

## Contours and Controversies of Parler

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## 1 Introduction

Parler is a social network that was founded in 2018 by John Matze and Jared Thompson. It launched at a time when large social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter had begun to more aggressively moderate accounts whose content and behavior violated aspects of their terms of service. Parler marketed itself as an alternative, framing its offering as a free-speech focused network that would not moderate, fact-check, or take down speech or speakers. Many of the early adopters were right-wing figures who had lost their accounts on mainstream platforms. Parler came to be known as an “alt-platform” (a small social platform) catering to the American right.

Parler began to receive extensive news coverage during the 2020 election as a place where Donald Trump supporters had gathered in response to perceived anti-conservative bias on mainstream social media platforms. While there was no evidence of viewpoint-based censorship, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter had begun to label and fact-check erroneous claims by Trump, which angered some of his most ardent supporters. Parler attracted further attention after the election as it appeared to become something of an echo chamber within which claims that the election had been “stolen” from incumbent candidate Donald Trump gained a significant following; these claims included numerous unfounded conspiratorial allegations of deliberate theft and plotting that were fact-checked or otherwise moderated elsewhere. Additionally, it served as a central coordination platform for individuals who stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021—numerous FBI investigations have included examples of planning and incitement that took place on Parler in the days leading to the riot. Following public outcries and internal investigations, various service providers took action against Parler; it was removed from the Google Play store (Jan. 8) and the Apple App Store (Jan. 9), and lost its web hosting on Amazon Web Services (Jan. 10).

The Stanford Internet Observatory team began to study dynamics on Parler during our work as part of the [Election Integrity Partnership](#), which focused on assessing voting-related misinformation. While much of our research focused on cross-platform spread of particular hashtags, we also undertook a study of account creation and growth dynamics on Parler, and we discuss some preliminary findings in this report. These include novel finds related to moderation—of interest given that lack of moderation is one of the central claims in Amazon’s decision to cease hosting the app—as well as engagement and posting statistics, and account creation dynamics.

## 1.1 Key takeaways

- Parler's moderation policies indicated that they primarily moderate based on user reports, rather than proactive mechanisms. Based on the user profile data, it appears that as of Jan. 9 there were 802 moderators for an estimated 13 million users.
- Many of the most active Parler accounts used integrations, such as RSS feeds, to automate content posting to the platform.
- Networks of fake accounts on Parler were designed to promote commercial off-site content, such as Trump coin scams and OnlyFans profiles.
- Parler's user growth trends show jumps in response to political events in the U.S. and the choice by other platforms to label or remove content from prominent individuals, including President Trump.
- Several distinct account creation peaks on Parler attracted users from Brazil and Saudi Arabia, plus QAnon accounts in Chinese and Japanese, largely in response to increased content labeling and removal on Twitter.

## 1.2 About the data

Our dataset comprises 3 snapshots of user data:

- A dataset of 12 million users who joined between August 2018 and December 2020.
- An updated dataset of 13.3 million users, spanning from August 2018 to January 9, 2021. This is the dataset used by the recent iDRAMA report,<sup>1</sup> which we recommend as complementary reading to this report.
- A backfilled dataset with updated follower counts for verified users.<sup>2</sup>

None of the data in this post should be considered a point-in-time snapshot of the entirety of Parler, or to be 100% accurate, because it was assembled through an extended process and because we cannot verify missing values as a result of Parler's deplatforming. However, the data is sufficient to illustrate trends regarding Parler's userbase and platform growth, and enable basic subset analyses.

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<sup>1</sup><https://arxiv.org/abs/2101.03820>

<sup>2</sup>Thank you to the iDRAMA group and Max Aliapoulios in particular, for the gathering of the primary Parler user datasets.

## 2 Contours of Parler

Our analysis focuses on User and Post data returned by the Parler API. Post data include information about upvotes, reposts, comments, hashtags and overall impressions, as well as a nested user object (“creator”). The measure of “impressions” provides a view into post exposure to the Parler audience. This is a useful addition not present in most other social media APIs, as it allows for a direct measurement of post reach instead of estimating it based on comment or repost activity.

| Key         | Value   |
|-------------|---|
| @           | {0}   |
| article     | False   |
| body        | For those that have not seen it. Italy is implicated in the election steal. |
| comments    | 0   |
| createdAt   | 20210109211614  |
| creator     | {19}  |
| hashtags    | [2]   |
| id          | 424733f15a5d4eadb8f29c457f1fe418  |
| impressions | 71  |
| links       | [1]   |
| reposts     | 0   |
| sensitive   | False   |
| state       | 4   |
| upvotes     | 0   |

Table 1: Sample API return from a single real Parler post, displaying relevant fields only. The @ field is an array of accounts that were mentioned in the post, while hashtags is an array of hashtags used. The meaning of state is currently unknown. creator is an array containing the details of the user who created the post (see Table 2 on the next page).

The API also returns over two dozen key data fields for each user, including transparently-named fields such as user ID, follower and following counts, and their “score” (which we will discuss in this post). It also includes information that is slightly obscured, such as their user type—e.g. administrator, moderator, verified user—which can be derived from a bitmask stored in the “interactions” field.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup><https://github.com/d0nk/parler-tricks>

| Key              | Value   |
|------------------|---|
| badges           | [5]   |
| banned           | False   |
| bio              | Founder/CEO of Parler and iPhone developer... |
| comments         | 2300000                                       |
| followers        | 736000  |
| following        | 409   |
| human            | True  |
| integration      | False   |
| interactions     | 2151  |
| joined           | 20180824131026                                |
| likes            | 15000   |
| media            | 180   |
| name             | John Matze                                    |
| posts            | 1300  |
| private          | False   |
| rss              | False   |
| score            | 1100000                                       |
| userid           | a078092e6e2df507bfd12db471029eb3              |
| username         | John  |
| verified         | True  |
| verifiedComments | False   |

Table 2: Relevant contents of a Parler user object, as retrieved from the API. badges is an array of all of the badge types awarded to the user.<sup>4</sup> Integrations are discussed in Section 2.2.1 on page 9.

## 2.1 Admins and moderators

While much has been made of its role in facilitating the January 6th storming of the Capitol, concerns about Parler’s lack of effective content moderation—the reason largely given for its deplatforming, yet part of its original appeal—had begun months before. Amazon, for example, noted in a court filing<sup>5</sup> that they sent upwards of 100 pieces of content inciting violence, starting in mid-November:

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<sup>4</sup><https://arxiv.org/pdf/2101.03820.pdf>, section 4.3

<sup>5</sup>[https://cdn.pacermonitor.com/pdfserver/LHNWTAI/137249864/Parler\\_LLC\\_v\\_Amazon\\_Web\\_Services\\_Inc\\_wawdce-21-00031\\_0010.0.pdf](https://cdn.pacermonitor.com/pdfserver/LHNWTAI/137249864/Parler_LLC_v_Amazon_Web_Services_Inc_wawdce-21-00031_0010.0.pdf)

- “After the firing squads are done with the politicians the teachers are next.”
- “Death to @zuckerberg @realjeffbezos @jackdorsey @pichai.”
- “White people need to ignite their racial identity and rain down suffering and death like a hurricane upon zionists.”
- “Put a target on these motherless trash [Antifa] they aren’t human taking one out would be like stepping on a roach no different.”
- “We need to act like our forefathers did Kill [Black and Jewish people] all Leave no victims or survivors.”
- “We are coming with our list we know where you live we know who you are and we are coming for you and it starts on the 6th civil war... Lol if you will think it’s a joke... Enjoy your last few days you have.”

Figure 1: Excerpts of violent threats from Amazon's court filing

The platform's limited moderation is carried out by volunteers who have no quotas or obligations to moderate. Recent interviews with leadership have stressed that the platform does not look for violations (even of troubling and illegal content) but rather waits for user reports. The ostensible moderation policy is inconsistent and contradictory—the user agreement claims to “allow all free speech that is lawful,” but, according to CEO John Matze, pornographic and some trolling content is removed.<sup>67</sup>

Parler user data suggests that as of Jan. 9 Parler had 802 moderators, with their join dates roughly clustering around Parler's historical growth spikes:

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jul/01/parler-conservative-twitter-new-free-speech-social-network>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20200630/23525844821/parler-speedruns-content-moderation-learning-curve-goes-we-allow-everything-to-were-good-censors-days.shtml>

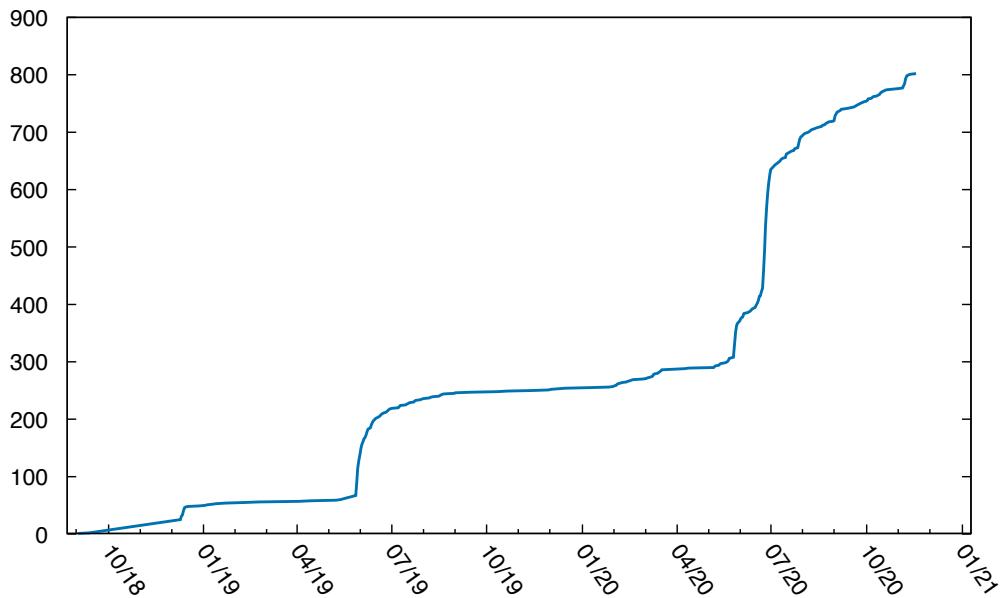


Figure 2: Growth in moderator count over time

Though Parler claimed in January to be hiring paid moderators,<sup>8</sup> the overwhelming majority of moderators were still volunteers.

We also identified 21 site administrators, including John Matze, Lead of Quality Assurance Matthew Matze, Chief Policy Officer Amy Peikoff, Chief Technology Officer Alexander Blair, as well as developers and administrative assistants. Some portion of these users are Parler employees—it is unclear whether all administrators were on Parler’s payroll, or whether some were volunteer administrators, similar to moderators.

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.wsj.com/articles/parler-struggles-survival-amazon-lawsuit-trump-fans-11610414745>

| Joined     | Interactions | Username            | Full name                              |
|------------|--------------|---------------------|--|
| 2018-08-24 | 2151         | John                | John Matze                             |
| 2018-12-10 | 483          | JelloShells         | JelloShells                            |
| 2020-04-25 | 6503         | AmyPeikoff          | Amy Peikoff                            |
| 2019-06-12 | 6631         | Kimberly [REDACTED] | Kimberly                               |
| 2020-07-18 | 6242         | ParlerJury          | Parler Community Jury                  |
| 2018-12-10 | 99           | Olin                | Bongs Away                             |
| 2019-06-10 | 6247         | RadianceLux         | #Fatkidclub President-Elect [REDACTED] |
| 2019-11-22 | 2403         | Jesse [REDACTED]    | Jesse [REDACTED]                       |
| 2019-06-02 | 99           | Ootsie07            | Ootsie07                               |
| 2018-08-30 | 6247         | Matt                | Matthew Matze                          |
| 2019-06-17 | 99           | MarcM               | Marc [REDACTED]                        |
| 2018-12-13 | 6503         | ablair              | Alexander Blair                        |
| 2019-05-30 | 99           | MoSmith             | MoSmith                                |
| 2019-01-04 | 6247         | Kev                 | Kev                                    |
| 2020-07-22 | 99           | EssdotFerg          | EssDotFerg                             |
| 2019-05-04 | 6499         | tiffanyy            | Tiffany                                |
| 2018-08-23 | 6247         | Jared               | Jared                                  |
| 2020-10-20 | 98           | Ca [REDACTED]       | Ca [REDACTED]                          |
| 2020-06-25 | 106          | d3vils              | pianissimo:                            |
| 2020-07-09 | 482          | imupnext96          | imup98                                 |
| 2020-07-10 | 98           | Bridget024          | Bridget [REDACTED]                     |

Table 3: Parler site administrators, inferred from the “interactions” field. Full identifying names of people who may not be publicly associated with Parler have been redacted.

Administrators and moderators were also active site participants. Some shared and amplified content that would have been removed from other platforms, including denying COVID-19’s existence and disputing public health countermeasures, asserting claims of voter fraud and a mass stolen election, and making threats to the law enforcement protecting politicians before and after the insurrection in the Capitol.

## 2.2 Power User Insights

We drilled into three metrics from the API to understand more about the characteristics of Parler's most prominent users: integrations or feed automations, follower counts, and user score.

### 2.2.1 Integrations

A number of the most “active” accounts on Parler are affiliates, where articles are fetched by an RSS feed known to Parler and converted into parleys (posts). This is how sites such as various Epoch Times properties and OANN “post” content on the platform. The syndication is not obvious from looking at an account’s profile, and creates something of an illusion that those outlets are highly active participants on Parler. Other non-RSS integrations are also present, including Breitbart, PragerU and the Daily Mail. These may be custom content management system integrations or other syndication mechanisms. There are 81 integrations in total, 17 of which are RSS-based.

| RSS   | Score   | Username              | Joined     |
|-------|---------|-----------------------|------------|
| True  | 4200000 | epochtimes            | 2018-12-19 |
| True  | 1500000 | OANN                  | 2020-11-12 |
| True  | 585000  | LauraLoomer           | 2018-12-10 |
| True  | 475000  | CitizenFreePress      | 2018-10-05 |
| True  | 388000  | TheBabylonBee         | 2020-06-30 |
| True  | 269000  | TheWesternJournal     | 2019-06-14 |
| True  | 215000  | JustTheNews           | 2020-07-10 |
| True  | 156000  | dailycaller           | 2018-12-15 |
| True  | 111000  | AmericanGreatness     | 2020-07-01 |
| False | 406000  | PragerU               | 2018-12-10 |
| False | 406000  | BreitbartNews         | 2018-10-26 |
| False | 176000  | LifeNews              | 2019-05-31 |
| False | 86000   | TheDailyMail          | 2020-07-09 |
| False | 45000   | RSBNetwork            | 2020-06-24 |
| False | 35000   | RealElizabethjohnston | 2018-12-10 |
| False | 16000   | BeingLibertarian      | 2018-11-08 |

Table 4: Integrations with over 10k followers

### 2.2.2 Influencers

So who attracts an audience on Parler? Prominent pro-Trump personalities top the list, including media figures and social media influencers. Almost 50% of Parler users follow Sean Hannity, despite him not being a very early adopter (he joined on June 24, 2020). 13th on the list is conspiracy theorist Lin Wood, who, prior

to Parler’s recent hiatus, was leveraging the platform to spread unsubstantiated allegations of election theft and post continued incitements to violence.<sup>9</sup>

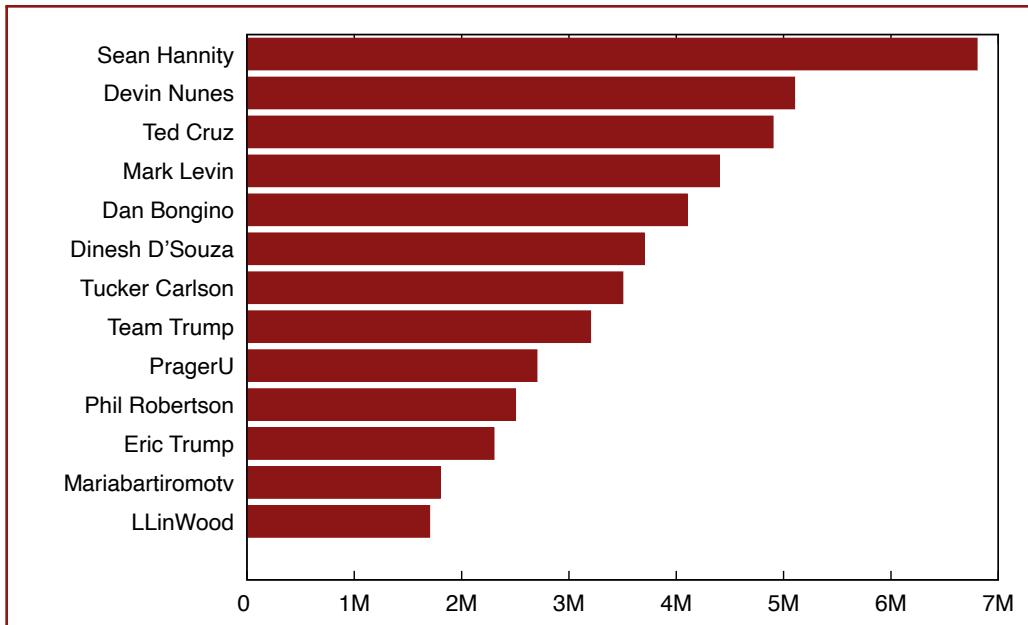


Figure 3: Follower counts of some of the top users as of January 9, 2020

### 2.2.3 Scoring and engagement

Platforms including Twitter and Facebook do not share a user’s “score”—a measure of general account favorability and popularity—via their APIs, but Parler does. The exact details of the scoring algorithm are not currently known, but we can assume that it is derived from some combination of upvotes and downvotes on original posts and comments (not on “echoes,” Parler’s version of a retweet or share), potentially with different weighting for each. The degree to which it affects the prominence and reach of particular Parler posts or comments is not known. Interestingly, we observe several of the top influencers with the largest follower counts, but also a cluster of QAnon-focused accounts and several of the syndicated publications.

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<sup>9</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisondurkee/2021/01/12/lin-wood-kicked-off-delaware-court-case-over-toxic-post-election-lawsuits/>

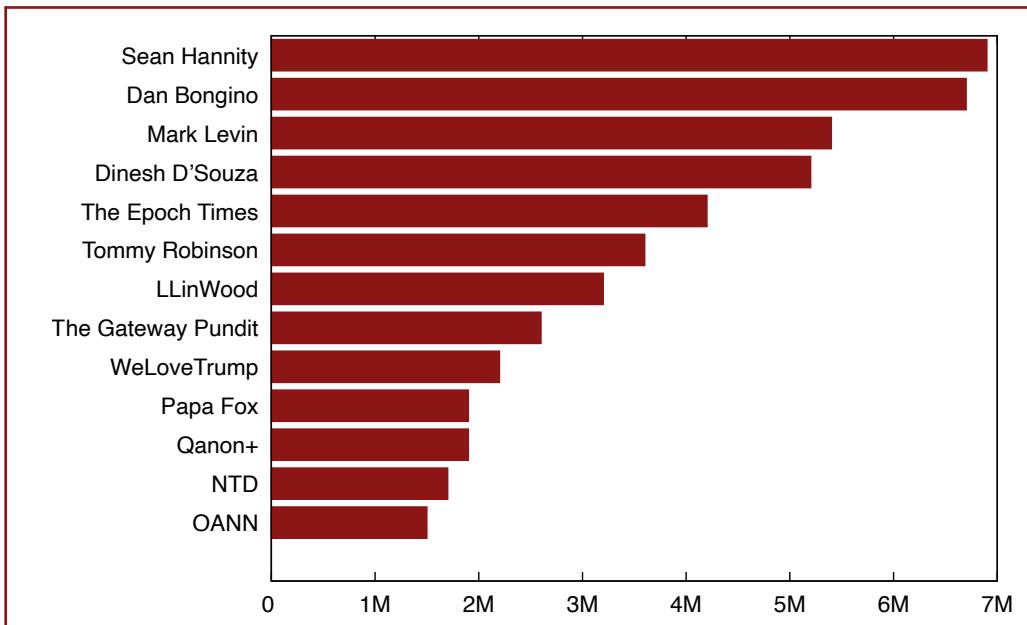


Figure 4: Top Parler users, ranked by score

### 2.3 Domains and URLs

As with Twitter accounts, many users include URLs in their bio field. Frequency analyses of both domains and full URLs indicates some of the promotions and marketing happening on Parler, sockpuppet accounts promoting “Trump coin” marketing as well as OnlyFans accounts, sometimes placed behind a Weebly placeholder page to make the porn marketing less obvious. Other domains of note are qmap.pub,<sup>10</sup> the formerly most-favored site for “Q drops,” and those promoting “Stop the Steal” and “Massupvote,” a growth service for Parler. Relative prevalence of domains and URLs can be found in Figures 5 and 6 on the following page.

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.logically.ai/articles/QAnon-key-figure-man-from-new-jersey>

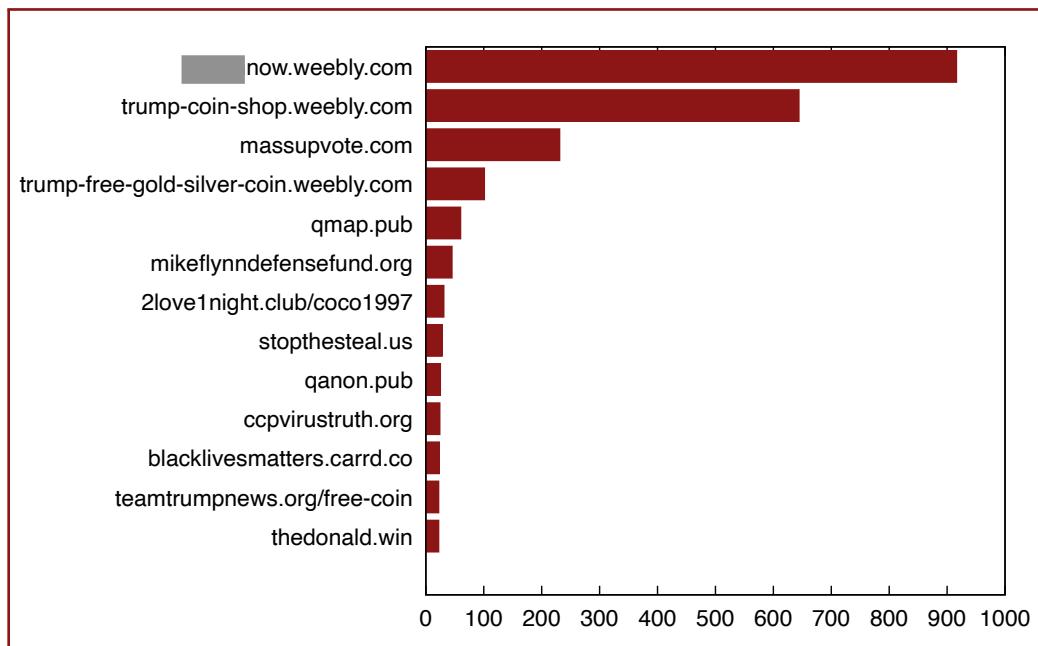


Figure 5: Top URLs shared in user bios, with one redaction of sensitive content

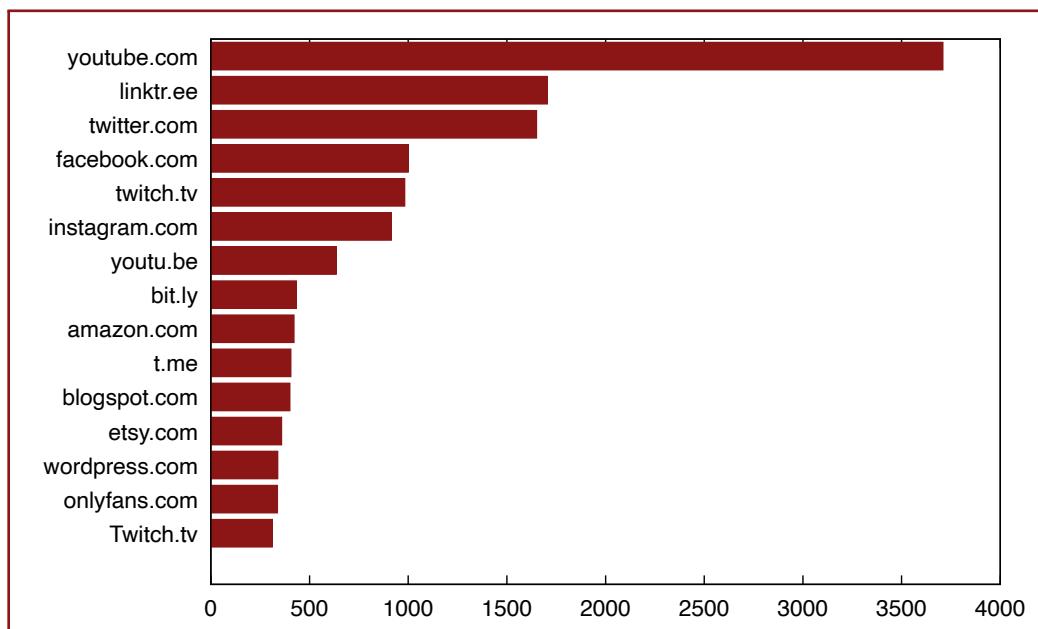


Figure 6: Top domains shared in user bios

### 3 Parler Growth and Communities

Since its launch in 2018, Parler has amassed roughly 13 million followers. Growth on the platform has not been smooth, rather, the platform's membership jumped up in response to exogenous events. As the user base grew, users began the early stages of community identity growth on the platform as well, potentially attempting to build groups or identities through bio language.

#### 3.1 New accounts over time

Parler has had three major growth spurts in its time, with the first in June of 2019, the second in July of 2020, and the third in November 2020, shortly after the U.S. Presidential Election.

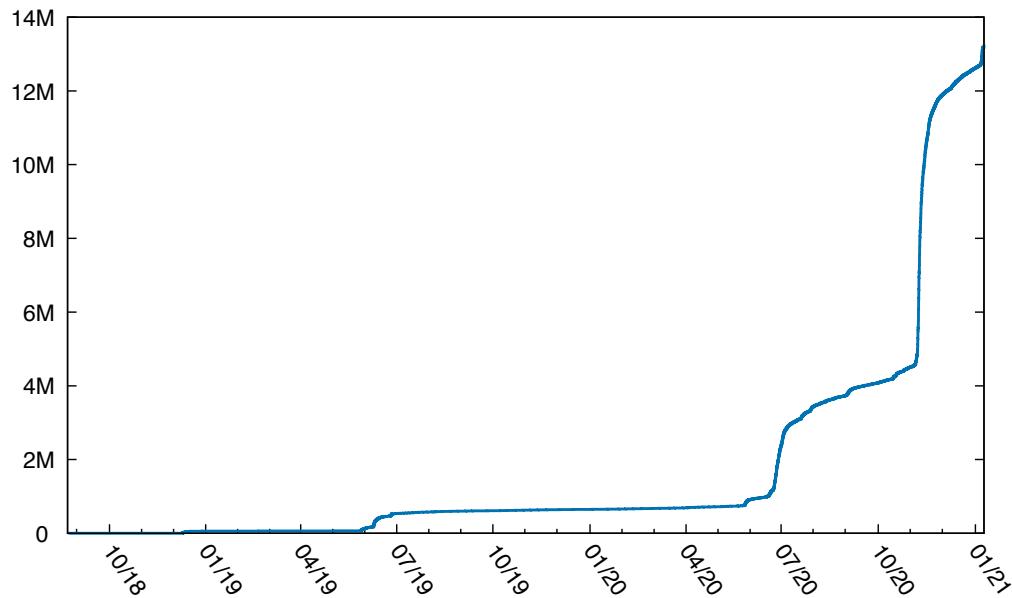


Figure 7: Cumulative user count (linear) from August 2018 to January 2021, mm/yy

Looking at this data on a logarithmic scale, the relative magnitude of these user acquisitions is more clearly apparent:

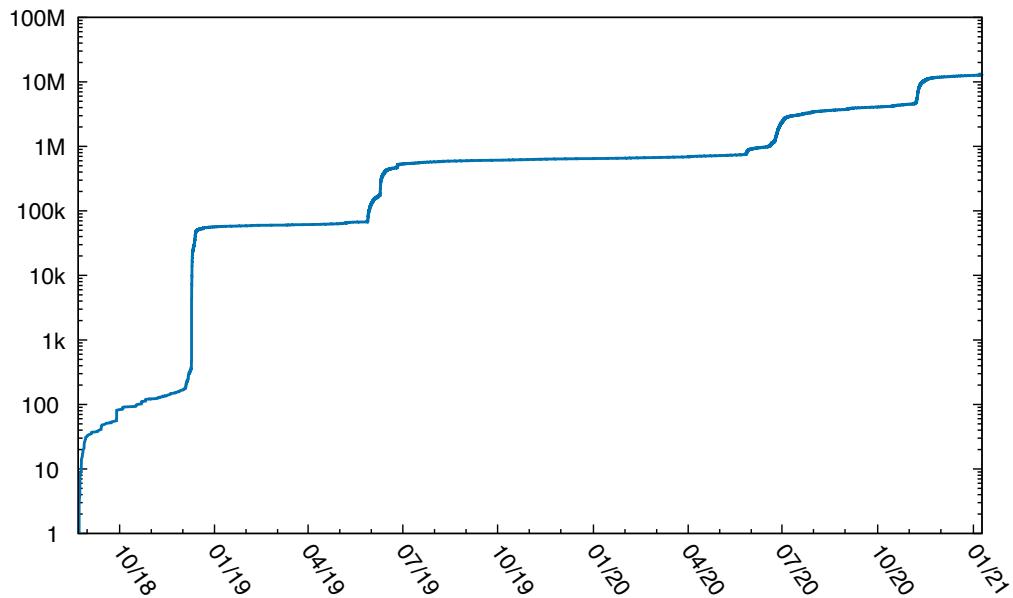


Figure 8: Cumulative user count (logarithmic) from August 2018 to January 2021, mm/yy

The most intense peaks are also more visible when viewed as a histogram of accounts created per minute, with the highest peak being in above 7000 per minute:

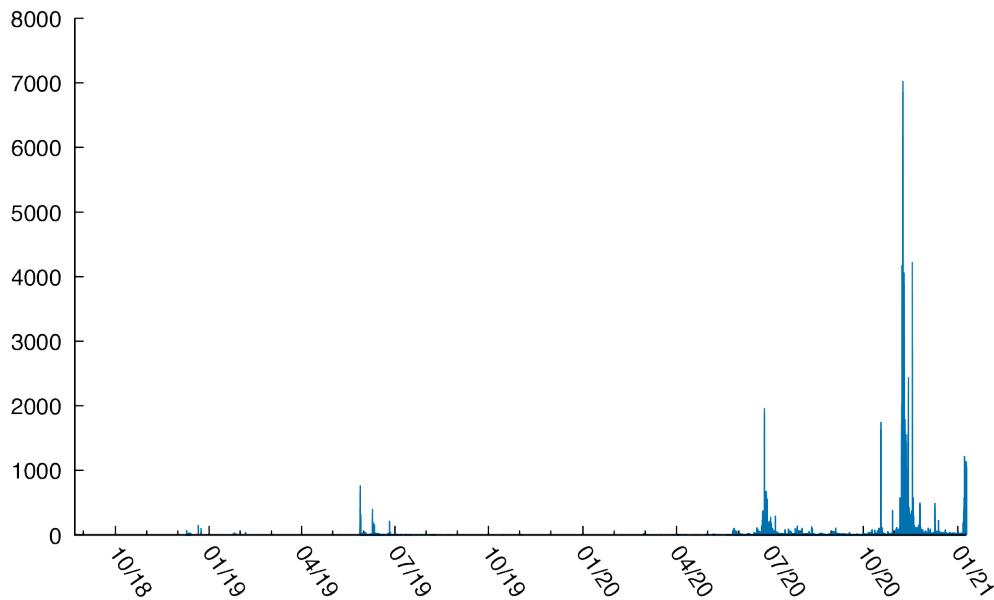


Figure 9: New user count per minute from August 2018 to January 2021, mm/yy

### 3.2 U.S. election-related growth

The account growth due to the U.S. election was far and away the most dramatic, with Parler more than doubling its userbase within a number of weeks—at its peak, Parler was registering 7029 new users per minute. At the very end of the range, a spike of user account creations coincided with Parler’s authentication and subscription requirements being reduced, likely due to Twilio canceling the SMS service Parler used to verify phone numbers.<sup>11</sup>

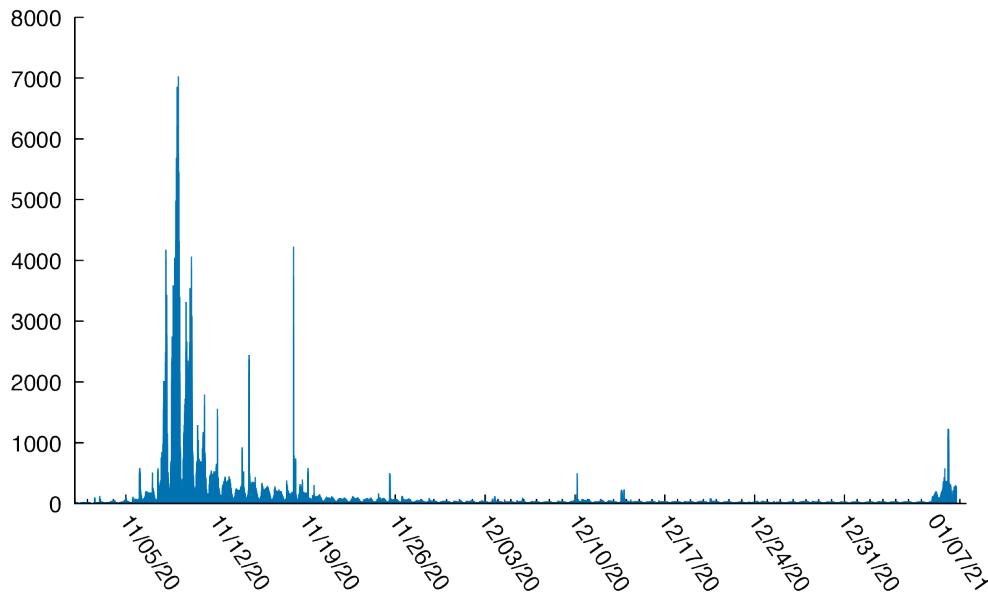


Figure 10: New users per minute, November 1 to January 9

### 3.3 Emoji-based community indicators

Stanford Internet Observatory has previously used<sup>12</sup> emoji representation in Twitter metadata to characterize communities of Twitter users, as many users write them in their profiles or bios as intentional community membership identifiers. Given the relatively small number of Parler users, we were able to analyze almost all of the users at once, and find subcommunities based on this data.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.sfchronicle.com/business/article/Bay-Area-internet-companies-crack-down-on-Trump-15862099.php>

<sup>12</sup><https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/twitter-takedown-october-2020>

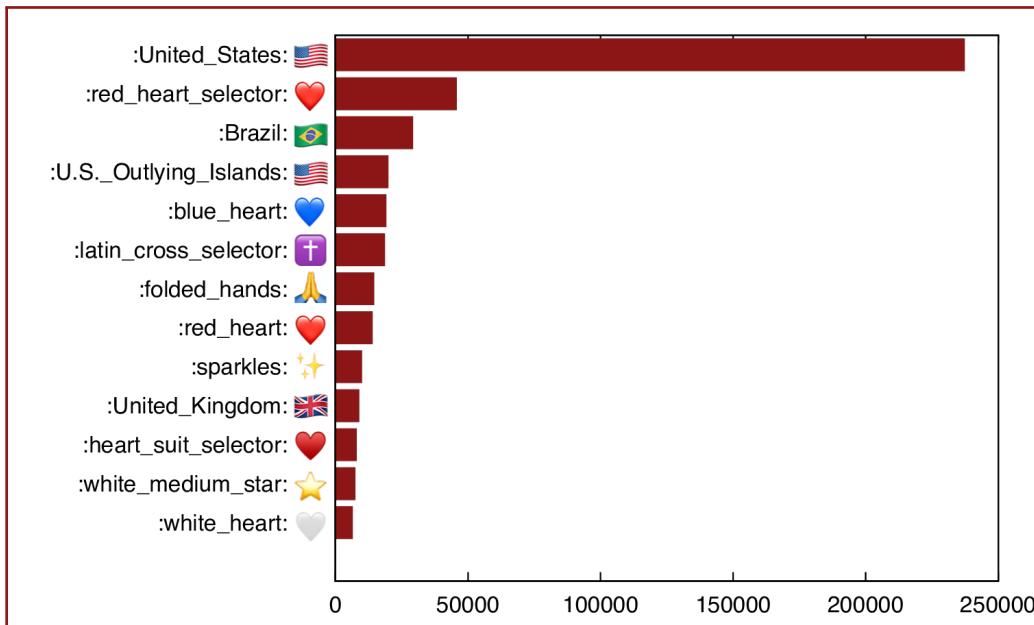


Figure 11: Emoji found in user bios

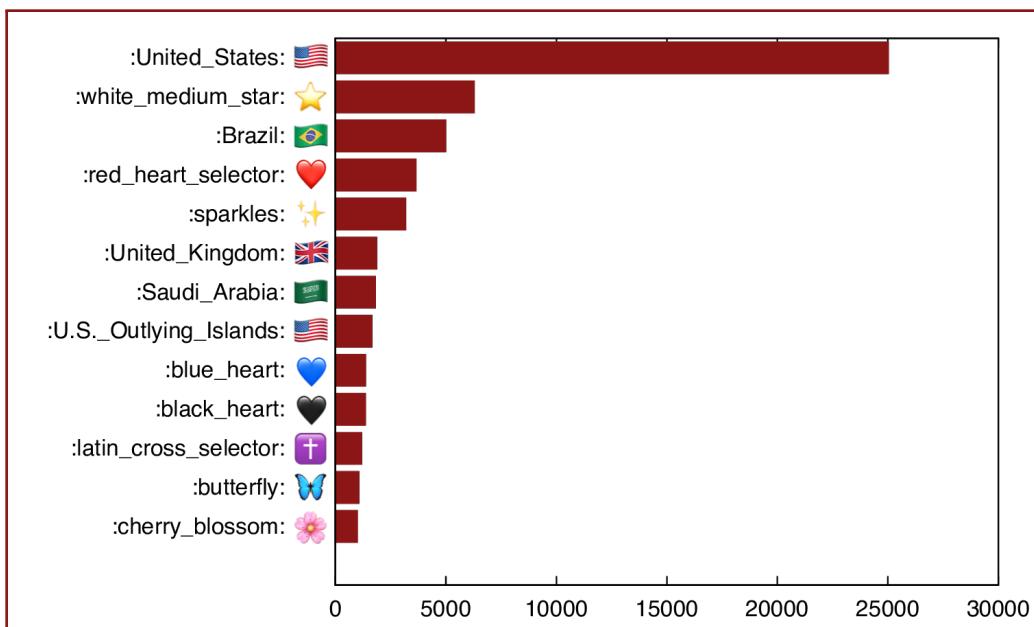


Figure 12: Emoji found in user display names

Unsurprisingly, the majority of users identify with the United States,<sup>13</sup> with notable clusters indicating affinity for Brazil, the UK and Saudi Arabia, along with

<sup>13</sup>While some emoji appear visually the same, different systems sometimes use different unicode classifications for the same emoji image. For example, the U.S. Outlying Islands flag emoji (🇺🇸) is the same as the U.S. flag (🇺🇸), but only appears on certain emoji keyboards.

users invoking Christian symbolism (the Latin cross and folded hands). The prevalence of blue and black hearts, as opposed to the standard red heart emoji, indicates supporters of the “Blue Lives Matter” slogan.

The “skin tone” attribute is a weak proxy for actual racial breakdown (particularly given that a dark tone “raised fist” emoji was used by a cluster of a few hundred left-wing accounts that appeared to be created largely to troll the majority right-wing userbase), but the near absence of “dark” for the popular “folded hands” emoji is suggestive:

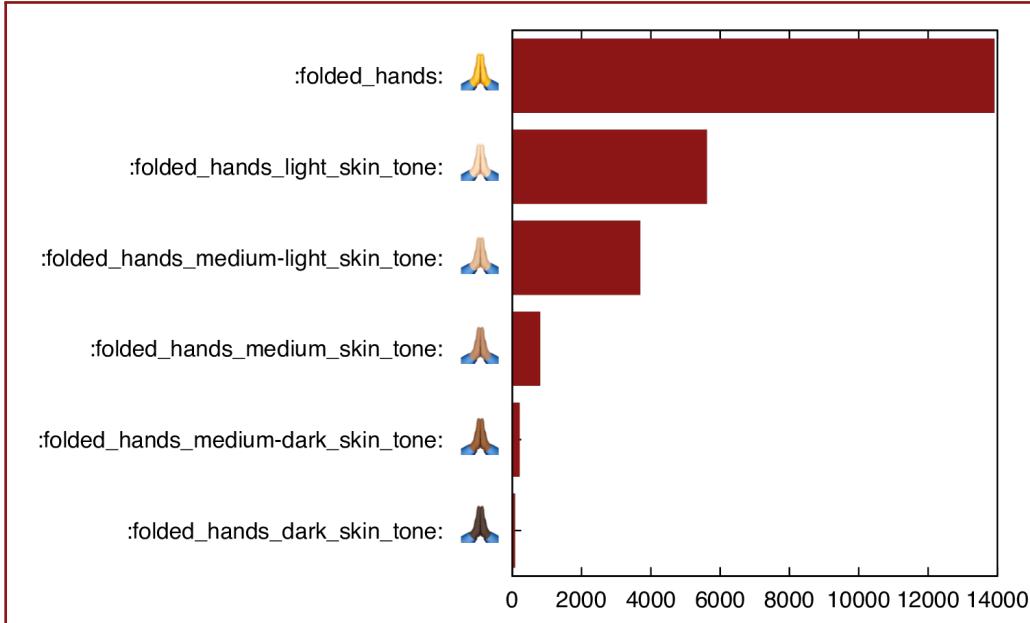


Figure 13: Breakdown of skin tone among “folded hands” emoji in bio

More notably, our initial analysis of emoji immediately highlighted the significant Brazilian and Saudi Arabian subsets of the Parler user base, which we discuss further in Section 4.

## 4 International Communities

While Parler is primarily thought of as a haven for U.S. right-wing Twitter refugees, we found that there were two notable blocks of users that were likely not North Americans: Portuguese speaking Brazilians and Arabic speaking Saudis. We primarily infer this from the user bios—there is no user-facing geolocation or user-specified language or locale available via the API. We analyzed bio text using the [langdetect](#) python package, which has several shortcomings common to untrained language detection algorithms: it is unreliable on short sentences or words (for example, the QAnon hashtag #WWG1WGA is consistently detected as being Polish), and it can be easily tripped up by sentences that use symbols from multiple Unicode code pages. Additionally, only 13% of Parler accounts have

bios at all (and these might be considered to be more “high-quality” accounts) thus limiting the sample size. However, even with limited data and an error rate of 5-10%, we still see some significant trends. We could find no indication that there were any Portuguese or Arabic speakers within the pool of Parler moderators, which is an indication that the platform may not have built capabilities to moderate or adjudicate reports on written content in these communities.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.1 Brazil

In June and July, 2020, we observed a significant uptick in Portuguese-language detected bios. An initial sharp spike on June 6 was likely due to a group of Trump allies and supporters, such as Dan Bongino, joining the platform,<sup>15</sup> followed by the Portuguese-language surge peaked on July 2 (see Figure 14).

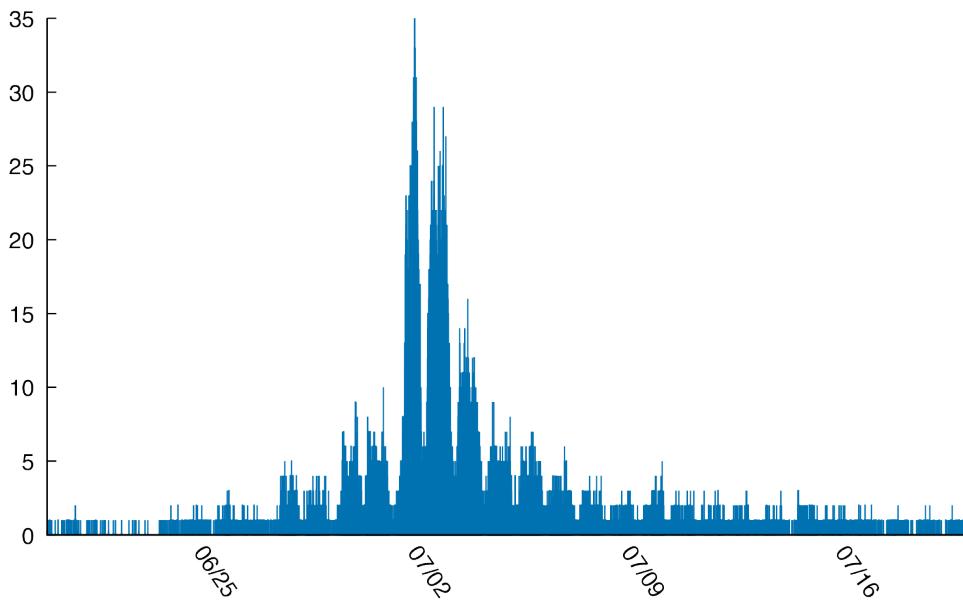


Figure 14: Portuguese-detected bio growth per minute, mid-June to mid-July 2020, mm/dd

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<sup>14</sup>Lack of language diversity has proven fatal on other platforms, notably with Facebook’s inability to understand and respond to the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar because it did not have moderators who could read Burmese. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-facebook-hate/>.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackbrewster/2020/06/25/as-twitter-labels-trump-tweets-some-republicans-flock-to-new-social-media-site/>

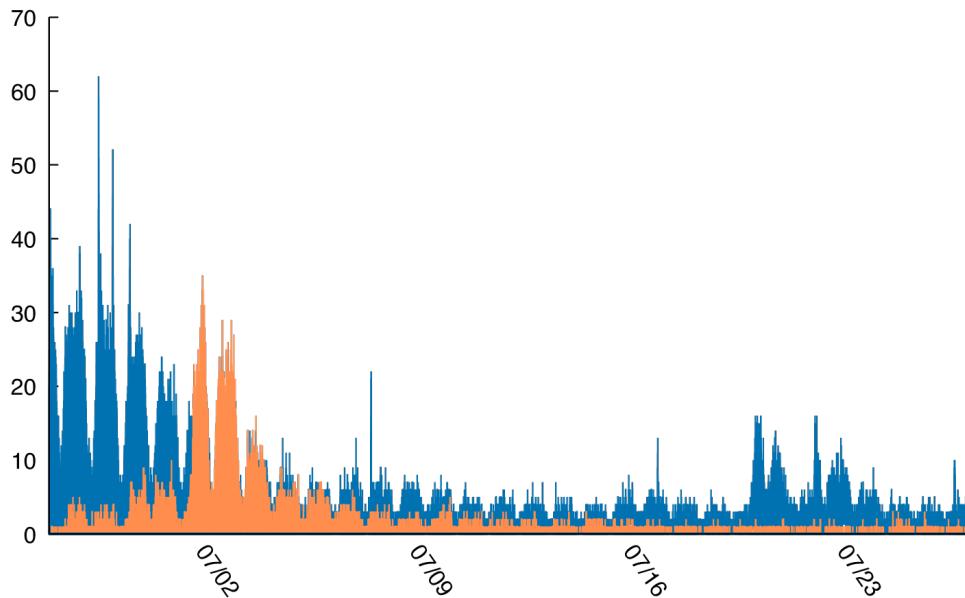


Figure 15: English (blue) versus Portuguese (orange) detected bio language, June 27 thru July 27

The July spike correlates with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and his son Flávio joining Parler.<sup>16</sup> Prior to this, there were only a handful of Portuguese-language bio users in our bio-detected subset (~850 as of 6/22). Along with the Bolsonaros, several other prominent Brazilian right-wing political figures joined Parler in July, including former education minister Arthur Weintraub, economic minister Paulo Guedes, and several other politicians from Bolsonaro's PSL party and the conservative PTB party. Famed astrologer and YouTube personality Olavo de Carvalho also joined the site at the very end of June. Analysis of emoji trends from bio and name fields also correspond with these language detection-based trends:

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<sup>16</sup><https://pleno.news/tecnologia/parler-alcanca-marca-de-27-milhoes-de-usuarios-ativos.html>

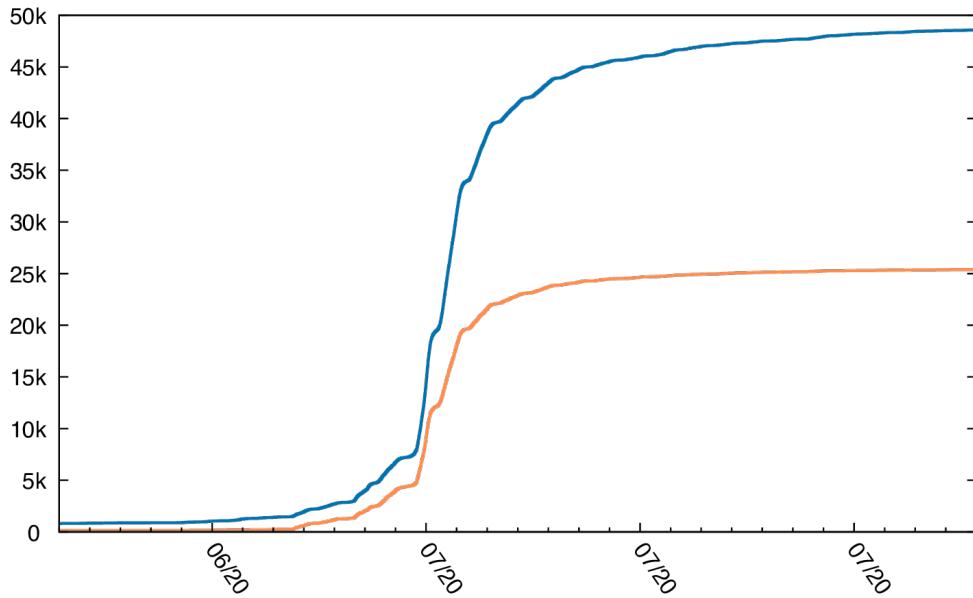


Figure 16: Portuguese-detected bio growth (blue) versus Brazilian flag emoji bio growth (orange), mid-June to mid-July 2020, mm/dd

After this initial splash, there were very few Portuguese-language users until the overall growth spike in November. The increase in Parler's popularity is also apparent from mentions on Twitter:

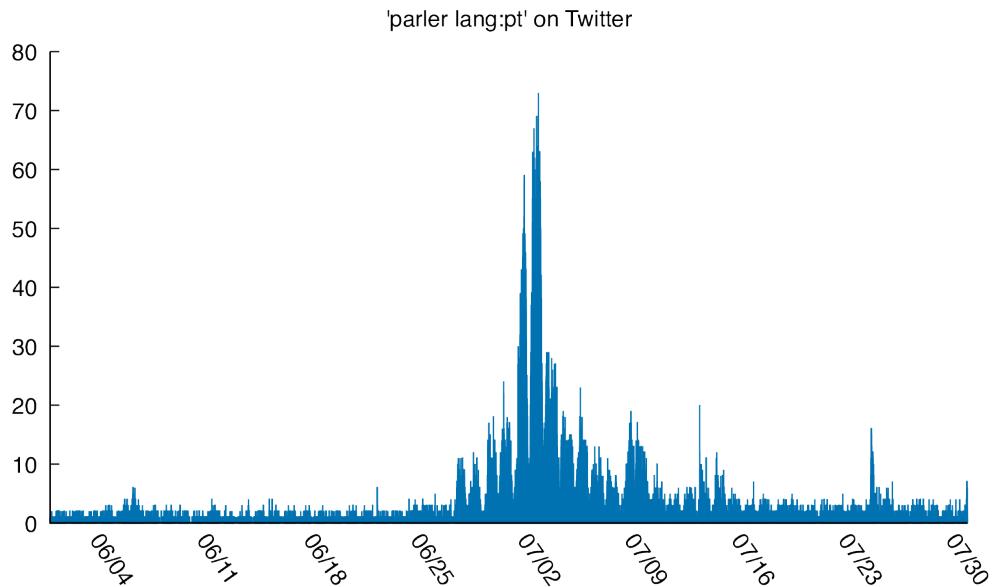


Figure 17: Mentions of Parler in Portuguese tweets, with the highest number of mentions on July 2.



Figure 18: Flávio Bolsonaro and Olavo de Carvalho posting on Twitter regarding their Parler accounts

The most prolific promoter of Parler during this time was Fernando Amaral, an online publisher frequently accused of disseminating misinformation.<sup>17</sup> During July he posted about Parler 592 times, including #Parler and #ParlerBrasil in every post.

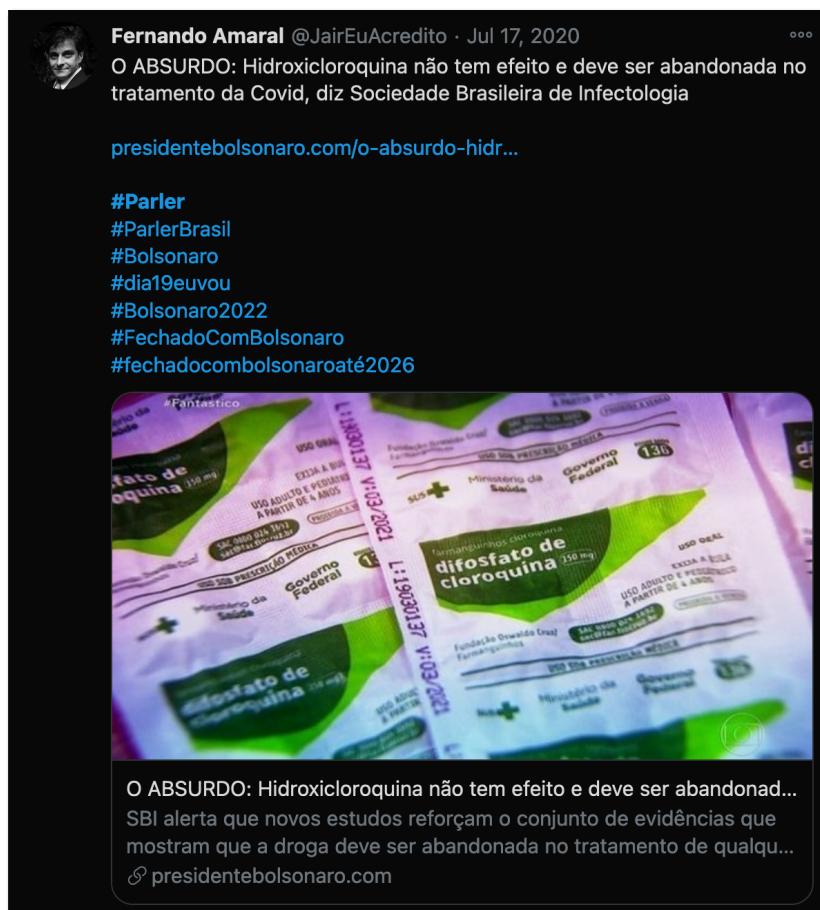


Figure 19: Fernando Amaral promoting hydroxychloroquine and Parler

<sup>17</sup><https://epoca.globo.com/guilherme-amado/redes-de-noticias-falsas-mudam-de-perfil-agora-apostam-na-defesa-promocao-do-governo-bolsonaro-23435073>

After this surge, Parler mentions on Twitter persisted at a higher level than before, but correlated with almost no Brazilian account creations on Parler itself until the larger surge around the U.S. election. It seems that Parler may have been more popular on Brazilian Twitter than on Parler itself.

In terms of “score,” the highest ranked entity on Parler is [Jornal da Cidade Online](#), a notorious source of disinformation in Brazil. Among other conspiracies, it has spread misinformation about Venezuelans having access to Brazilian voting machines—a commonality with U.S. misinformation campaigns.

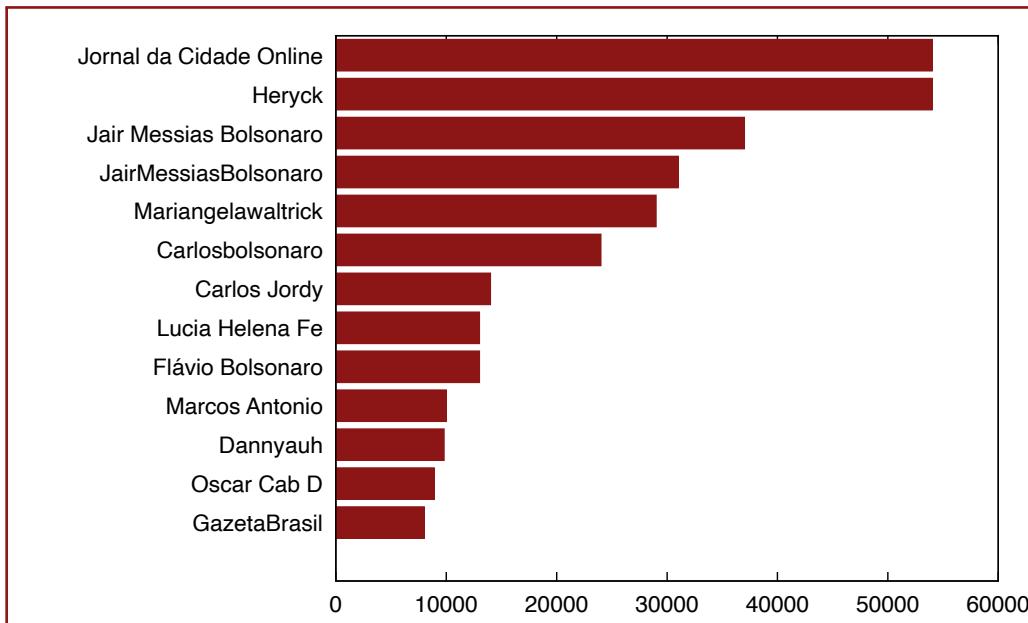


Figure 20: High scoring users within the Brazilian userbase

There are only 3 verified (“Gold”) users in the Brazilian dataset: Jair Bolsonaro, Flávio Bolsonaro and Brazilian politician Carlos Jordy. However, the gold badge verification, intended to mitigate impersonation, doesn’t appear to have as much of an impact as might be desired: the unverified account “jairmessiasbolsonaro” had at one point a notably higher score than the verified Bolsonaro account, with much higher engagement. There were three additional active Bolsonaro impersonator accounts, all using the same banner image and bio, so while the gold badge may indicate one account is “real”, there does not appear to be any associated moderation process that ensures duplicate accounts do not proliferate.

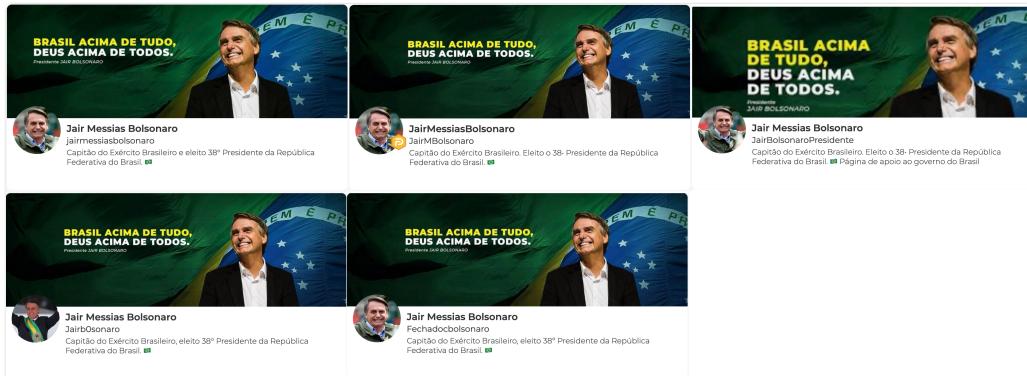


Figure 21: Various “Bolsonaro” accounts, contrasted with the gold-badge verified account. The bio texts all read “Captain of the Brazilian Army and elected 38th President of the Federal Republic of Brazil.”

Users with the highest follower counts include Bolsonaro, and Weintraub, as well as several writers for the website “Brasil sem Medo” (Brazil without Fear). In May 2020 the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court investigated Bernardo P Küster, Leandro Ruschel, and Filipe Martins of Brasil sem Medo for spreading disinformation,<sup>18</sup> potentially in coordination with members of Bolsonaro’s inner circle.<sup>19</sup>

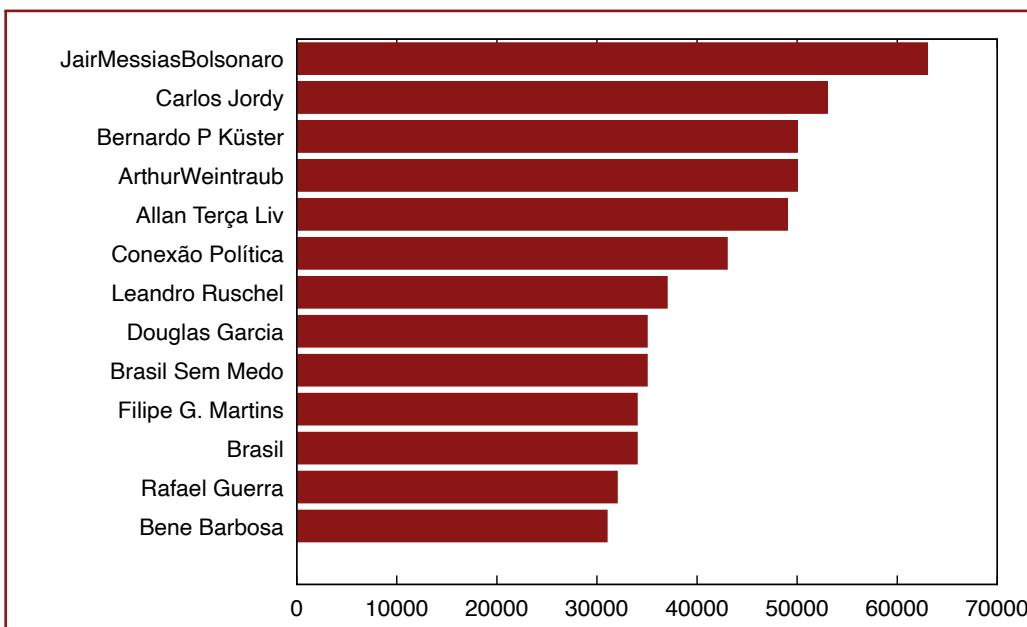


Figure 22: Highly followed users within the Brazilian userbase

<sup>18</sup> <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020-05-27/policia-federal-mira-aliados-de-bolsonaro-em-investigacao-sobre-noticias-falsas.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://medium.com/dfrlab/facebook-removes-inauthentic-network-linked-to-bolsonaro-allies-5927b0ae750d>

## 4.2 Saudi Arabia

In June 2019 about 200,000 users in Saudi Arabia joined Parler, according to Reuters.<sup>20</sup> Many Saudis tweeted in early June that they were creating Parler accounts in response to Twitter suspending Saudi accounts,<sup>21</sup> On Twitter, they used hashtags like #ParlerKSA (for Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) to recruit and encourage followers to move to the platform. So many new Parler accounts were created in June that for periods of time Parler was inoperable, with Arabic user signups exceeding those of English-speaking users.

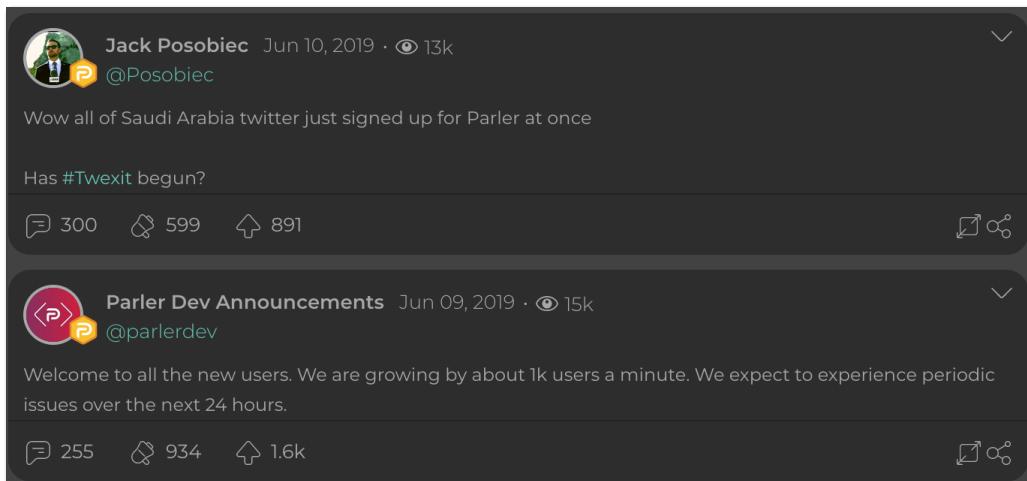


Figure 23: Jack Posobiec remarking on the surge of user signups from Saudi Arabia

We investigated this trend by looking at the 21,000 Parler accounts that had bios with Arabic text (many Parler accounts do not have bios). About 80% of these accounts joined Parler in June or July 2019, as shown in Figure 24 on the next page. Based on the bios, which often had the Saudi flag emoji or words referring to Saudi Arabia, we believe the majority of these accounts are from Saudi Arabia.

<sup>20</sup><https://www.reuters.com/article/twitter-saudi-politics/refile-unhappy-at-twitter-thousands-of-saudis-crash-pro-trump-social-network-idUSL2N23J001>

<sup>21</sup>[https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/info-ops-disclosure-data-september-2019.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/info-ops-disclosure-data-september-2019.html)

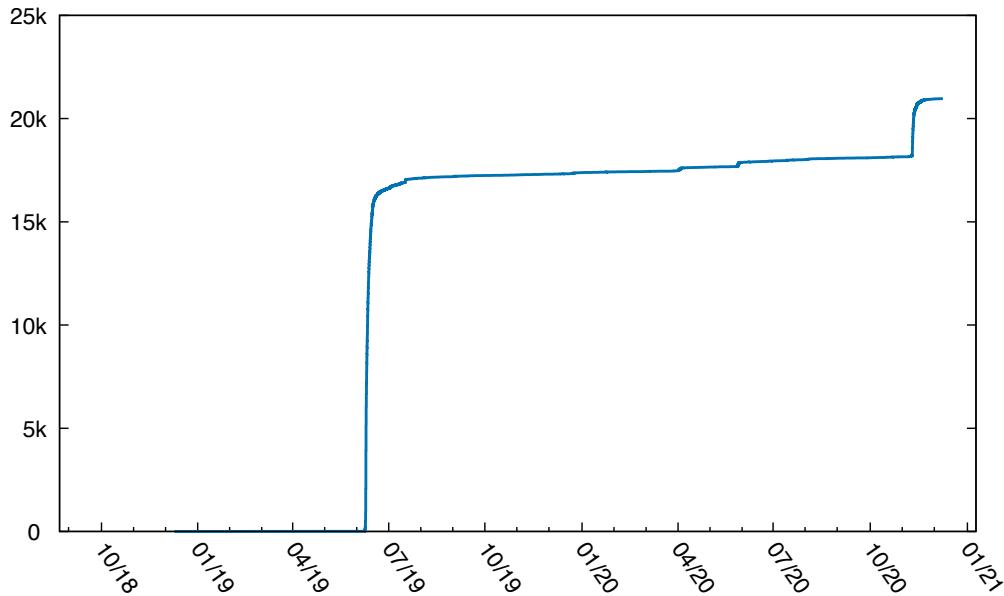


Figure 24: Cumulative account creation for Parler users with Arabic language bios.

Earlier in 2019, Twitter suspended six accounts that originated in Saudi Arabia, the largest of which was a news account with 95,000 followers.<sup>22</sup> It is not clear whether the movement to Parler was a direct response to this, or whether there were other takedowns of Saudi Twitter accounts that were not publicized.

Twitter went on to suspend several Saudi networks later in 2019 and in 2020, including one network with 88,000<sup>23</sup> accounts. One of the larger Parler accounts, username G26, was linked to a suspended Twitter account, @U50\_\_. This account was likely suspended in mid to late 2020.

The Saudi Parler accounts included a mix of Saudi nationalist accounts, at least one actress,<sup>24</sup> ordinary Saudi individuals, and spam accounts, including follow-back accounts. A handful of the accounts were verified, including one account for a Saudi journalist who posted anti-Twitter and pro-Saudi government content. The nationalist accounts included one with a profile that said سعودية الرّياض تَحْدُد الْهُوَى وَالْمُوَيْهَى الْعَالَم ("Saudi Arabia of love and identity"). One of its posts said رِيَاضٌ تَحْدُد الْهُوَى وَالْمُوَيْهَى الْعَالَم #G20 ("Riyadh leads the world #G20"), and another praised the Saudi King.

<sup>22</sup>Though Twitter did not announce this takedown until September 2019, the accounts did not tweet past April 2019, suggesting they were suspended in early 2019.

<sup>23</sup><https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/smaat-twitter-takedown>

<sup>24</sup><https://twitter.com/MaramAbdulaziz/status/1141726139817385984>



Figure 25: Saudi nationalist [account](#) on Parler. The profile photo is of Saudi King Salman.

The spam accounts included 203 accounts with nearly identical bios that said حسابي الرئيسي @koon (“my main account @koon”). These accounts all joined during the Saudi Parler rush, between June 10 and 17, 2019. Several of these accounts were handle squatting, capturing usernames that could be marketable. These included @Saudiking, @Pancake, @ArabianAirlines, @Clinic, @Delivery, @virginmobile, @souffle, @NokiaKSA, and @child. The @koon account, created on June 10, 2019, was one of the more popular Saudi accounts, with 1,200 followers. It is not clear whether the spam accounts were active.

### 4.3 Chinese and Japanese content

While Portuguese and Arabic are by far the most frequent non-English languages, there are some other areas of interest. Removing clearly misdetected languages, the bio breakdown is:

| <b>Detected language</b> | <b>Count</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| English                  | 1097982      | 81.90          |
| Portuguese               | 54073        | 4.03           |
| Arabic                   | 21053        | 1.57           |
| Spanish                  | 13754        | 1.03           |
| Farsi                    | 4894         | 0.37           |
| Japanese                 | 2619         | 0.20           |
| Korean                   | 673          | 0.05           |
| Chinese                  | 634          | 0.04           |
| Urdu                     | 374          | 0.03           |

Table 5: Language breakdown among accounts with bio text (detection errors excluded). Note that the majority of “Korean” and Chinese are for the most part Traditional Chinese.

Unusually, Japanese appears to be more prevalent than both Chinese detection sets combined, even accounting for the Korean accounts which were mostly misdetected as traditional Chinese. An examination of these accounts indicates that they are primarily involved in the small but active Japanese “QArmyJapanFlynn” QAnon adherent community, largely exiled from Twitter; for example, @hotoke888 was fairly prominent in this community on Twitter before the account’s suspension, with over 3800 followers.

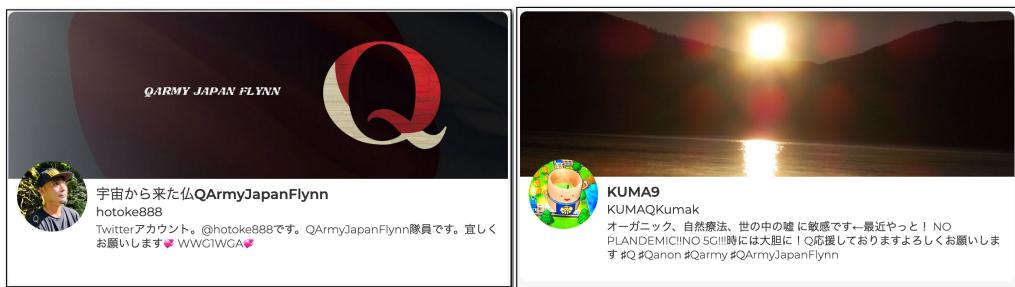


Figure 26: @hotoke888 and @KUMA9, another typical Japanese QAnon (and anti-5G) account

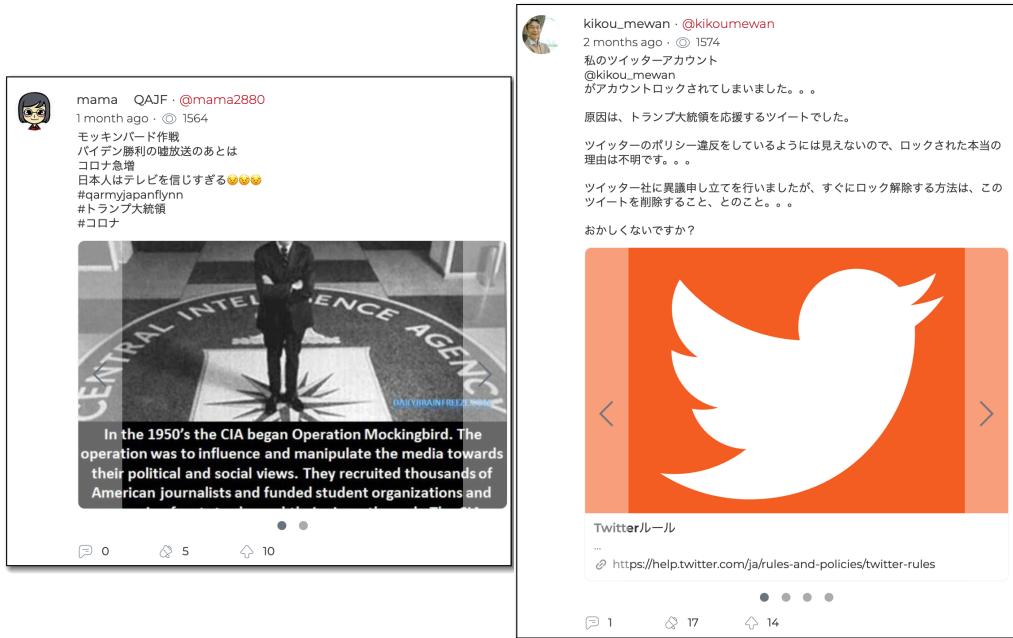


Figure 27: Japanese users on Parler promoting conspiracy theories and complaining about their Twitter account suspensions

The lack of Chinese accounts is particularly notable due to the fact that prominent right-wing personalities such as Miles Guo and Lu De were posting content primarily in Traditional Chinese, receiving moderately high engagement:



Figure 28: Lu De and Miles Guo Parler posts in Traditional Chinese

While we do not have access to all of the historical data of the accounts in question, it appears that the Japanese user base may have been larger but less active, while the Chinese userbase is smaller and very active, particularly on posts from the

Guo and Lu De profiles. Another explanation might be that there were a number of inauthentic accounts inflating these numbers—further research into the dynamics of these media properties is ongoing.

## 5 Conclusion

There has been much writing and speculation about the role of Parler in the political events of late 2020 and early 2021 in the United States. Our preliminary analysis has focused largely on the dynamics of the platform’s growth and users. In two years, Parler amassed 13 million users, but that number is still small when compared with Twitter’s 321 million or Facebook’s 7.2 billion. The growth patterns and behavior of both domestic and international account indicated two clear trends. The first is that Parler has emerged as a space in which accounts that have been suspended by Twitter Safety continue to communicate with their audiences. Second and somewhat more nuanced is that while some of the most prominent right-leaning media figures and outlets created accounts on the site, they largely did not cultivate their Parler audience separately from other social media audiences. Instead they relied on integrations to automate their posts.

Finally, while Parler prides itself as being an unmoderated “free speech” platform, there is already evidence of the inevitable challenges with this model. Predictably, spam, financial fraud and porn accounts proliferated on the platform, sometimes in violation of the platform’s limited content policies. Parler’s non-English user base is also increasing and diversifying, yet the platform does not appear to have any moderation capacities for other languages leaving the platform’s ownership increasingly blind to the content on the site. We believe that trust and safety should be considered in any product’s design, even when the platform mission is intentionally permissive.



*The Stanford Internet Observatory is a cross-disciplinary program of research, teaching and policy engagement for the study of abuse in current information technologies, with a focus on social media. The Observatory was created to learn about the abuse of the internet in real time, and to translate our research discoveries into training and policy innovations for the public good.*

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