous German military medal, became a common white supremacist symbol after World War II, though today it is used in many non-racist/extremist situations and cannot be assumed to be used as a hate symbol without other contextual clues.
Okay Hand Gesture	A common hand gesture that a 4chan trolling campaign claimed in 2017 had been appropriated as a symbol meaning "white power." Used by many on the right--not just extremists--for the purpose of trolling liberals, the symbol eventually came to be used by actual white supremacists as well. Caution must be used in evaluating instances of this symbol's use.
ROA	Race Over All
SS Bolts	Derived from the Nazi-era Schutzstaffel (SS).
ZOG	Zionist Occupied Government; belief that the U.S. government is controlled by Jews.

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