Perceptions of Policing:
A Comparison of Extreme-Right and Extreme-Left Discussion Forums

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Background

- This presentation summaries progress to date on an exploratory analysis of a database containing 14 million posts from social media and discussion forums known to host misinformation, extremism, and conspiracism ("MEC sector").

- Database includes material from both Extreme Right and Extreme Left

- Historically both groups are regarded as critical of law enforcement (Danahy, 2022) and are often described as intensely opposed factors, which results in acrimonious online debates and various protests and counter protests (Klein, 2019; Wood, 2020).

- Research Question: Have current events like BLM protests and FBI raid on Mar-a-Lago changed the dynamics between groups?

What is Extremism?

Extremism = groups outside the normal political spectrum

Forum types identified by forum name, description, and reputation.

Extreme Left

- Anarchists
- Antifascists
- Anti-rightists
- Socialists

Extreme Right

- National Socialists
- Proud Boys
- White Pride / KKK
- Sovereign Citizens
- Anarchocapitalists

Later additions:
- Conspiracy/fringe
- QAnon
- Patriot / Veterans
- Political Right
- News / Politics
- Religion
- Heath Misinformation

Methods I: FOMEC

- Data Source
  - Frames of Misinformation, Extremism, & Conspiracism (FOMEC) project at Youngstown State University. YSU IRB #2022-191.
  - Purposive sample of forums found on 13 different platforms known to host MEC sector discussions for a period from April 2018 to November 2022.
  - 14 million posts with 50+ words

- Web scraping / exporting tools
  - Screaming Frog
  - Python,
  - Telegram Export

- 3 small studies
  - Forum analysis: Stata 17.0 MP
  - Kmeans cluster analysis: Stata 17.0 SE, Stata ngram module
  - Sentiment analysis: Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010)

Methods II: Police Frames

- This study uses 891,795 posts regarding policing (6.3% of posts).

- Text mining of key words and phrases. Examples:
  - *General References:* policing, cop, detective, deputy, federal bureau of investigation, fbi, law enforcement, security guard, sheriff, patrol, us marshal, arrest, forensic school resource officer, stop and frisk, terry stop strip search. qualified immunity
  - *Use of Force:* use of force, deadly force, excessive force, swat, taser, George Floyd, Freddie Gray Breonna Taylor, Chauvin
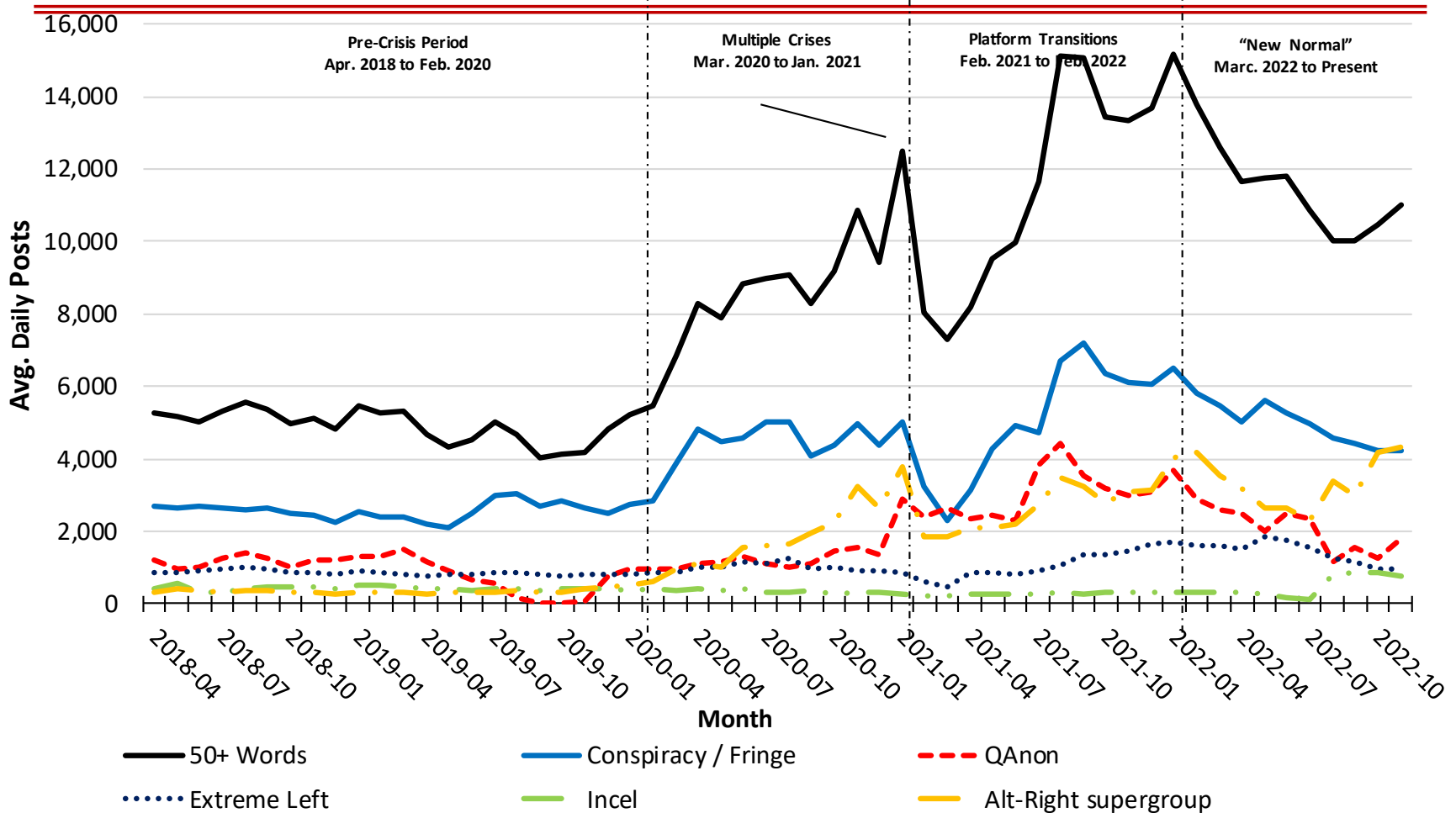 - *Police brutality:* handcuffs, kill, punch, shooting, shot, suspended

Platforms: Police Perception Study

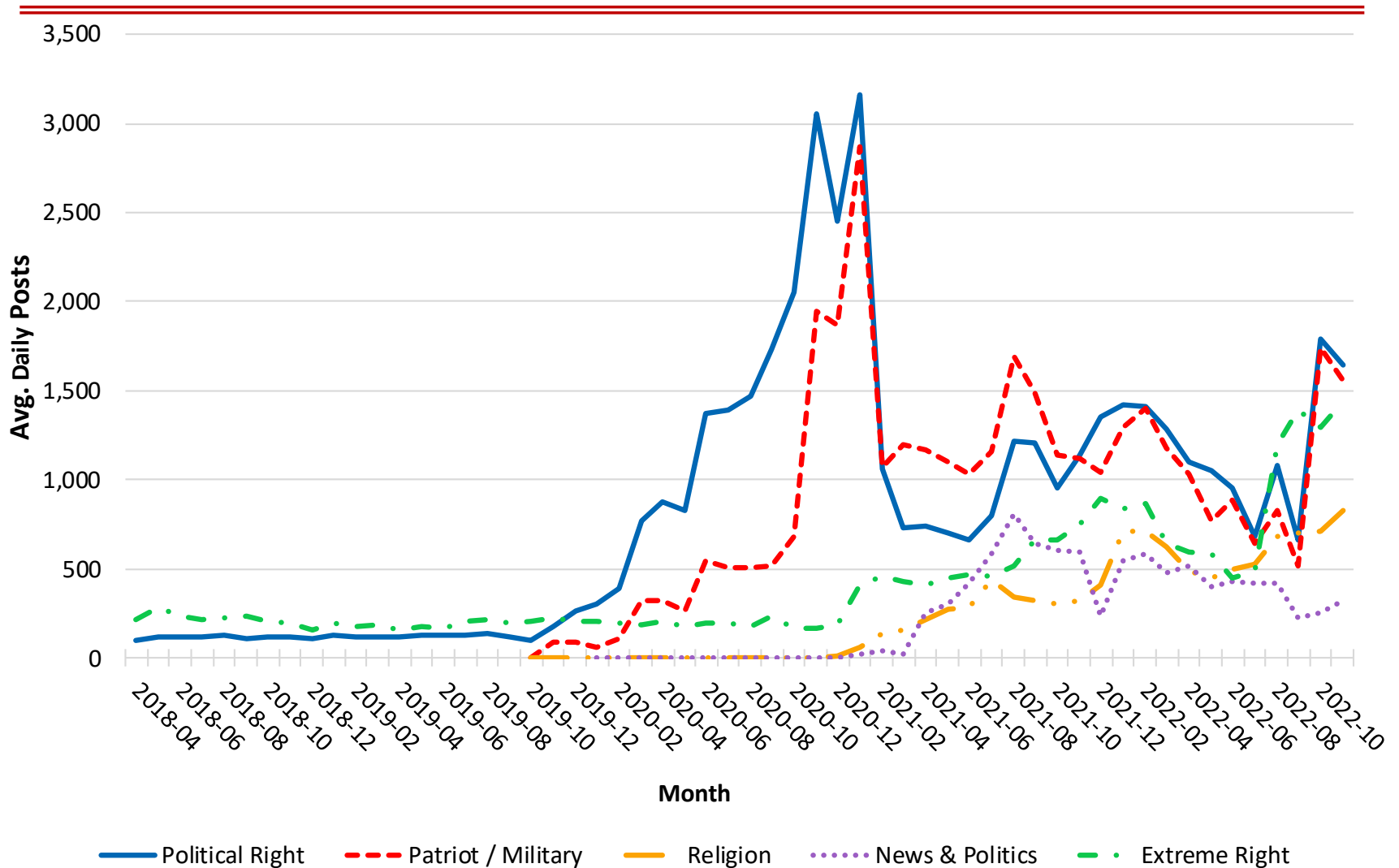| Platforms	50+ Word Posts	% of Total
Reddit (18 subreddits)	386,307	43%
8kun (7 forums)	192,244	22%
Telegram (350+ channels)	107,532	12%
Above Top Secret	101,601	11%
Win Boards (2 forums)	67,079	8%
Liberty Forums	18,697	2%
Incel.is	6,679	1%
Stormfront	7,546	1%
Raddle.me	3,052	<1%
White Biocentrism	542	<1%
EndChan (2 forums)	442	<1%
Christogenea	45	<1%
PinkPill.co	29	<1%
Total	891,795	100%

Avg. Daily Activity by Month

Note: 14,260,073 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.
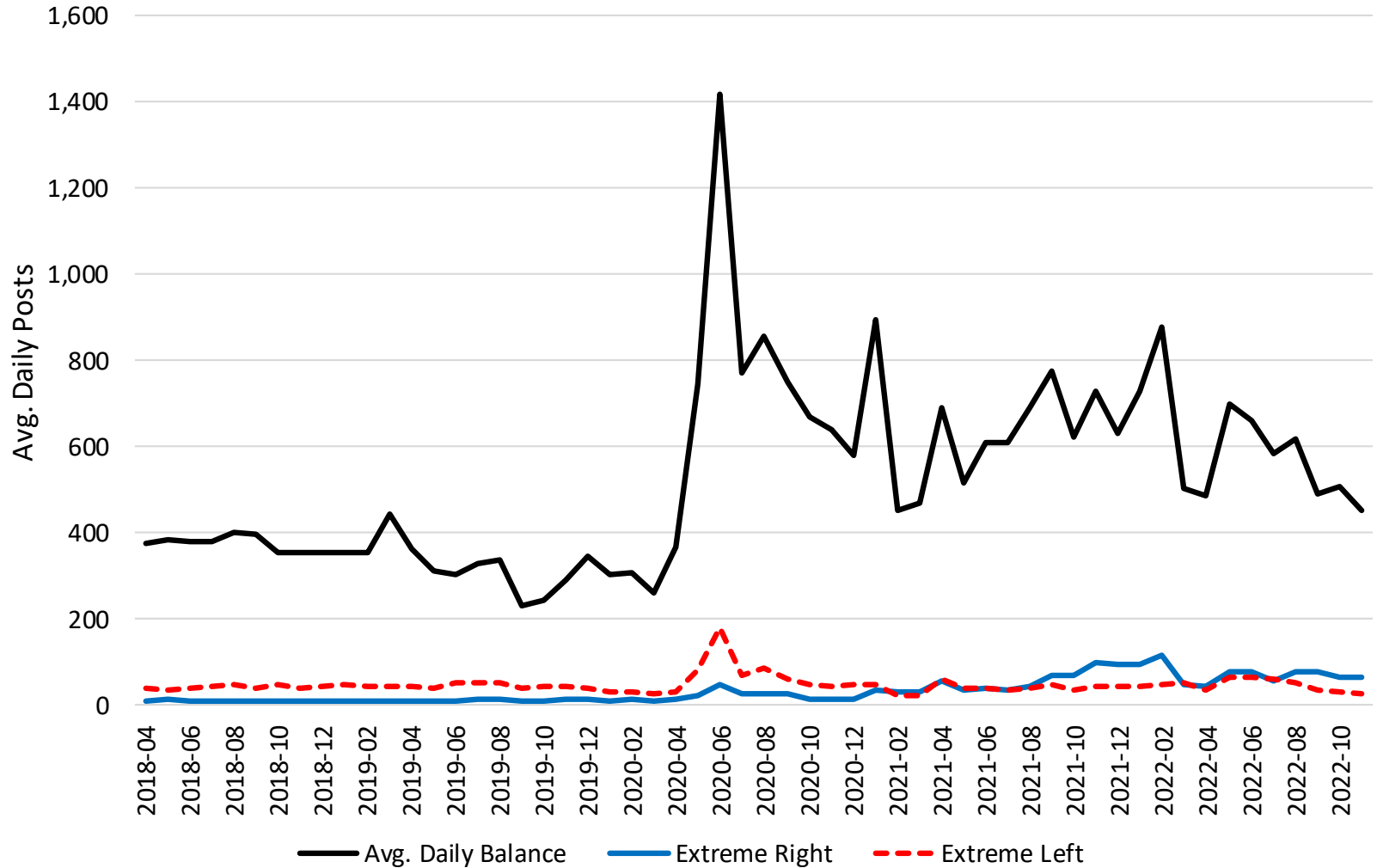
Avg. Daily Activity by Month for Alt-Right Supergroup by Month

Note: 2,917,274 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 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.
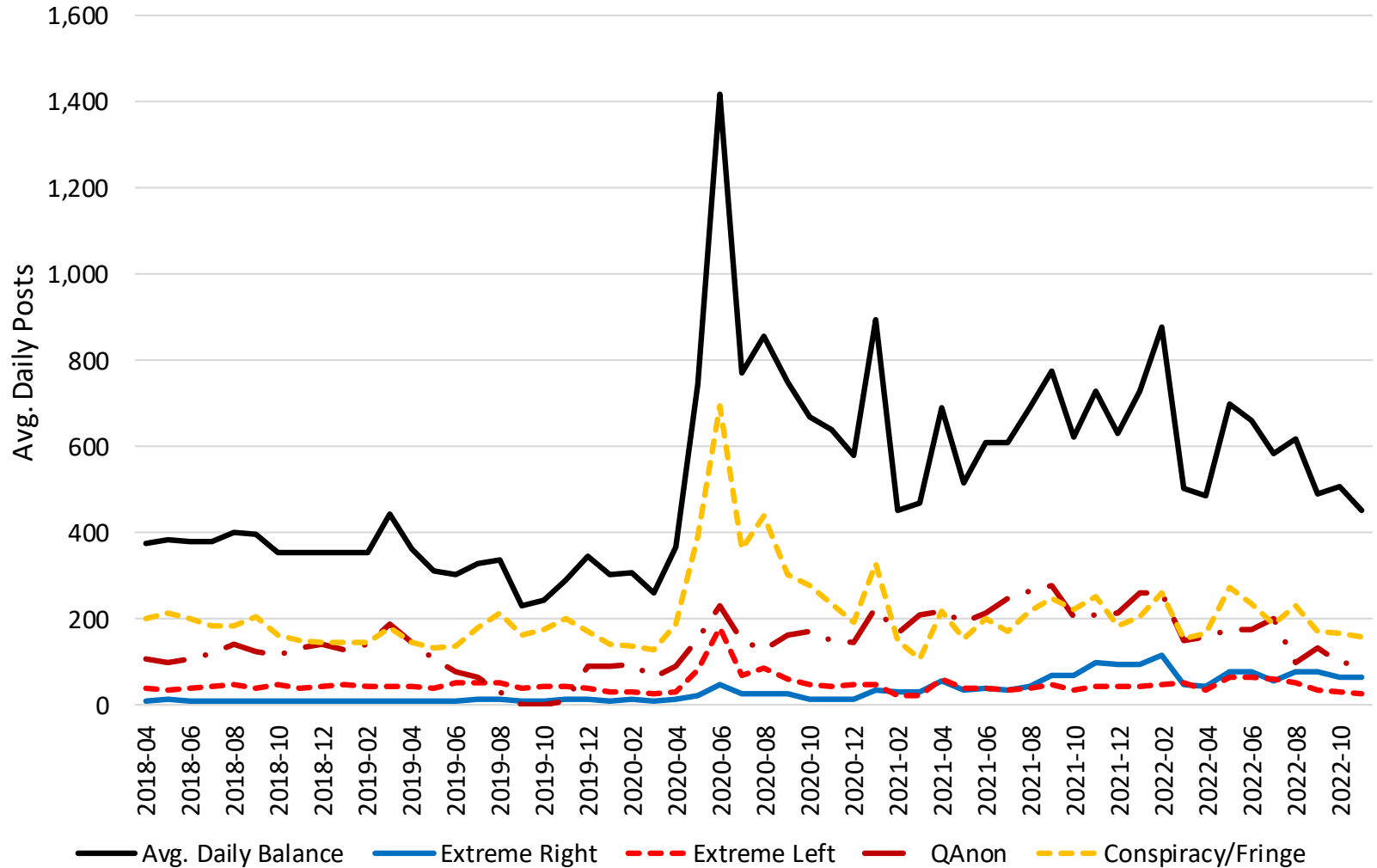
Average Daily Posts for Police Perception Study

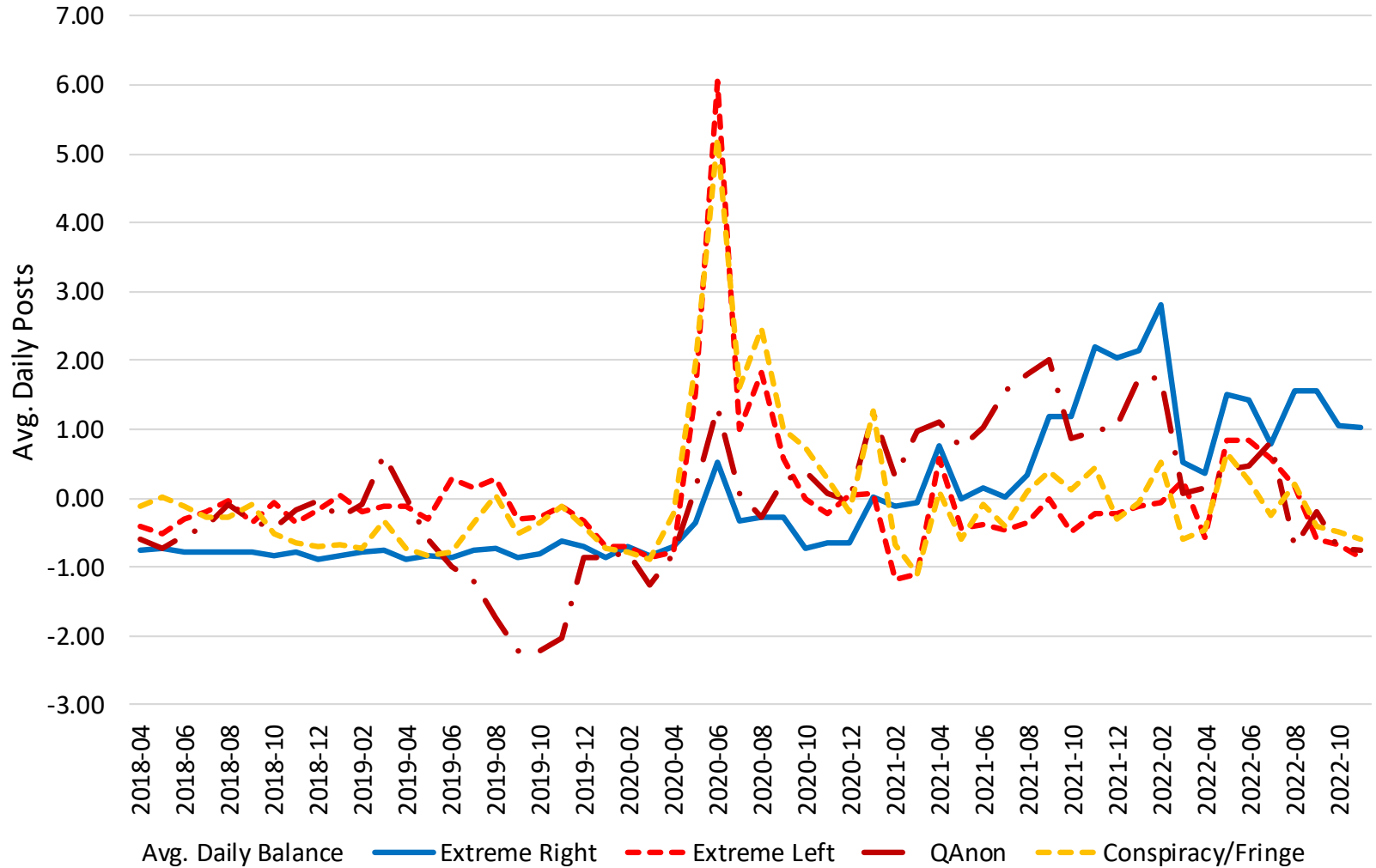
Notes: N=891,795 posts.

Average Daily Posts for Police Perception Study

Avg. Daily Posts

| | Avg. Daily Balance | Extreme Right | Extreme Left | QAnon | Conspiracy/Fringe |

Average Daily Posts Standardized

Notes: N=891,795 posts.

Kmeans Cluster (n=9,512)

	Cluster #1	Cluster #2	Cluster #3
Forums	Patriots / Veterans QAnon Politics / News Religion Health Misinfo	Conspiracy / Fringe Extreme Left Political Right	Extreme Right Incels
% with ngram			
Police	34%	42%	54%
Just / Justice	25%	35%	31%
FBI	27%	17%	8%
Trump	20%	17%	5%
Violence Subframe	41%	46%	51%

LIWC Analysis (n= 767,803)

	Analytic Thinking	Clout	Authentic	Tone
QAnon	83	58	24	20
Conspiracy/Fringe	63	48	34	20
Extreme Right	62	54	31	18
Religion	76	60	28	22
Extreme Left	57	48	36	18
Total	70	53	29	22
R^2	.16	.05	.04	.00

Key Questions

- How important are conspiracy and fringe forums in public debates over policing?

- Why are Incels discussing policing?

- Why are the implications of right-leaning groups using discourse indicating analytical thinking?

- How are extremist texts influencing the social media and discussion forums?
  - Protocols of the Elders of Zion
  - Turner Diaries
  - Siege
  - Active shooter manifestos
  - Rules for Radicals
  - Antifa Handbook

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