
FRAMES OF MISINFORMATION AND EXTREMISM

Web Forums and Social-Media Discussions

Monthly Summary

September 2022

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November 1, 2022

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This report contains top-line monthly numbers from a purposive sample of forums and discussions collected from 13 platforms that are known for hosting misinformation, extremism, and conspiracism (MEC sector).

This project receives funding from the Ohio Supercomputer Center through a faculty grant.

September 2022 Activity Summary

Methodological Notes: Activity levels are defined as the % of posts with at least one key word, phrase, or stem identified with particular themes. Results are limited exclusively to posts with at least 50 words. The complete list of current platforms from which forums were selected can be found toward the end of this document, and there will be more transparency regarding forums with the October report. While there is still some space to add a small number of channels, several forum types are now maxxed out given current processing capabilities. Historical trends are restated on a monthly basis as forums are added or dropped from the study. Documentation is also being rolled out in October, and as it appears, it can be found on my personal website, <https://www.rogersperspectives.com>. The quarterly supplement reporting results for all frames will reappear with this most recent quarter and will be placed on my personal site by the end of October without an email announcement.

Key Trend

Activity in the Alt-Right supergroup and especially its Extreme-Right component continued to rise after the spike precipitated by the FBI raid of Mar-a-Lago in August. While overall activity in the MEC sector fell 6% in September, activity in the Alt-Right supergroup grew 4% and its Extreme-Right component rose 14% (Fig. 1, 2, 3 and 4).

General Trends

- Among posts with at least 50 words in the purposive sample, September activity across all MEC sector forums averaged 10,027 posts per day, down 4% from August. It was 36% below the all-time study peak in August 2021 (Fig. 1 and 2).
- The two largest forum types – Conspiracy/Fringe and QAnon – declined at rates of 3% and 11% respectively (Fig. 1 and 2).

Recurring Topics

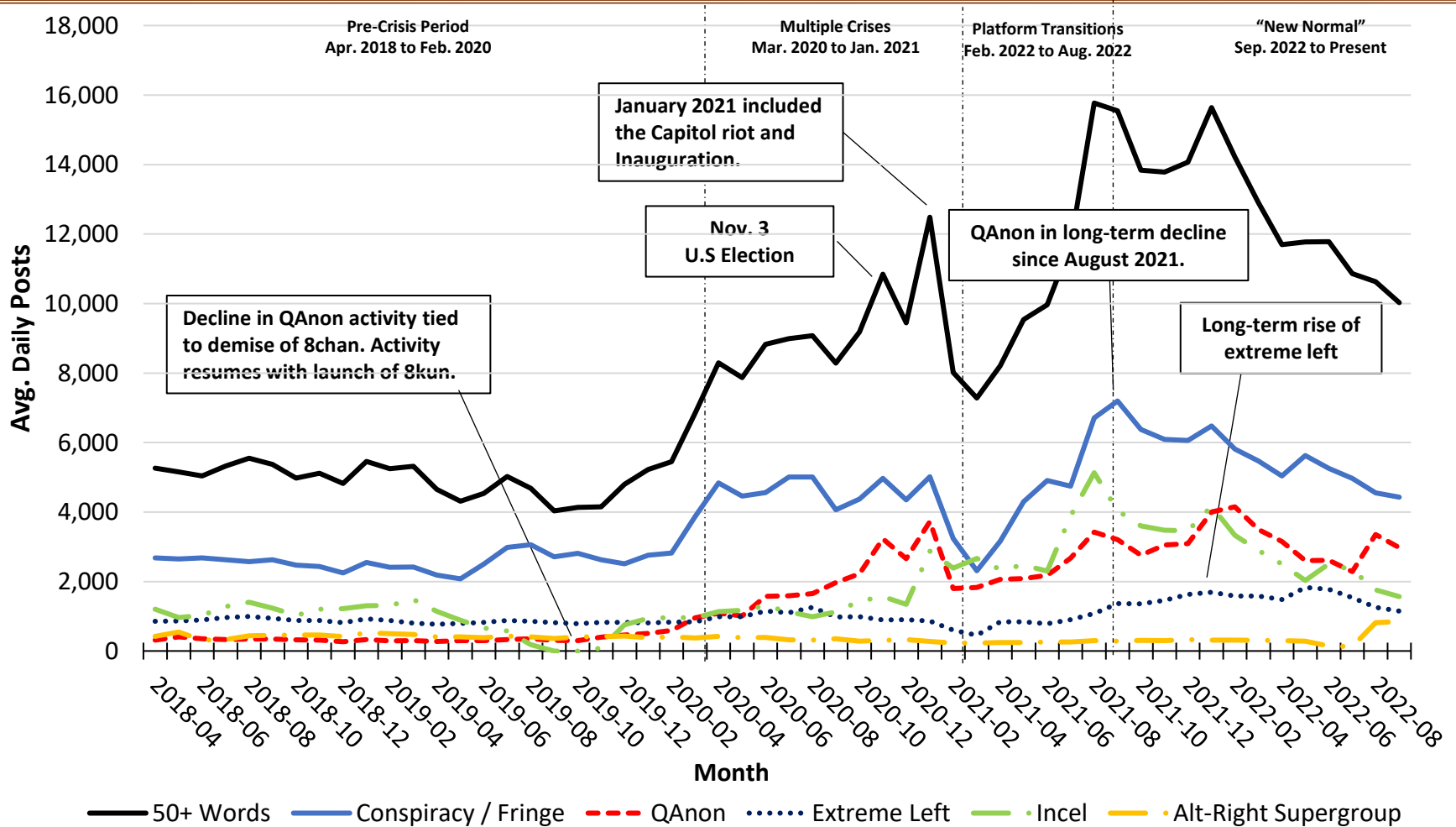
- The volume of Violent/Aggressive discourse fell 9% in September (Fig. 5). On a percentage basis, violence and aggression was present in 26% of all discourse, just above its all-time low for the study period (Fig. 7). Overall toxic discourse fell slightly, though high levels were still present among Incel and Extreme-Right forums (Fig. 5 and 8). The Religion frame remained steady, present in 30% of discourse (Fig. 9).
- References to Christian Prophecy increased 14% and was present in 31% of posts related to the Christian Radical Right (CRR). Christian Nationalism narrowly remained the largest CRR component ahead of Prophecy (Fig. 10).

Current Events

- The economy remained the major concern in the discussion of current events (Fig. 13).
- In September, more than half of references to sex crimes were not related to QAnon (Fig. 16).
- Health misinformation reporting expands (Fig. 17, 18, and 19). Cancer and diabetes were the two conditions with an unusually high gap in references to alternative medicine relative to subreddit benchmarks (Fig. 18). Cancer also scored high with regard to references to wellness and nutrition (Fig. 19). These patterns need further investigation to determine if they were signs of misinformation.

Figure 1

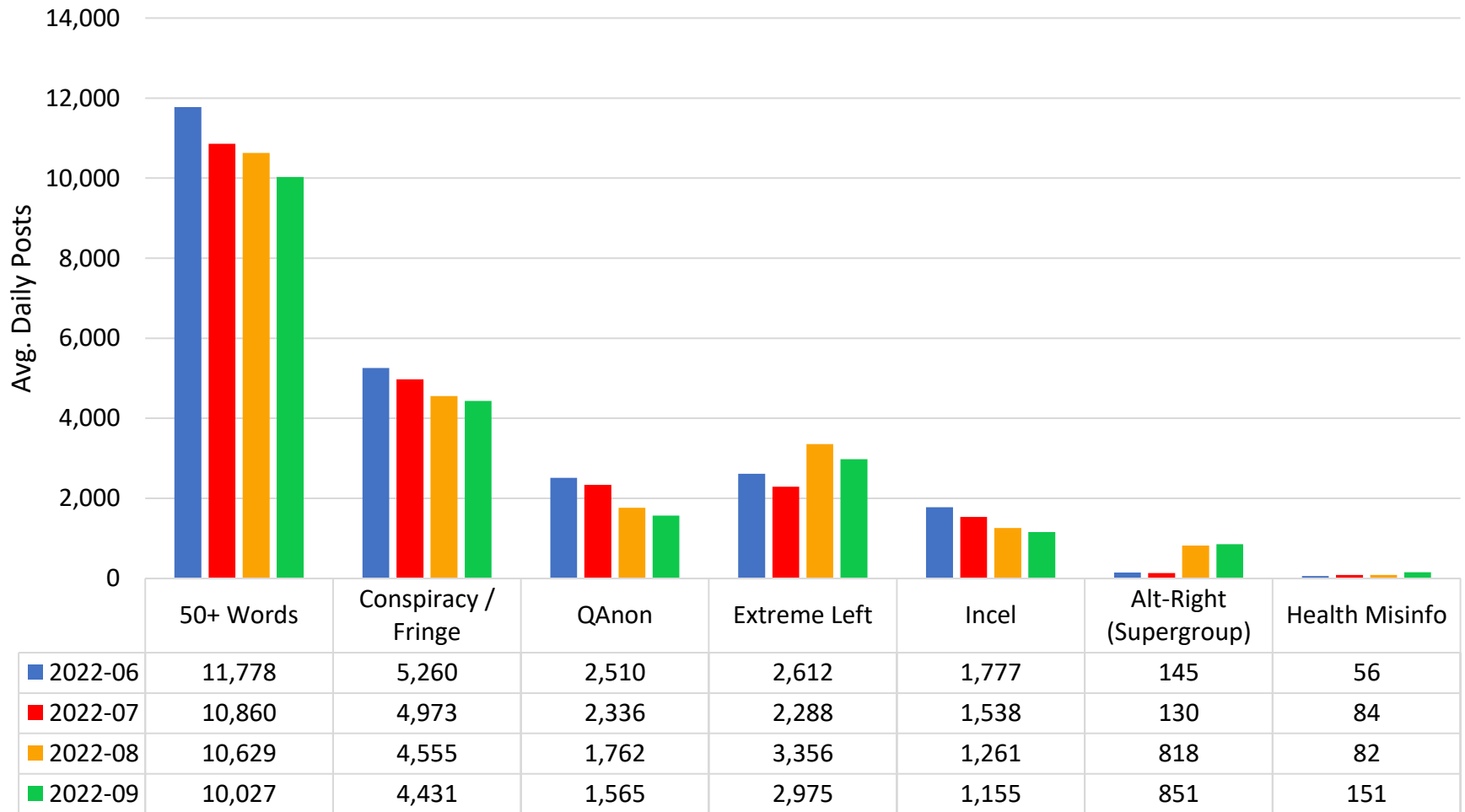
Avg. Daily Activity by Month



Note: 13,734,227 recovered posts with at least 50 words. Forums are not mutually exclusive. QAnon forums could be classified as both Conspiracy/Fringe and Extreme Right, but QAnon forums are separated due to their size and influence. This report uses a broad definition of the Alt-Right supergroup, which include both Extreme-Right groups (e.g., neo-Nazis, Boys, secessionists) and right-leaning groups with which Extreme-Right groups appear to be forming ideological alliances (Rogers, 2021). The breakout of the Alt-Right can be found in Figure 3. Health Misinformation forums not shown due to their small numbers most months.

Periods: The period of multiple crises refers to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, BLM protests, and 2020 presidential election activity. Platform Transition highlights the rise of new extremist and conspiracists forums in the universe of platforms, many due to their expulsion from Facebook and Twitter and the collapse of Parler.

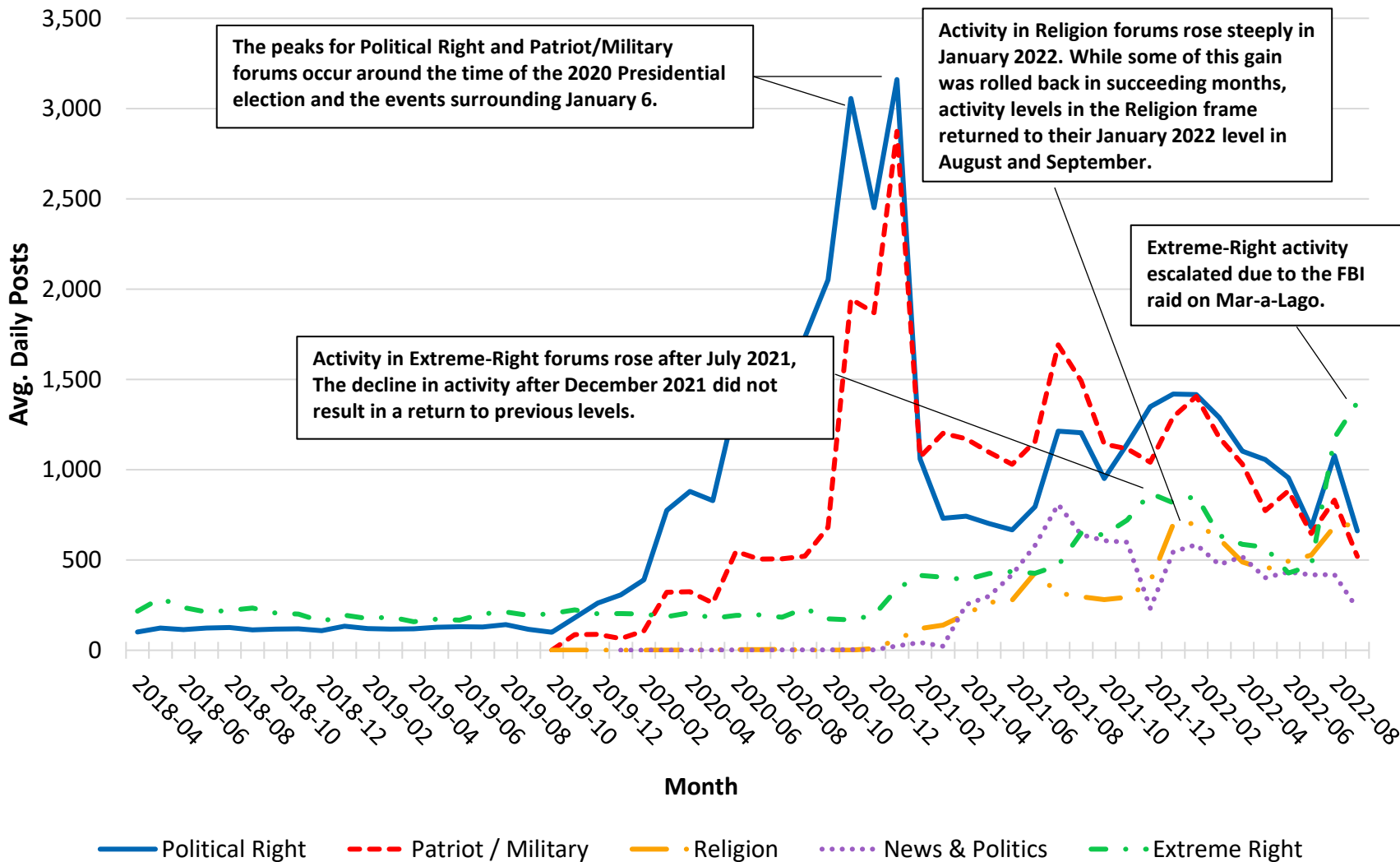
Figure 2 Avg. Daily Activity for Past Four Months



Note: 1,320,322 recovered posts with at least 50 words. Forums are not mutually exclusive. QAnon forums could be classified as both Conspiracy/Fringe and Extreme Right, but QAnon forums are separated due to their size and influence. This report uses a broad definition of the Alt-Right Supergroup, which include both Extreme-Right groups (e.g., neo-Nazis, Boys, secessionists) and right-leaning groups with which Extreme-Right groups appear to be forming ideological alliances (Rogers, 2021). The breakout of the Alt-Right can be found in Figure 4. Health Misinformation forums not shown due to their small numbers most months.

Figure 3

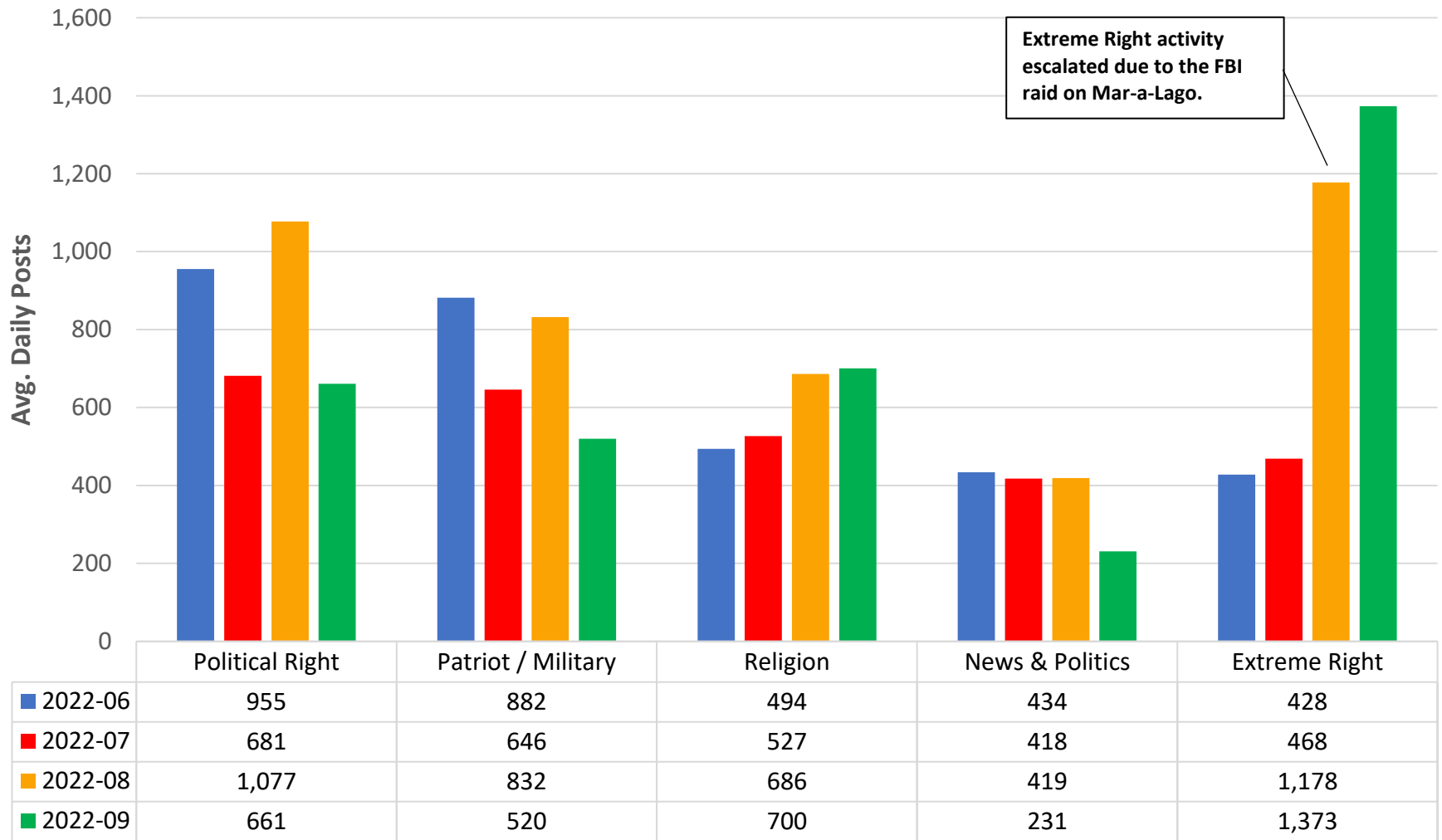
Avg. Daily Activity by Month for Alt-Right Supergroup by Month



Note: 2,634,461 recovered posts. These groups are a subset of forums classified as Alt-Right in Figure 1. The category Extreme Right includes but is not limited to neo-Nazis, Proud Boys, secessionists, and sovereign citizens. The Political Right includes partisan groups related to MAGA and libertarianism. While this study does not examine mainstream political sites, the discourse of partisan forums selected for the purposive sample often strays beyond normal partisan discourse.

Figure 4

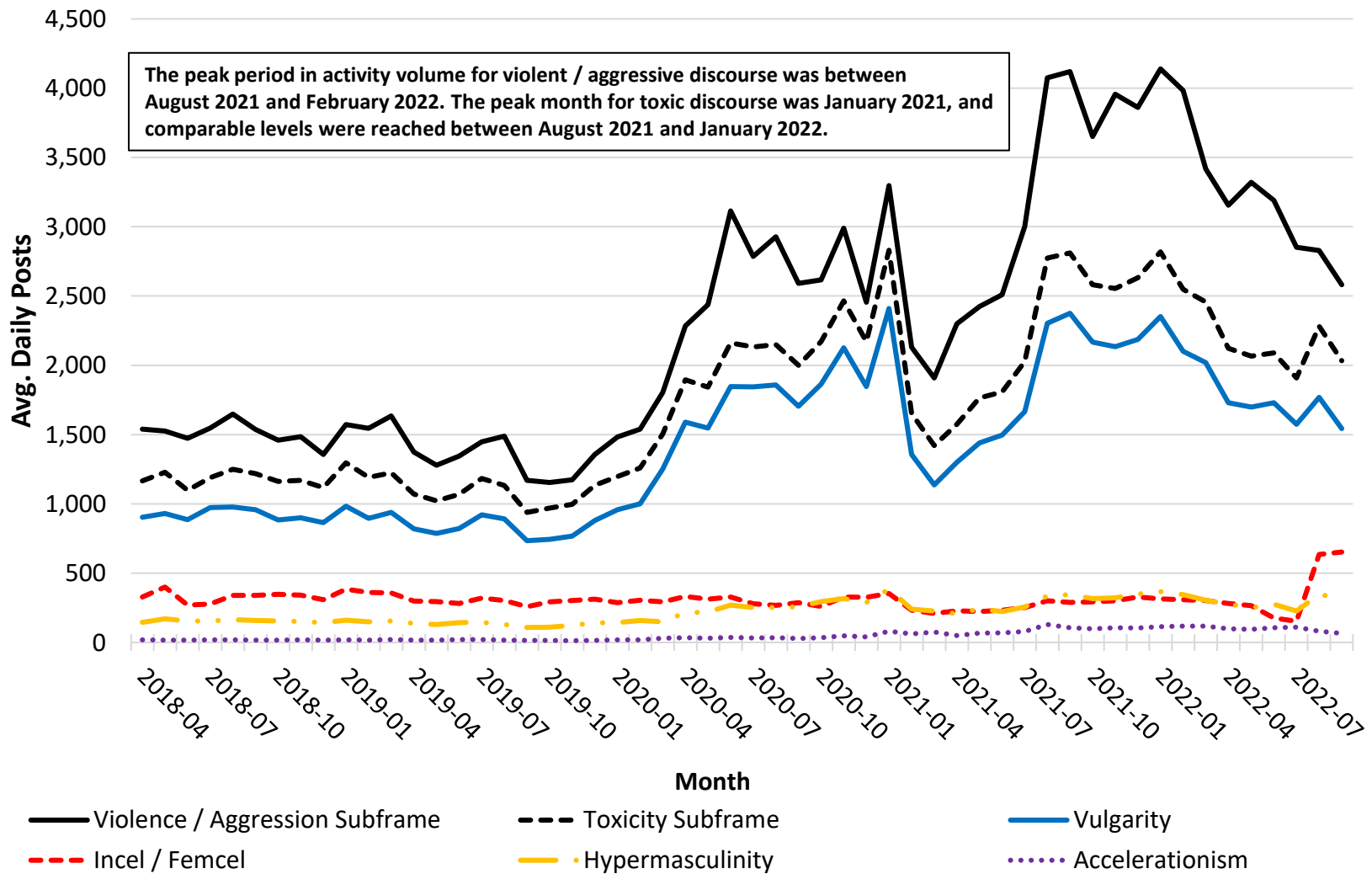
Avg. Daily Activity for Alt-Right Forums for Past Four Months



Note: 342,602 recovered posts. These groups are a subset of forums classified as Alt-Right in Figure 2. The category Extreme Right includes but is not limited to neo-Nazis, Proud Boys, and sovereign citizens. The Political Right includes partisan groups related to MAGA and libertarianism. While this study does not examine mainstream political sites, the discourse of partisan forums selected for the purposive sample often strays beyond normal partisan discourse.

Figure 5

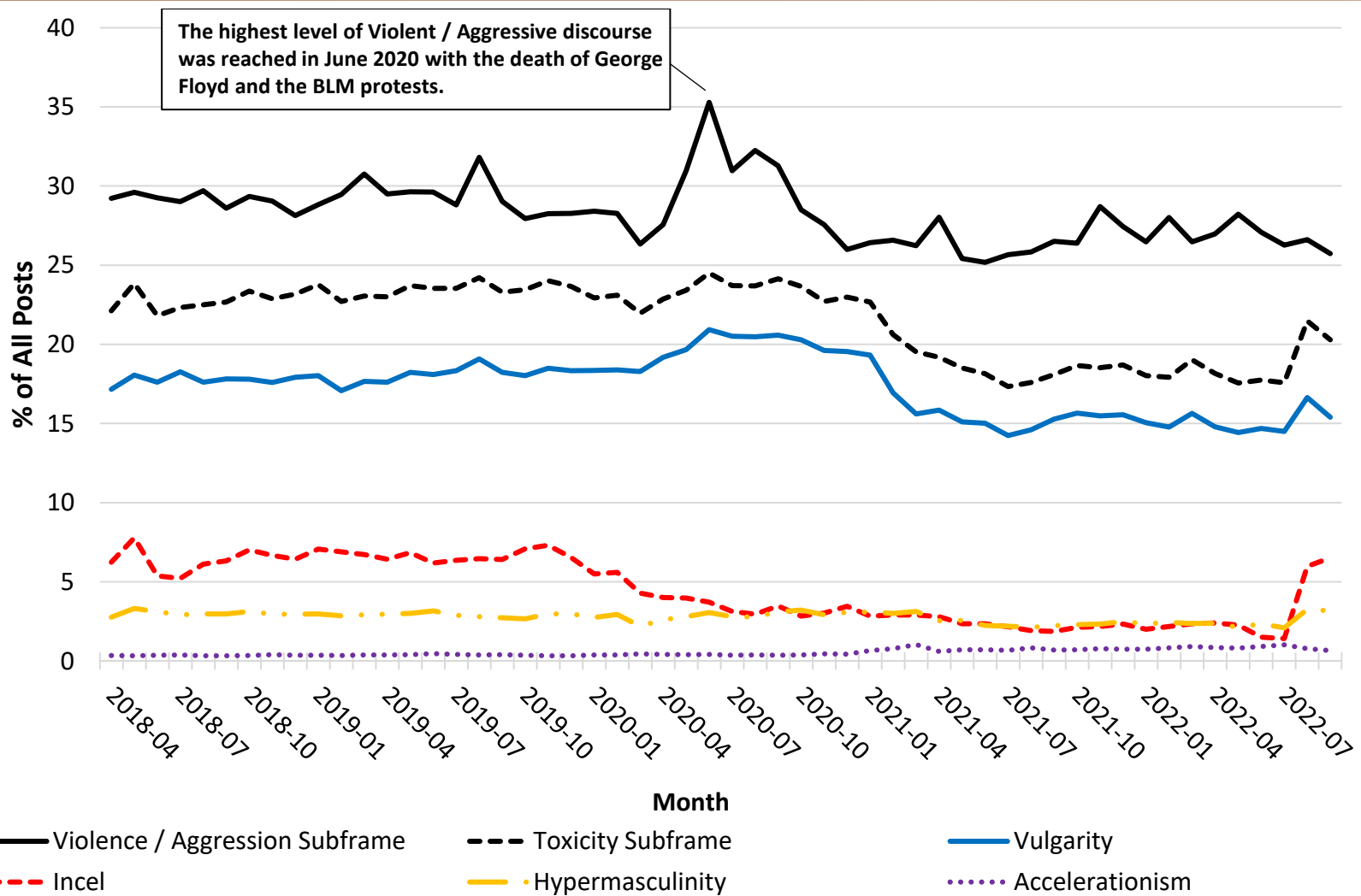
Avg. Daily Posts for Violent / Aggressive and Toxic Discourse by Month



Note: The Violence / Aggression subframe had 3,831,302 recovered posts. The Toxicity subframe had 2,848,989 recovered posts. The subframes are not mutually exclusive. Violent /Aggressive discourse is a standalone subframe in the Values frame and excludes references identified with the Military frame. Toxic discourse, also a subframe in the Values frame, includes the use of vulgar language, incel discourse, hypermasculinity, and accelerationism. Accelerationism does not include prophetic discourse (Fig.10).

Figure 6

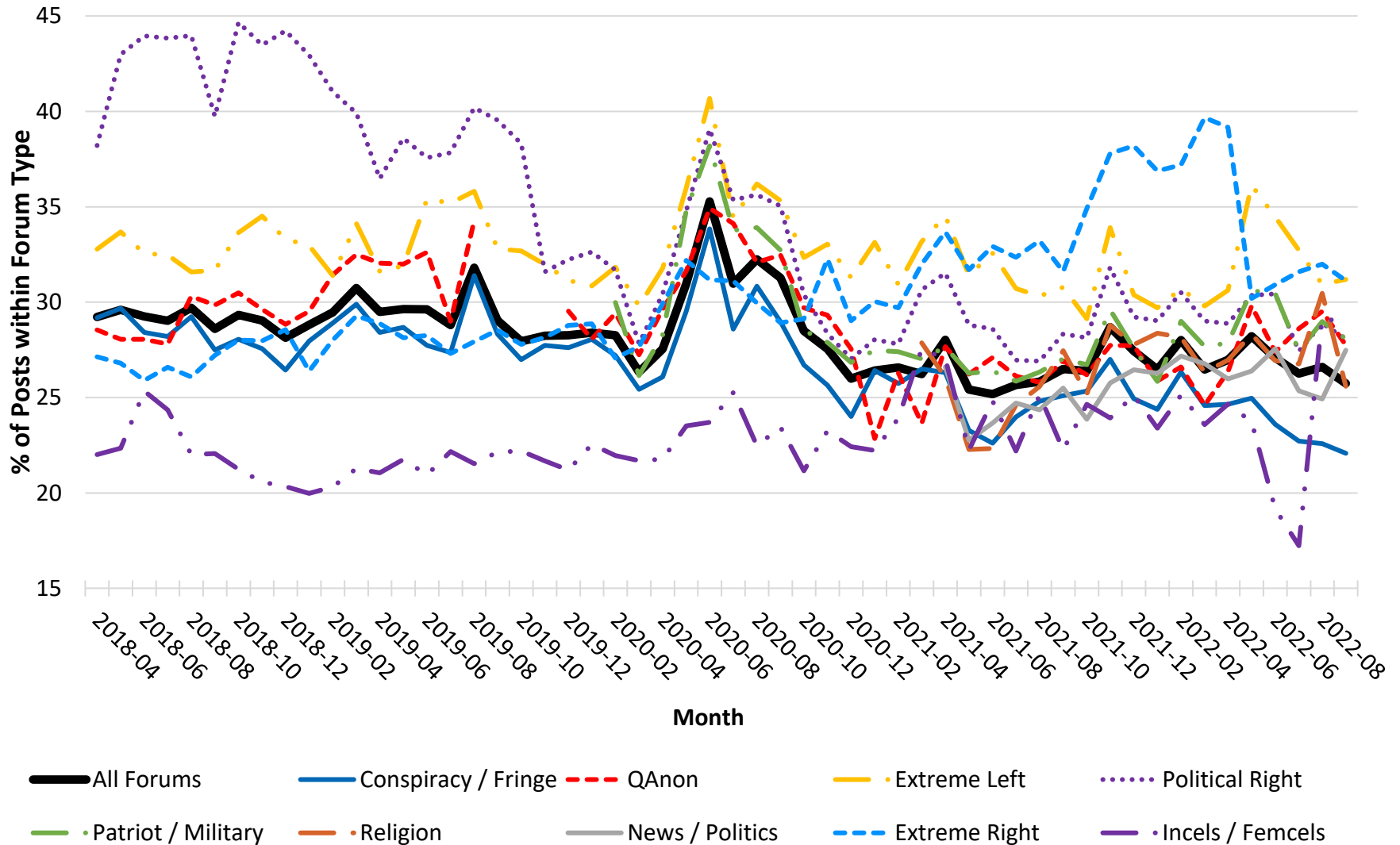
% Posts for Violent / Aggressive and Toxic Discourse by Month



Note: The Violence / Aggression subframe had 3,831,302 recovered posts. The Toxicity subframe had 2,848,989 recovered posts. The subframes are not mutually exclusive. Violent /Aggressive discourse is a standalone subframe in the Values frame and excludes references identified in the Military frame. Toxic discourse, also a subframe in the Values frame, includes the use of vulgar language, incel discourse, hypermasculinity, and accelerationism. Accelerationism does not include prophetic discourse.

Figure 7

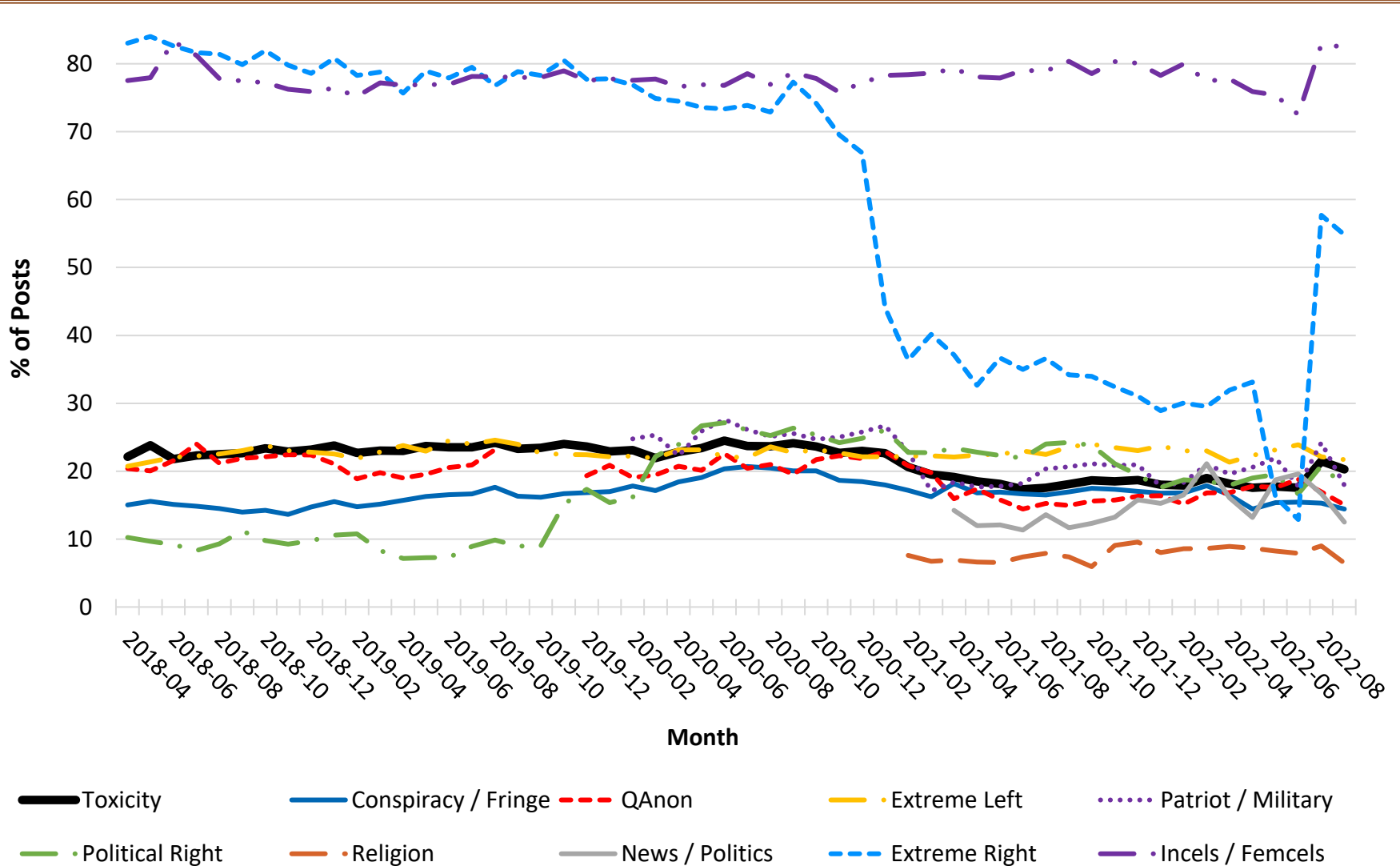
Violence as a % of Posts by Forum Type by Month



Note: The "All Forums" line is the base line for the entire purposive sample. Limited to months where the forum type had average daily activity of at least 100 posts.

Figure 8

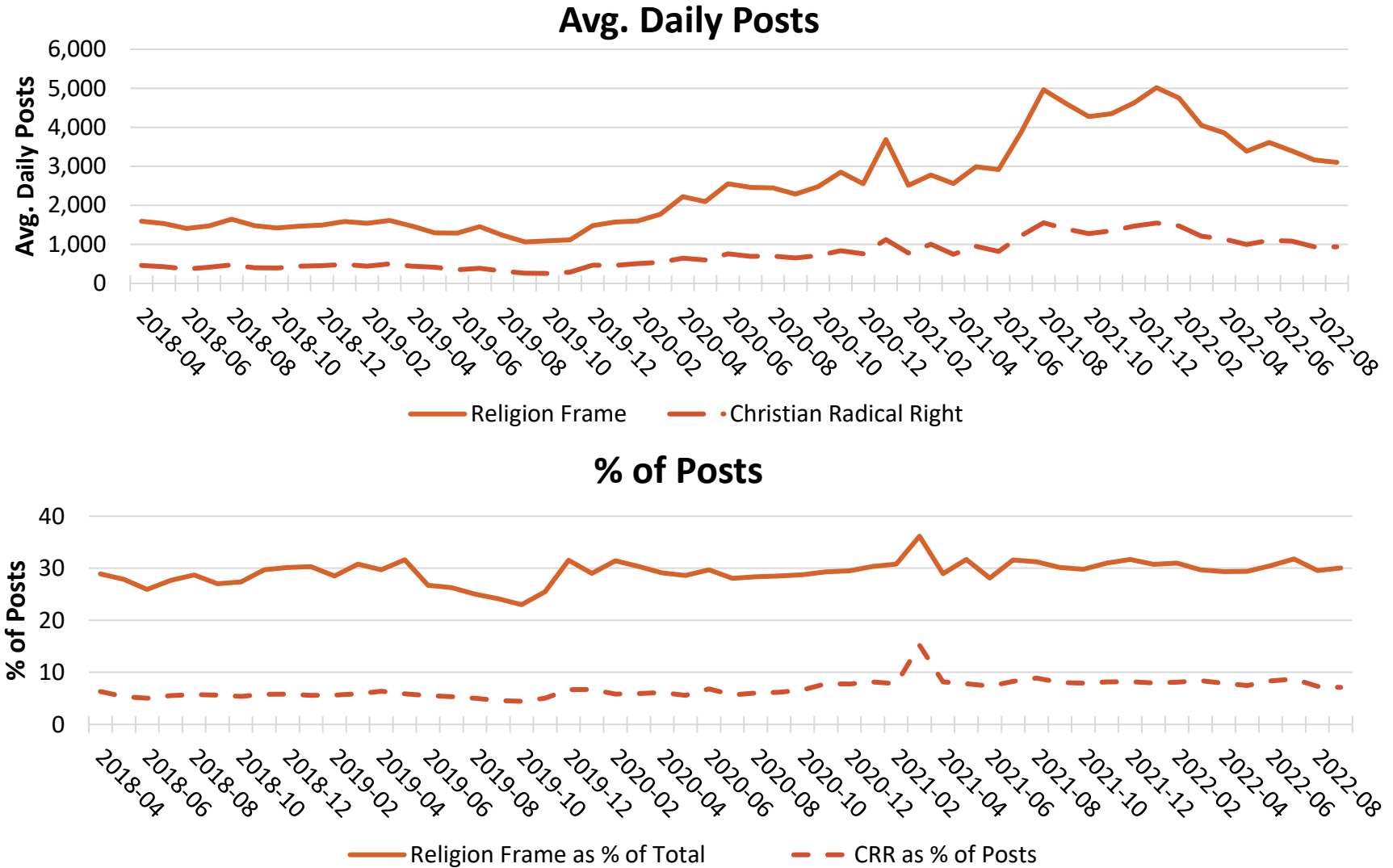
Toxicity as a % of Posts by Forum Type by Month



Note: The "All Forums" line is the base line for the entire purposive sample. Limited to months where the forum type had average daily activity of at least 100 posts. Incel discourse includes language about dating, appearance, and exercise that would not normally be regarded as toxic but in Incel forums reinforce the idea of involuntary celibacy.

Figure 9

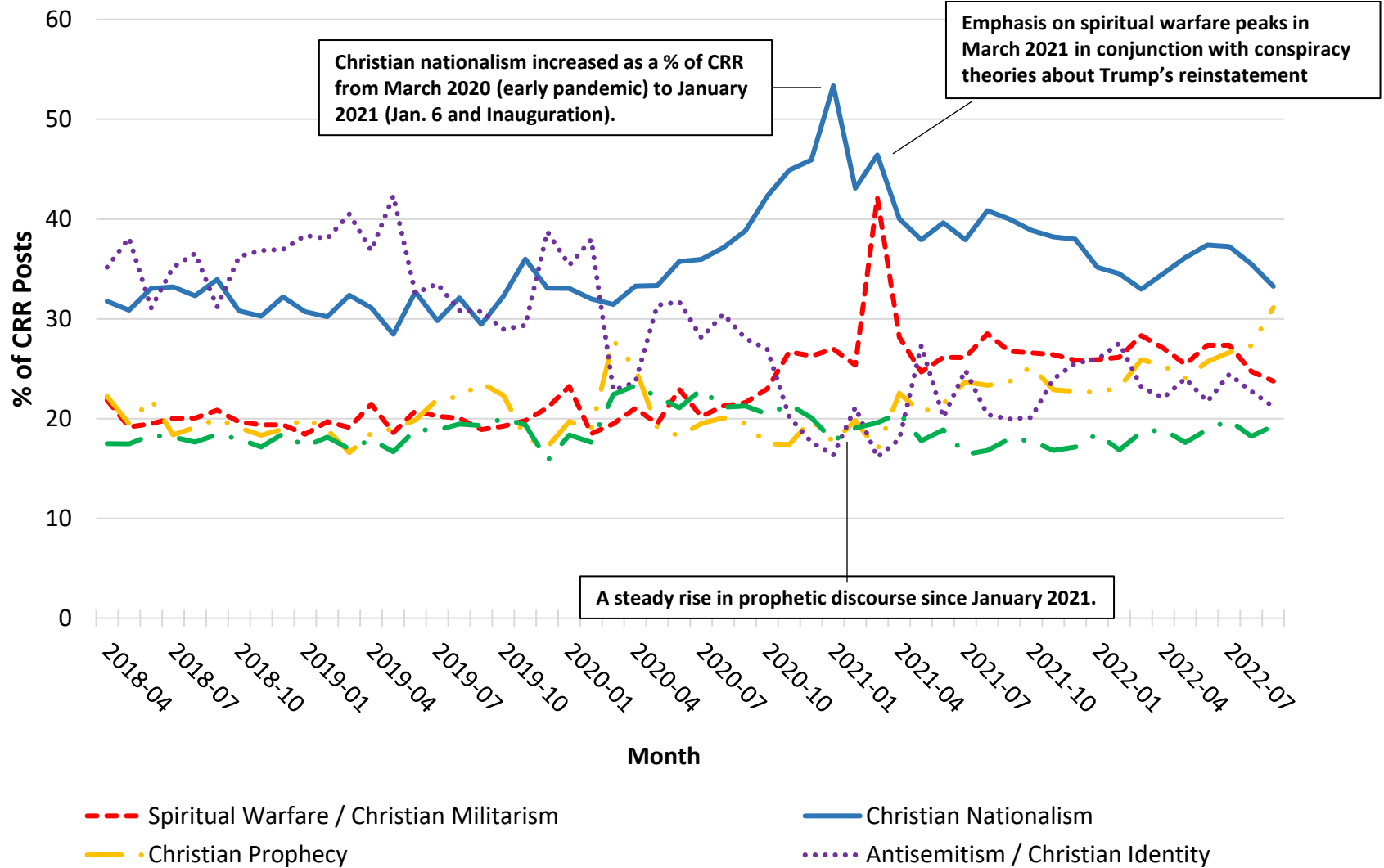
Activity for Religion Frame since April 2018



Note: The Religion frame had 4,109,779 recovered posts.

Figure 10

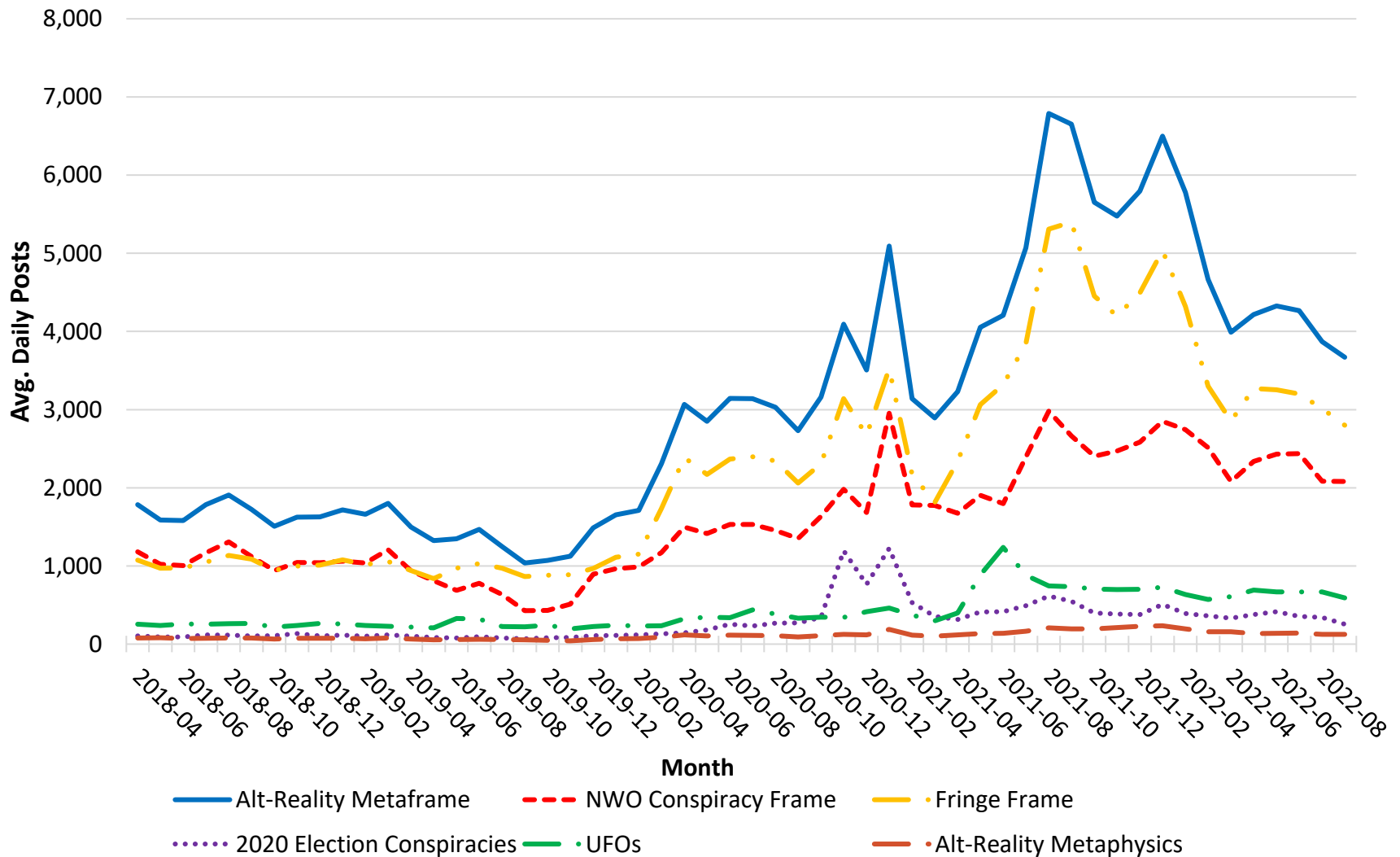
Components of Christian Radical Right as % of CRR



Note: Christian Prophecy includes both interpretations of the Bible text and claims to have messages from God about future events. Christian Reconstructionism is not included on this chart due to its small percentage of posts.

Figure 11

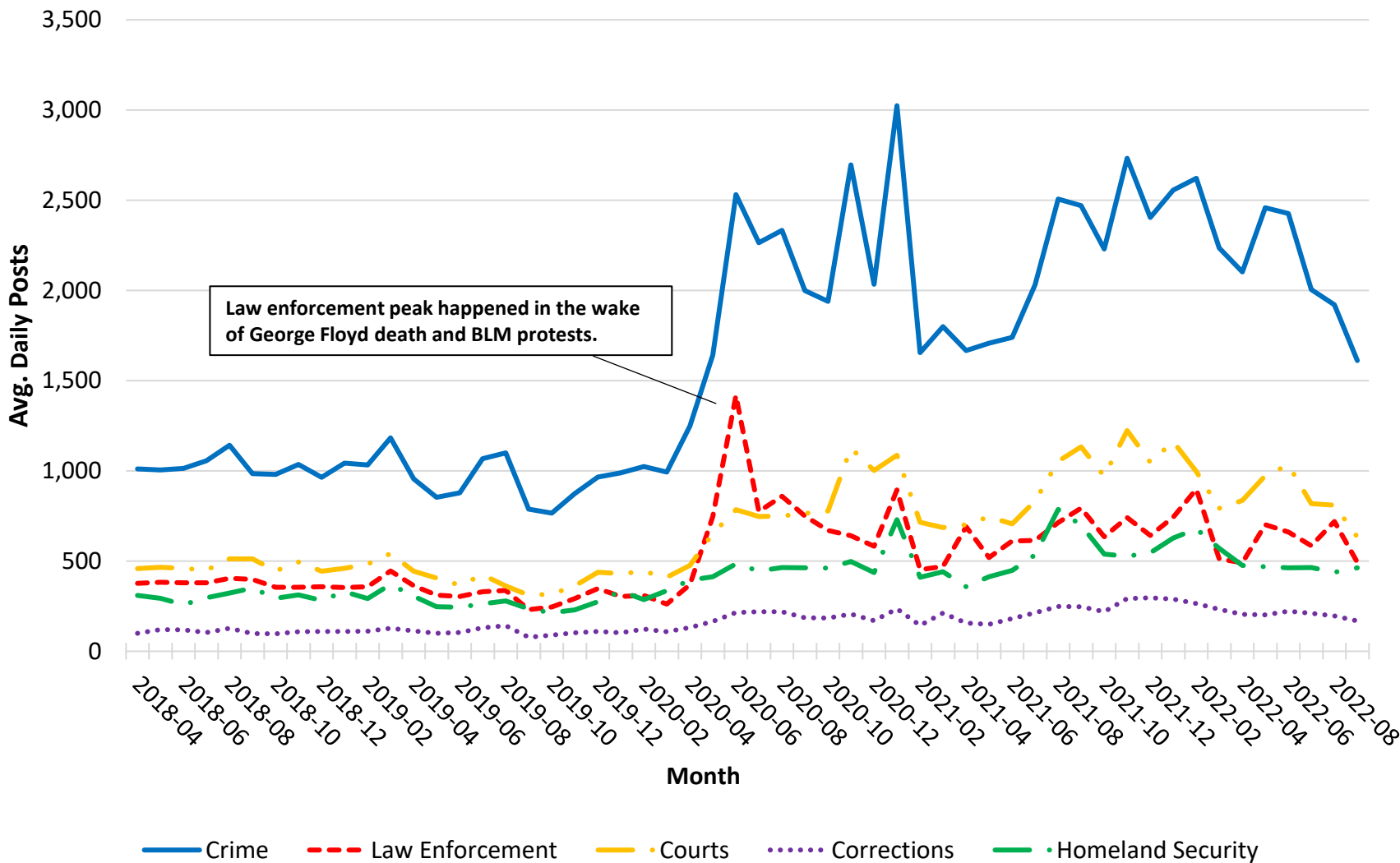
Avg. Daily Activity for Select Alt-Reality Themes by Month



Note: The Alt-Reality metaframe had 5,043,219. QAnon falls within the NWO Conspiracy frame. As we move further from the 2020 election, election conspiracy theories are harder to identify, so this theme may be revisited.

Figure 12

Avg. Daily Activity for Public Safety Components by Month



Note: The Public Safety frame had 4,053,273 recovered posts.

Figure 13

Avg. Daily Posts for Contemporary Topics by Month

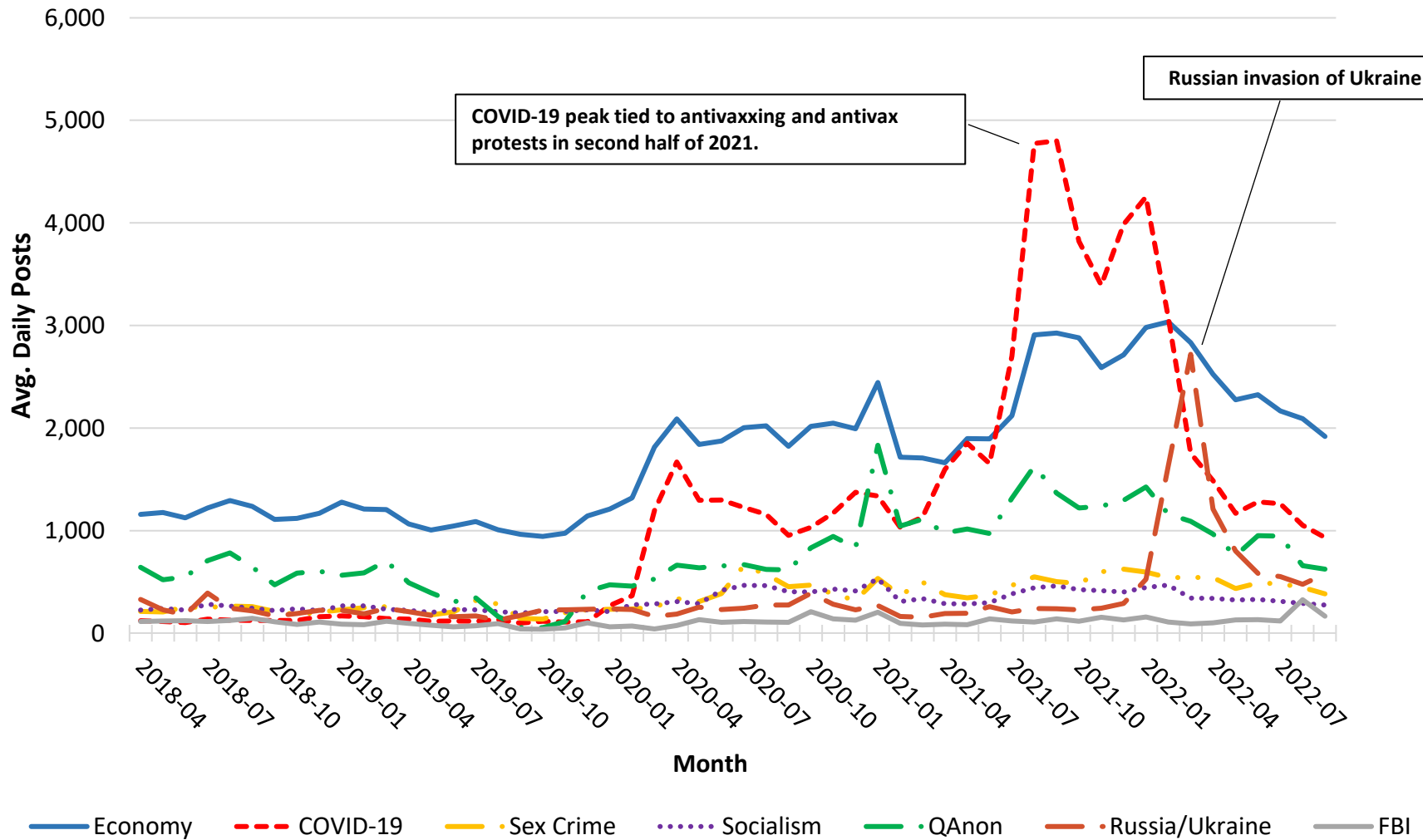
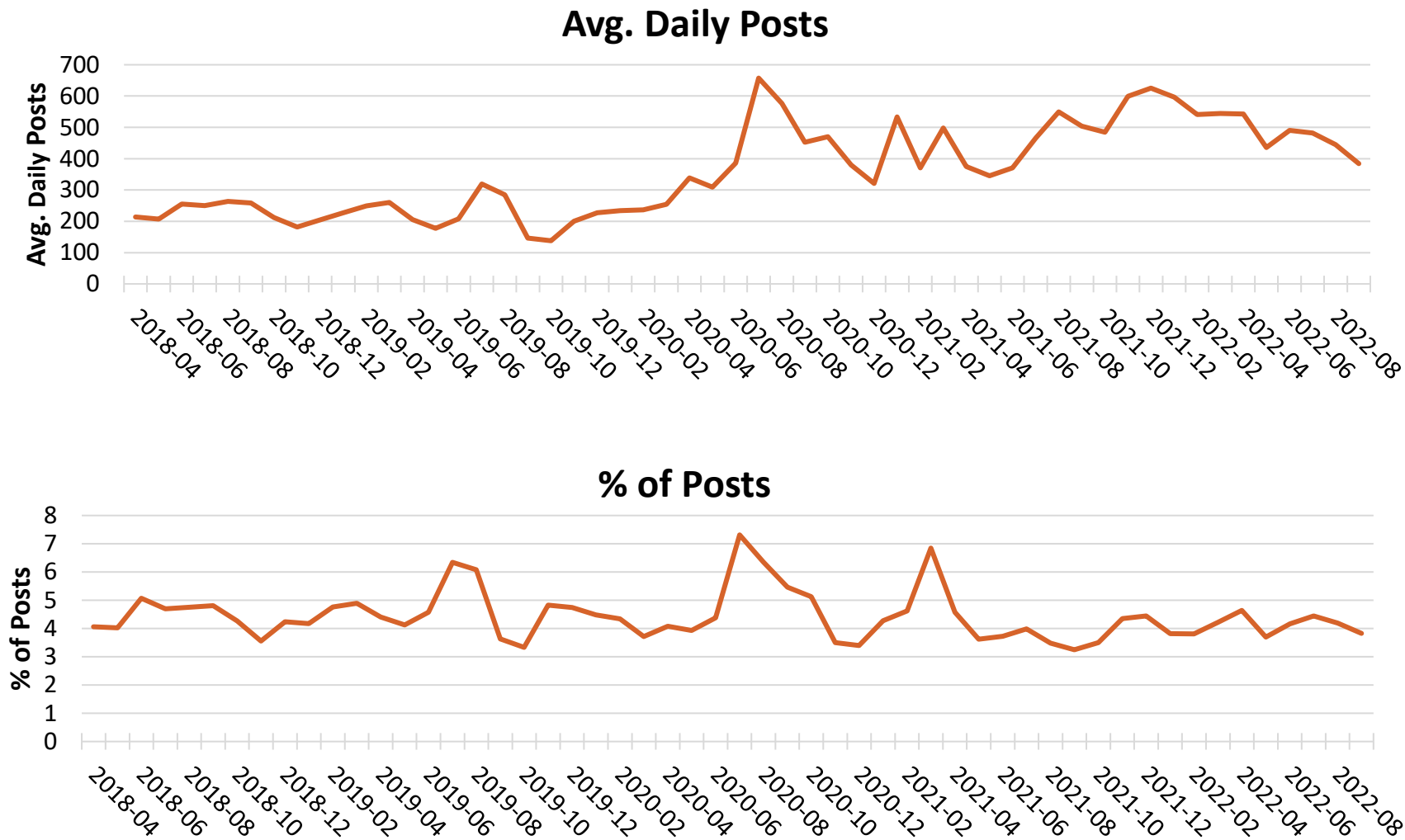


Figure 14

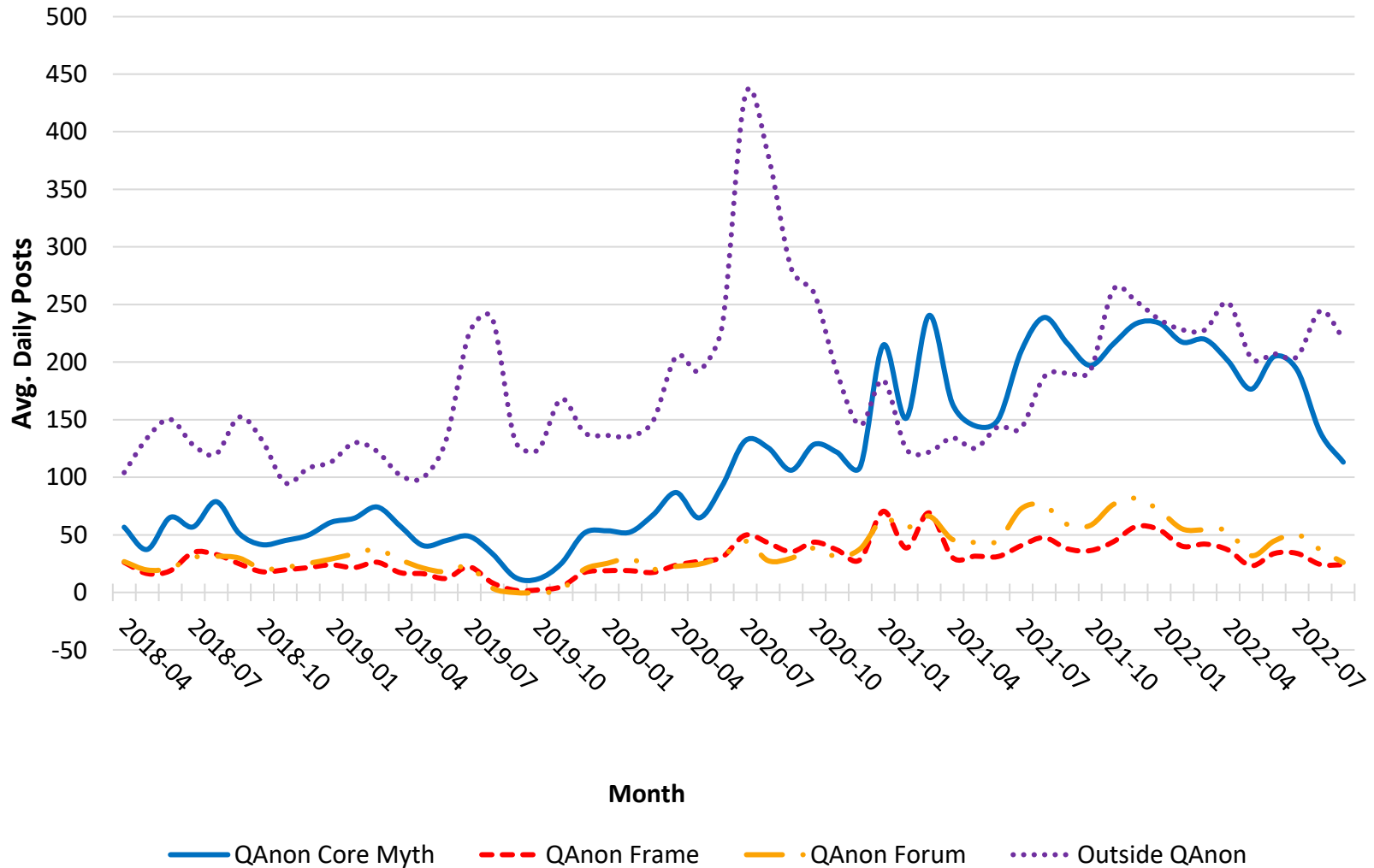
Sex Crime References since April 2018



Note: Sex-crime-related themes were found in 593,482 recovered posts.

Figure 15

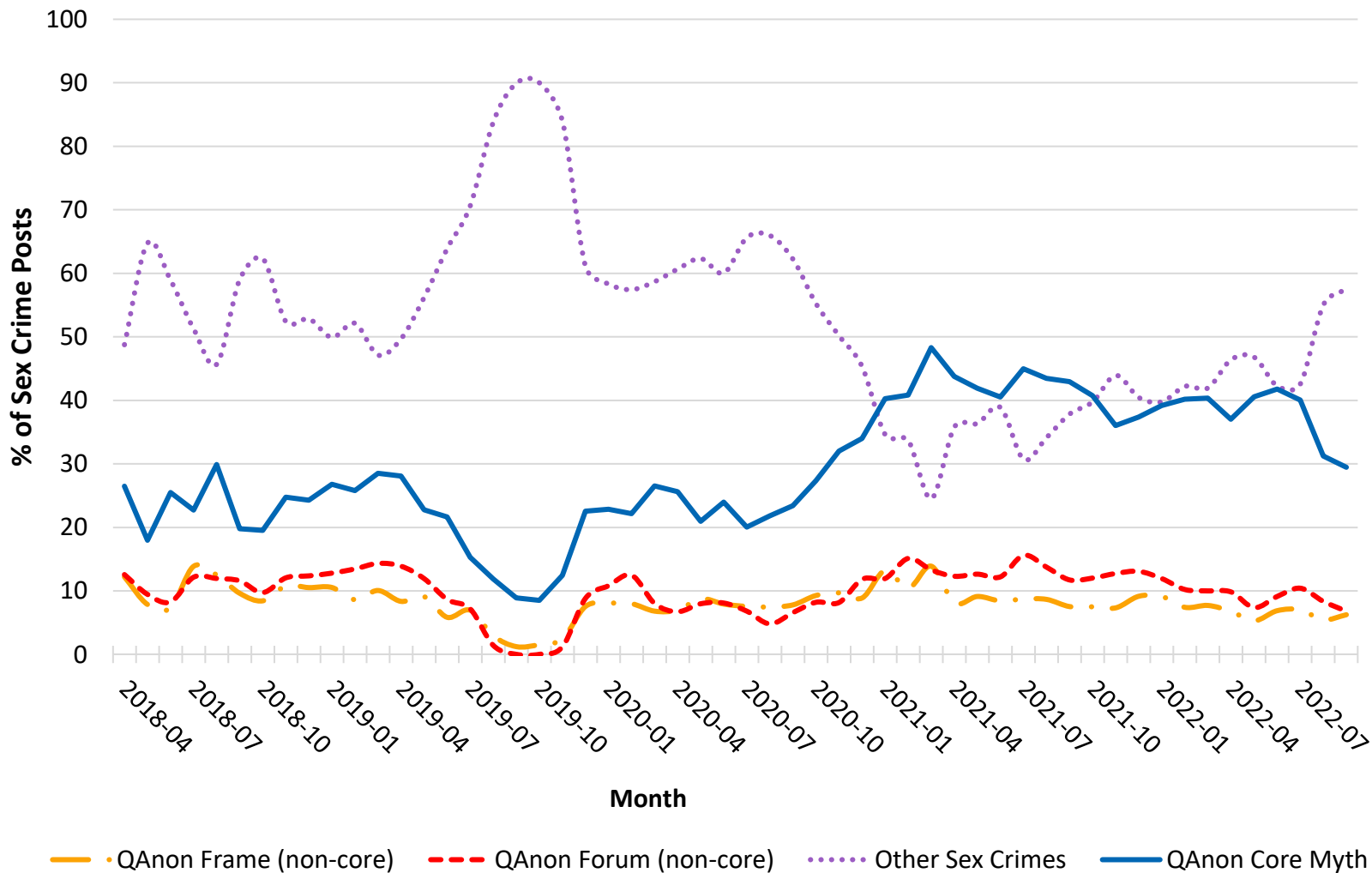
Sex Crime References by Source and Month



Note: Mutually exclusive categories. QAnon core myth refers to elites (Democrats) engaged in sex trafficking or Satanic sacrifice of kidnapped children. QAnon frame refers to references to sex crimes in QAnon frame that do not qualify as expressions of the QAnon core myth. QAnon forum are references in QAnon forums that cannot be regarded as part of QAnon frame. Outside references refer to discussions of sex crimes outside QAnon universe.

Figure 16

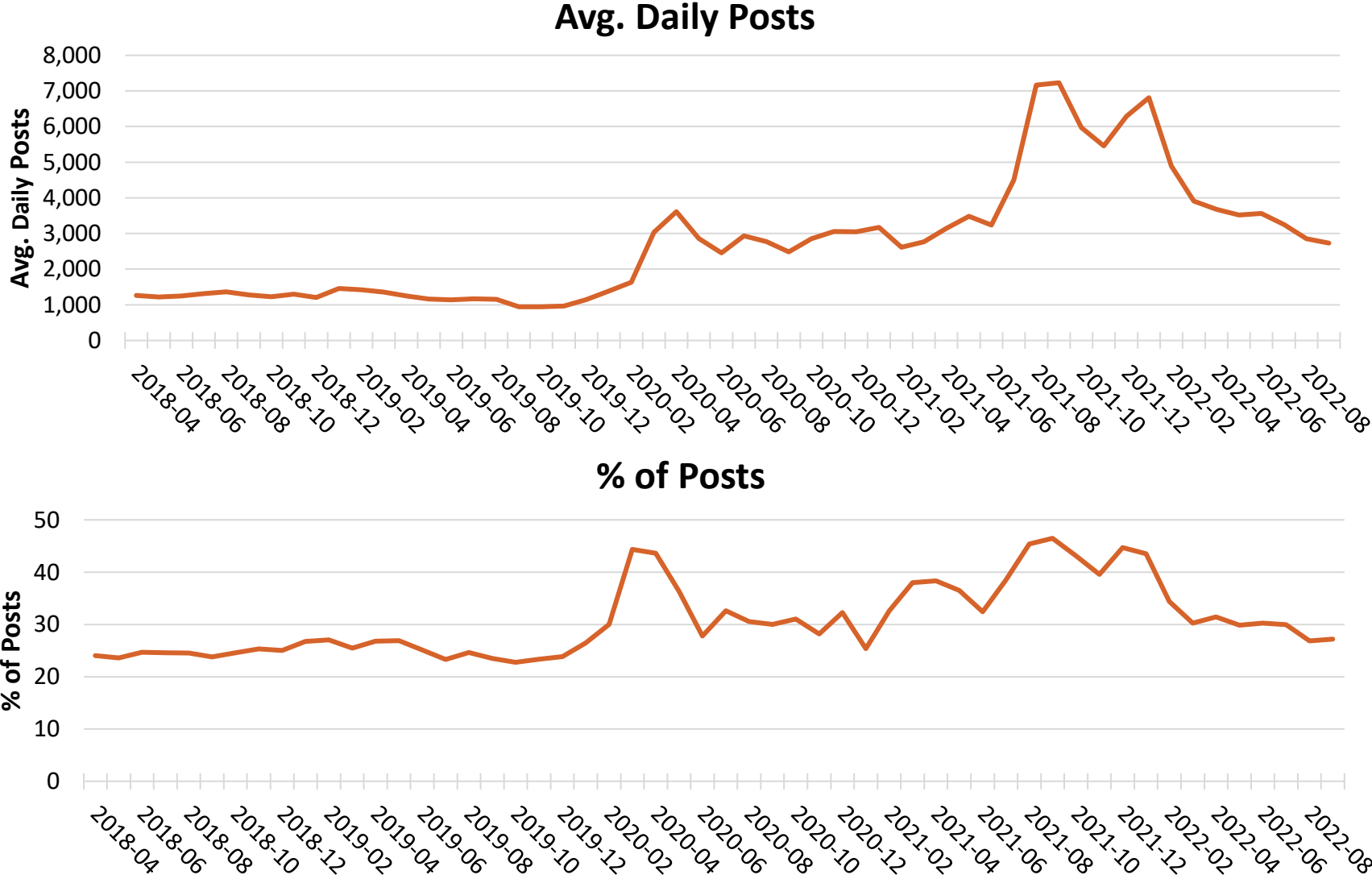
% Sex Crime References by Source and Month



Note: The denominator for each source is the number of sex crimes for the source. Mutually exclusive categories. QAnon core myth refers to elites (Democrats) engaged in sex trafficking or Satanic sacrifice of kidnapped children. QAnon frame refers to references to sex crimes in QAnon frame that do not qualify as expressions of the QAnon core myth. QAnon forum are references in QAnon forums that cannot be regarded as part of QAnon frame. Outside references refer to discussions of sex crimes outside QAnon universe.

Figure 17

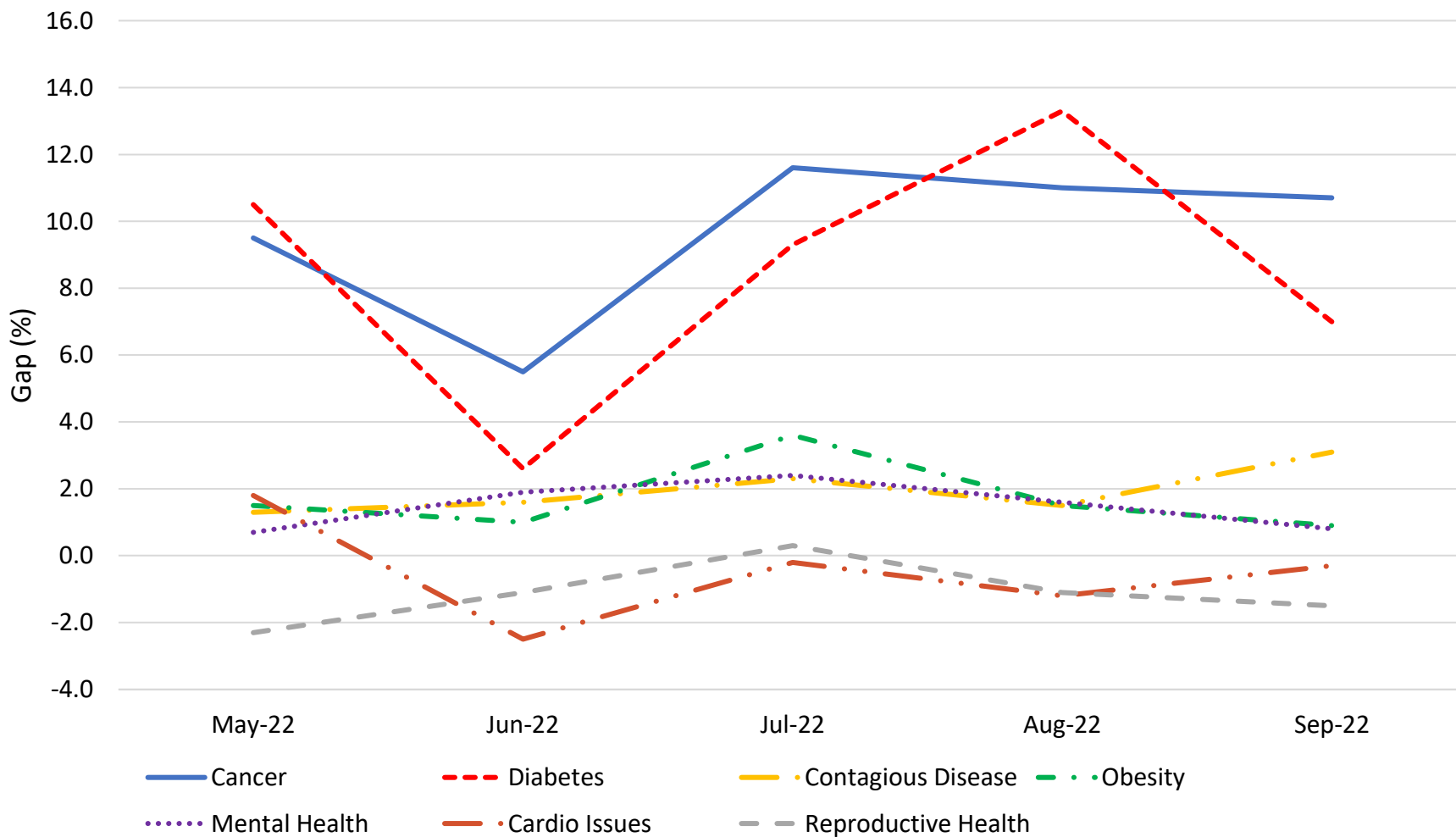
Activity for Health Frame since April 2018



Note: The Health frame had 451,065 recovered posts.

Figure 18

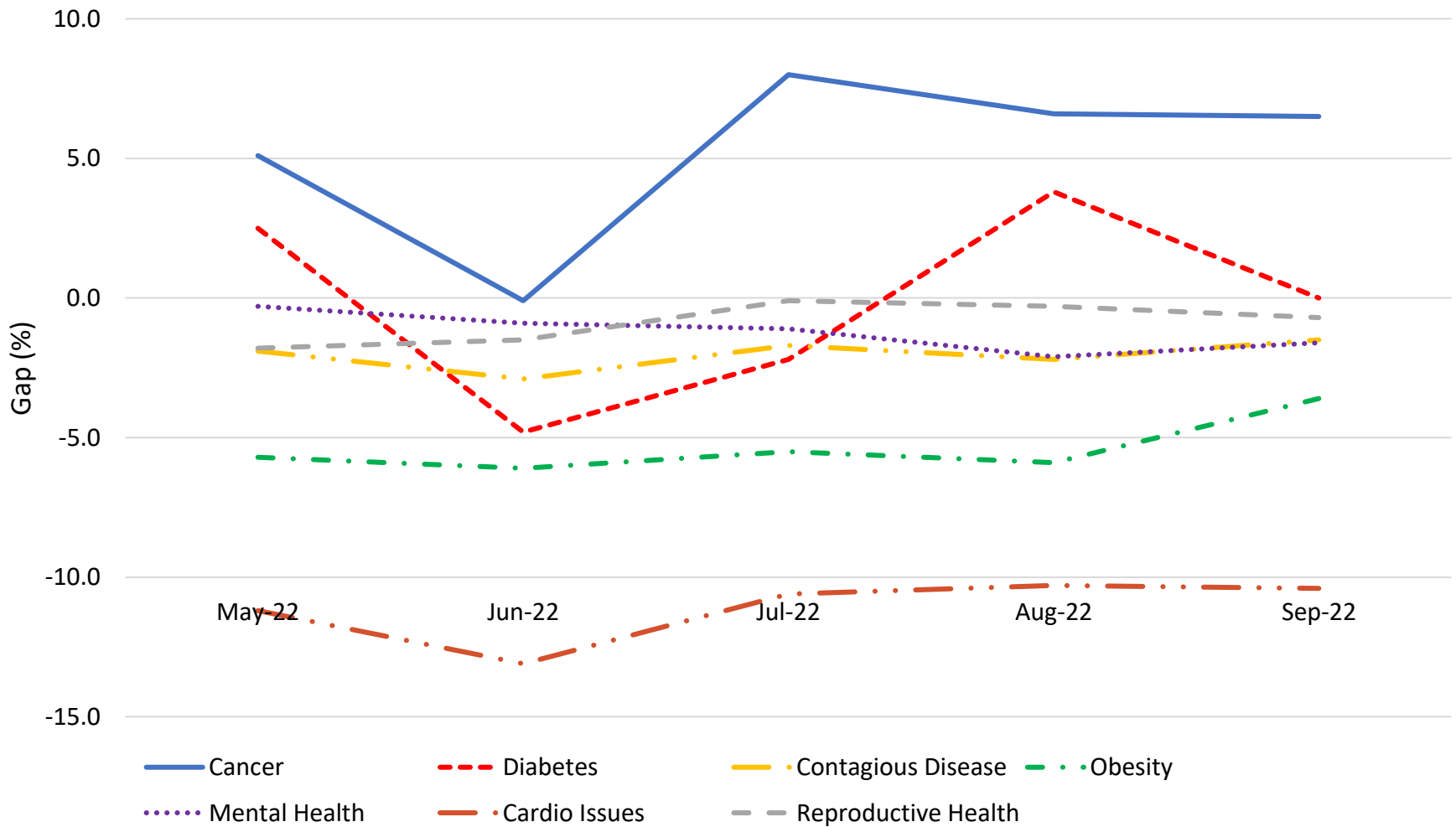
Gap Analysis for References to Alternative Medicine



Note: The gap measures the % of references to the condition mentioning alternative medicine in the FOME data to a group of 50+ health-related subreddits used as a benchmark. A positive number indicates that the rate of references to alternative medicine is higher in the FOME data than the benchmarks, and a negative number indicates that the benchmarks are higher.

Figure 19

Gap Analysis for References to Wellness & Nutrition



Note: The gap measures the % of references to the condition mentioning wellness and nutrition in the FOME data to a group of 50+ health-related subreddits used as a benchmark. A positive number indicates that the rate of references wellness and nutrition is higher in the FOME data than the benchmarks, and a negative number indicates that the benchmarks are higher.

Forum Definitions

- **Alt-Right:** A coalition of right-wing groups including the Extreme Right and adjacent and/or sympathetic types of forums, i.e., Political Right, News/Politics, and Religion (Main, 2018).
- **Conspiracy/Fringe:** Forums that spread nonmainstream and questionable beliefs, such as conspiracies, beliefs in UFOS and the paranormal, and alternative positions on science and history. These sites are included in the study because of the argument that extremism and conspiracism are linked (Barkun, 2002).
- **Extremism:** Political beliefs and strategies that fall outside the spectrum of normal politics (Anti-Defamation League, 2017).
 - **Extreme Right** includes antisemitic and Christian Identity forums, neo-Nazis, Proud Boys, secessionists, and White pride groups.
 - **Extreme Left** includes anarchist and socialist forums.
- **Incels:** incel is short for involuntarily celibate. These forums are known for their violent discourse.
- **News/Politics:** Sites that spread news or political comment that is extremist or conspiracist in nature. Mainstream media and Fox News channels are not included.
- **Patriot/Military:** Extremist or conspiracist forums that directly appeal to self-described “patriots,” current members of the military, or military veterans. Groups that call themselves “patriot” often have origins in QAnon.
- **Political Right:** Conservative, libertarian, America First, and MAGA forums that go outside of normal political discourse in their spread of extremist and conspiracist beliefs. Mainstream Republican/conservative forums are not included.
- **QAnon:** Movement that asserts elites (most Democrats) are engaged in the sex trafficking and human sacrifice of kidnapped children. It was claimed that Donald Trump had a plan to end these practices.
- **Religion:** Faith-based forums known to promote extremism and conspiracism. Mainstream religion forums are not included.

Platform Tag Rates August 2022

Platforms	50+ Word Posts	% of Total		# Tagged Posts	% Posts Tagged
Reddit	154,932	51.5%		148,624	95.9%
Telegram	80,250	26.7%		77,651	96.8%
Incel.is	21,933	7.3%		21,518	98.1%
8kun	17,166	5.7%		16,794	97.8%
Win Boards	13,955	4.6%		13,564	97.2%
Above Top Secret	8,414	2.8%		7,963	94.6%
Stormfront	1,884	0.6%		1,875	99.5%
Raddle.me	1,086	0.4%		1,005	92.5%
Liberty Forums	612	0.2%		596	97.4%
PinkPill.co	304	0.1%		300	98.7%
Christogenea	137	0.0%		136	99.3%
EndChan	106	0.0%		106	100.0%
White Biocentrism	42	0.0%		42	100.0%
Total	300,821	100.0%		290,174	96.5%

References

General Background

Barkun, M. (2003). *A culture of conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*. University of California Press.

Merlan, A. (2019). *Republic of lies: American conspiracy theorists and their surprising rise to power*. Metropolitan Books

Uscinski, J. E., & Parent, J. M. (2014). *American conspiracy theories*. Oxford University Press.

Report Citations

Anti-Defamation League. (2017). *Defining extremism*. <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/extremism>

Barkun, M. (2022). *A culture of conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*. California.

Center on Extremism. (2022, June 29). *After 18-month hiatus, new QAnon posts surface*. Anti-Defamation League. [fter-18-month-hiatus-new-qanon-posts-surface](#)

Main, T. J. (2018). *The Rise of the Alt-Right*. Brookings.

Rogers, R. L. (2021). Spiritual warfare and the Apocalypse: The religious framing of political violence among the American new right. In Crews, G., Markey, M. A., & Kerr, S., Eds., *Mitigating mass violence and managing threats in contemporary society*. IGI Global.

This report identifies patterns and tracks trends related to the framing of social and political extremism in conspiracy and right-leaning extremist discussion forums. The methodology implements automated text analysis based on key words, phrases, and word stems on a purposive from 13 major web-based and social-media platforms.

These numbers are top-line and are released through monthly and quarterly reports to facilitate timely monitoring. Although the trends in activity are interesting in themselves, the reports are not “market share” or “share of voice” reports because of the purposive nature of the sample. It is quite easy to get a different result simply by chance the mix of online forums. For example, if I want the religion frame to be the largest, I add more religion forums.

In spite of this limitation, the following should be noted:

1. Findings from the study are credible because the research includes several large, well-known discussion forums that are regarded as newsworthy.
2. Looking at the trend lines is a logical first step, even in a purposive study, if for no other reason than to see if the times lines correspond with known trends.
3. While the absolute numbers are easily misinterpreted when discussing overall volume and comparisons across sites, the use of a purposive sample can yield meaningful conclusions about trends within an online community, and comparisons of characteristics of online communities can be reasonably made when the data is standardized, e.g., comparisons are made on percentages and not absolute values.

The intent is not to address all issues in a single document. Rather, activity reporting is the first step in addressing key qualitative questions about how conspiracists and extremist movements coopt existing mainstream beliefs and practices to legitimate their positions and mobilize followers. The key questions include:

1. What frames are used to legitimate extremist views and interpretations of current events?
2. How has the use of frames in support of extremism changed over time?
3. What interactions are forming between frames?
4. To what extent do extremism, conspiracism, and fringe beliefs constitute a unified system of ideology, and to what extent are they decoupled?
5. To what extent are extremism, conspiracism, and fringe beliefs becoming mainstream?

Some specific issues are tracked with an eye on further research:

1. To what extent is religious discourse turning militaristic?
2. To what extent is political discussion turning violent? Most notably I am paying attention to the ongoing promotion of conspiracy theories surrounding the 2020 presidential election.
3. How is the core mythology of QAnon evolving?
4. How is QAnon and other New World Conspiracy theories interacting with religious communities?
5. What is hypermasculinity, and how is it influencing extremist discourse?
6. What conspiracy theories and misinformation are infiltrating the discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The quarterly reports will provide the most detailed top-line analysis, supplemented by monthly updates through flash reports. In addition, separate reports regarding the tracking of trends related to left-wing extremism, public-health (mis)information, and religion forums are in development. Detailed analysis of trends will be handled through peer-reviewed publications.

Coding has been made public and a link to a publicly shared Google drive can be online at <https://www.rogersperspectives.com/tracking-of-extremism-report>