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# FRAMES OF MISINFORMATION AND EXTREMISM

## Web Forums and Social-Media Discussions

### Monthly Summary

### November 2022

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*This report contains top-line monthly numbers from a purposive sample of forums and discussions collected from 12 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.*

# November 2022 Activity Summary

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**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. A user's manual and program code can be found at <https://www.rogersperspectives.com>. Any corrections for errors will appear in next month's report.

## Key Trends

- A 5% increase in the MEC sector was largely driven by a 25% growth in activity in QAnon forums and a 12% increase in Extreme-Right forums (Fig. 2 and 4).
- Peak daily activity in November was associated with the midterm elections, which were associated with jumps in activity related to the QAnon composite and Political-Right forums (Fig. 5).

## General Trends

- Among posts with at least 50 words in the purposive sample, November activity across all MEC sector forums averaged 11,008 posts per day, up from 10,446 in October. It was 27% below the all-time study peak in August 2021 (Fig. 1-4).
- In November, forum activity in the Alt-Right supergroup surpassed Conspiracy/Fringe forums as a percent of all posts, 39% to 38% (Fig. 1-4).

## Violent/Aggressive and Toxic Discourse

- The volume of Violent/Aggressive discourse rose 1% in November and was 8% above the total for September (Fig. 6). However, the November rate of increase was below the MEC sector at large, so violence and aggression fell to 25% of all discourse, one of its lowest points in the study period (Fig. 7).
- The highest percentages of violent/aggressive discourse were associated with the Extreme Right and Health Misinformation forums at 31% of activity, slightly above the Extreme Left at 30% (Fig. 7).
- Incels consistently score higher on toxicity than any other forum type. Although the percent of toxic discourse among Extreme-Right forums declined from 52% in October to 44% in November, the percent remained high relative to its customary levels prior to its spiking last quarter (Fig. 8).

## Religion

- The volume of the Religion frame grew 8% in November. This increase was the third consecutive month of growth, and the Religion frame in November was 19% above the frame for August (Fig. 9).
- After some work on the Christian prophecy timeline, prophecy became the leading component of the Christian Radical Right (Fig. 10). This sudden change was unexpected and will be reviewed for accuracy this month.

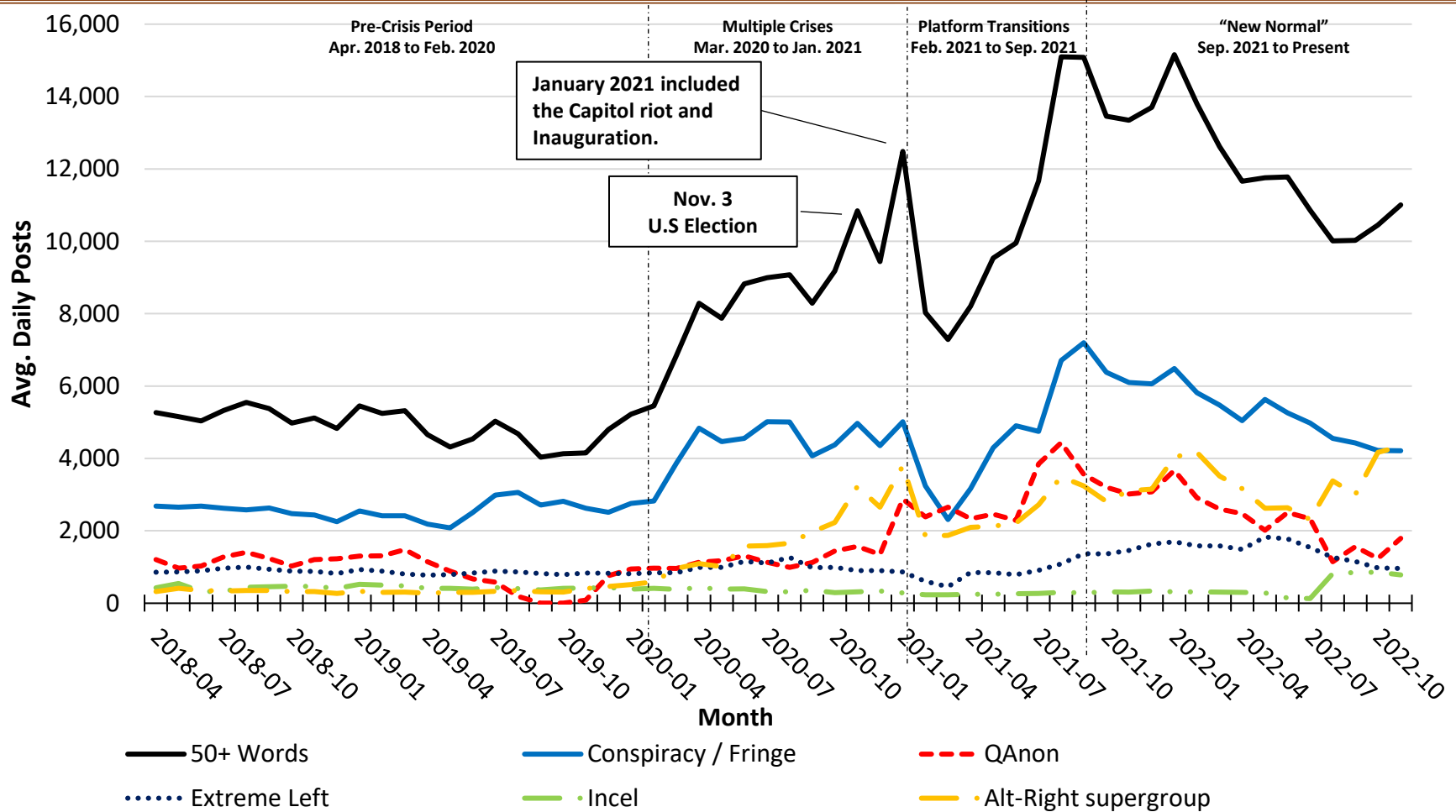
## Public Health

- Activity in the Health frame decreased 1% in November but remained 11% above its volume three months ago (Fig. 16).

## Current Events

- The economy remained the major concern in the discussion of current events (Fig. 18).
- There was a sharp rise in election discourse due to the November mid-terms (Fig. 18).

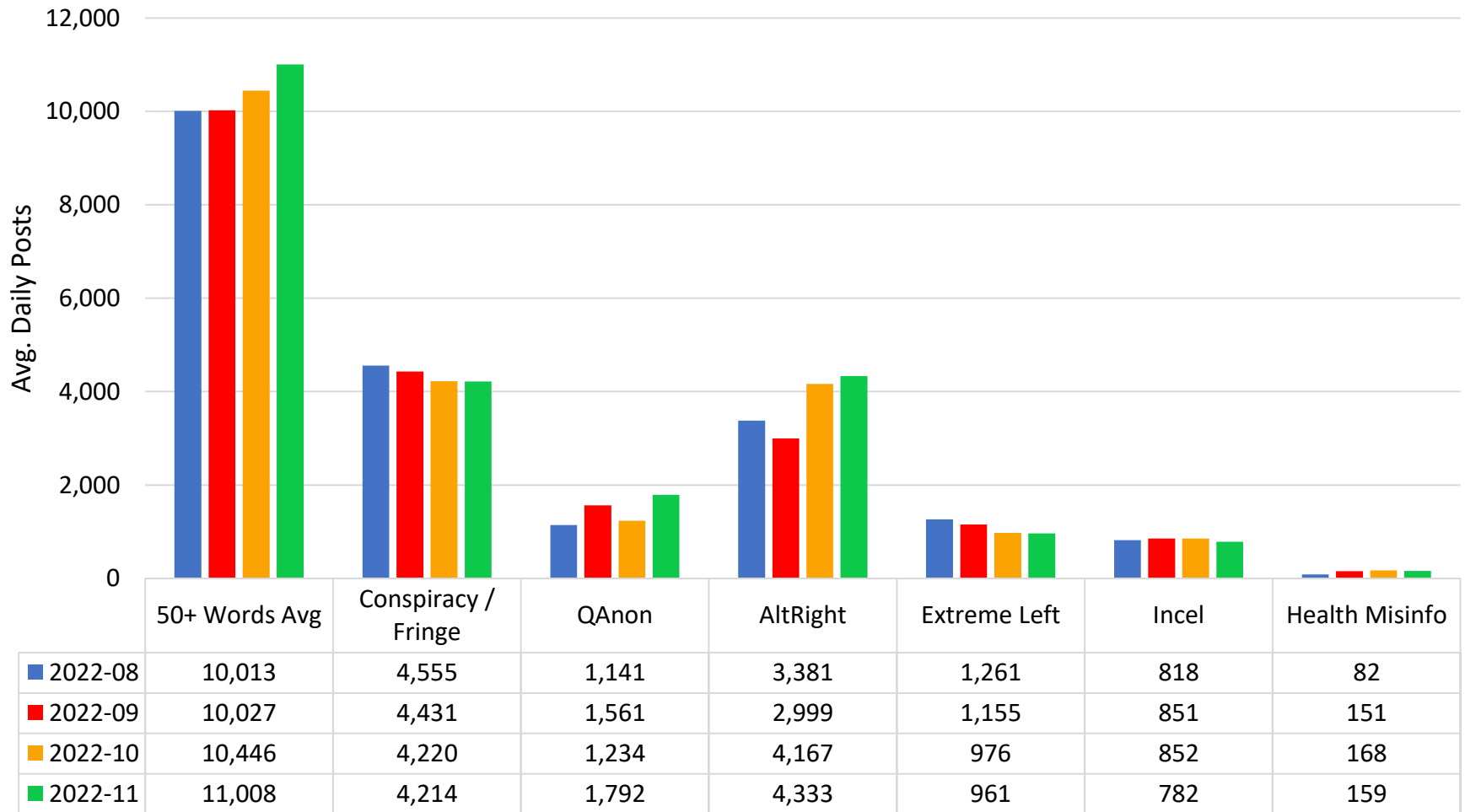
# Figure 1 Avg. Daily Activity by Month



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.

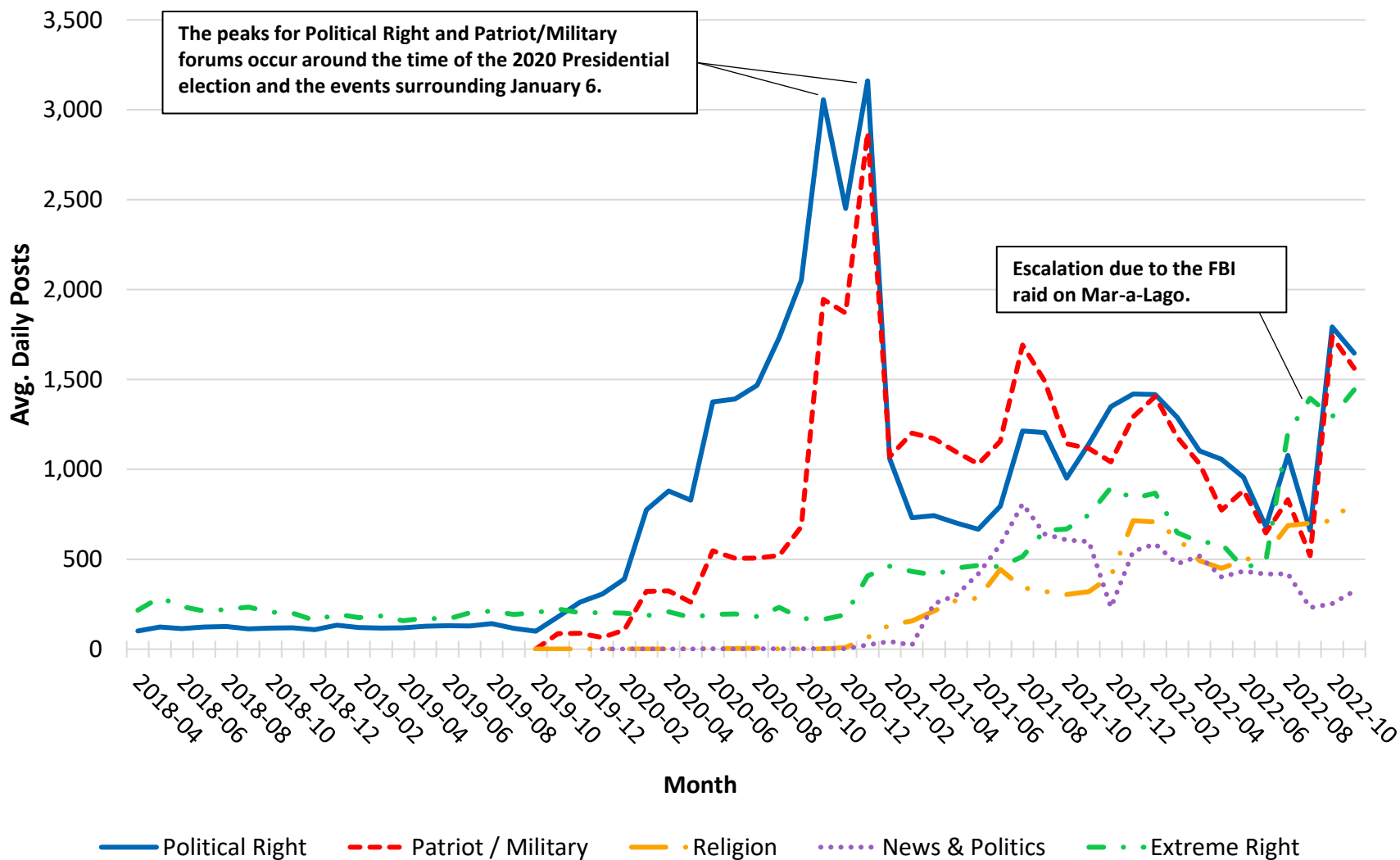
## Figure 2 Avg. Daily Activity for Past Four Months



Note: 1,763,364 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.

# Figure 3

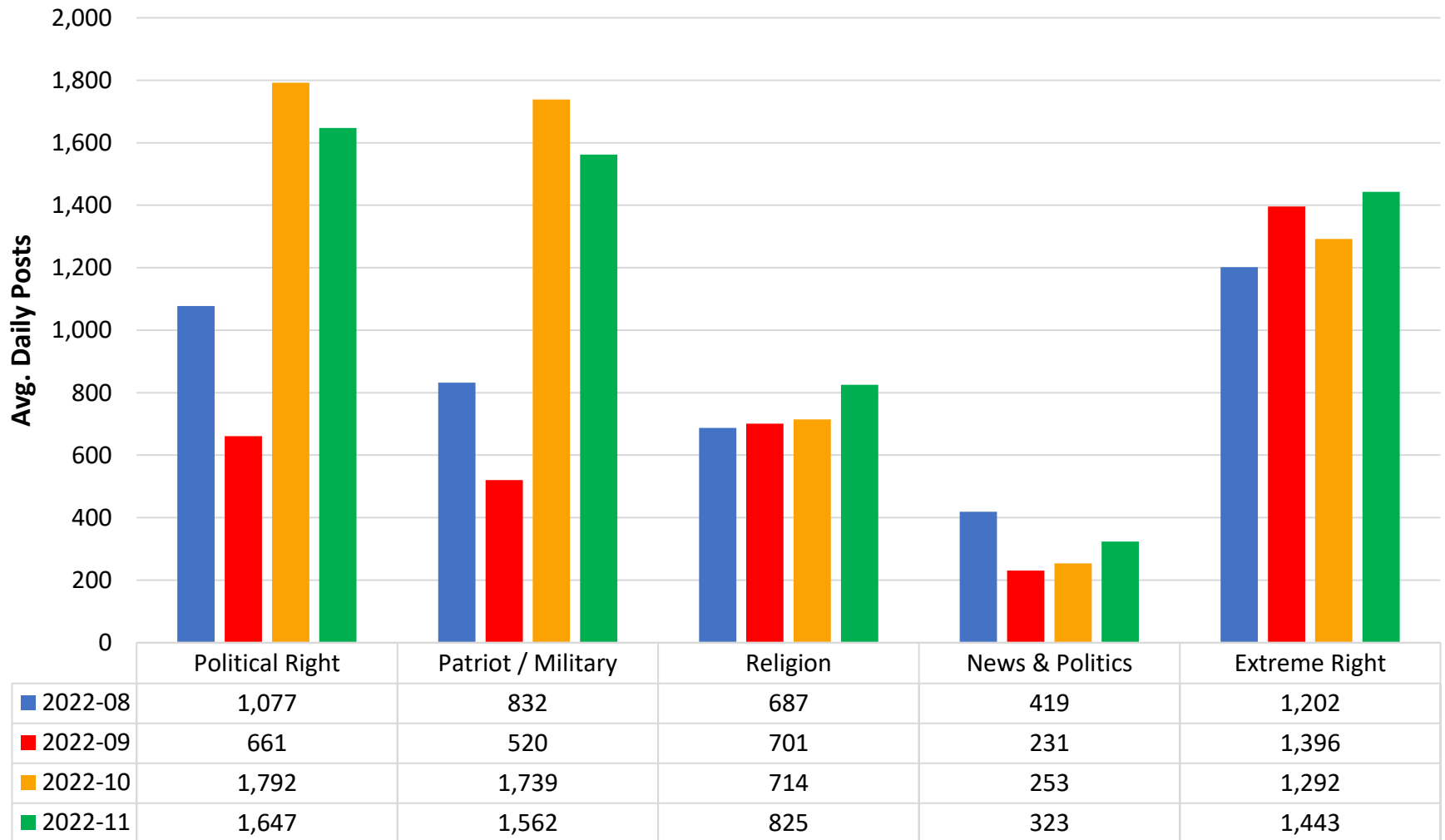
## Avg. Daily Activity by Month for Alt-Right Supergroup by Month



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 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

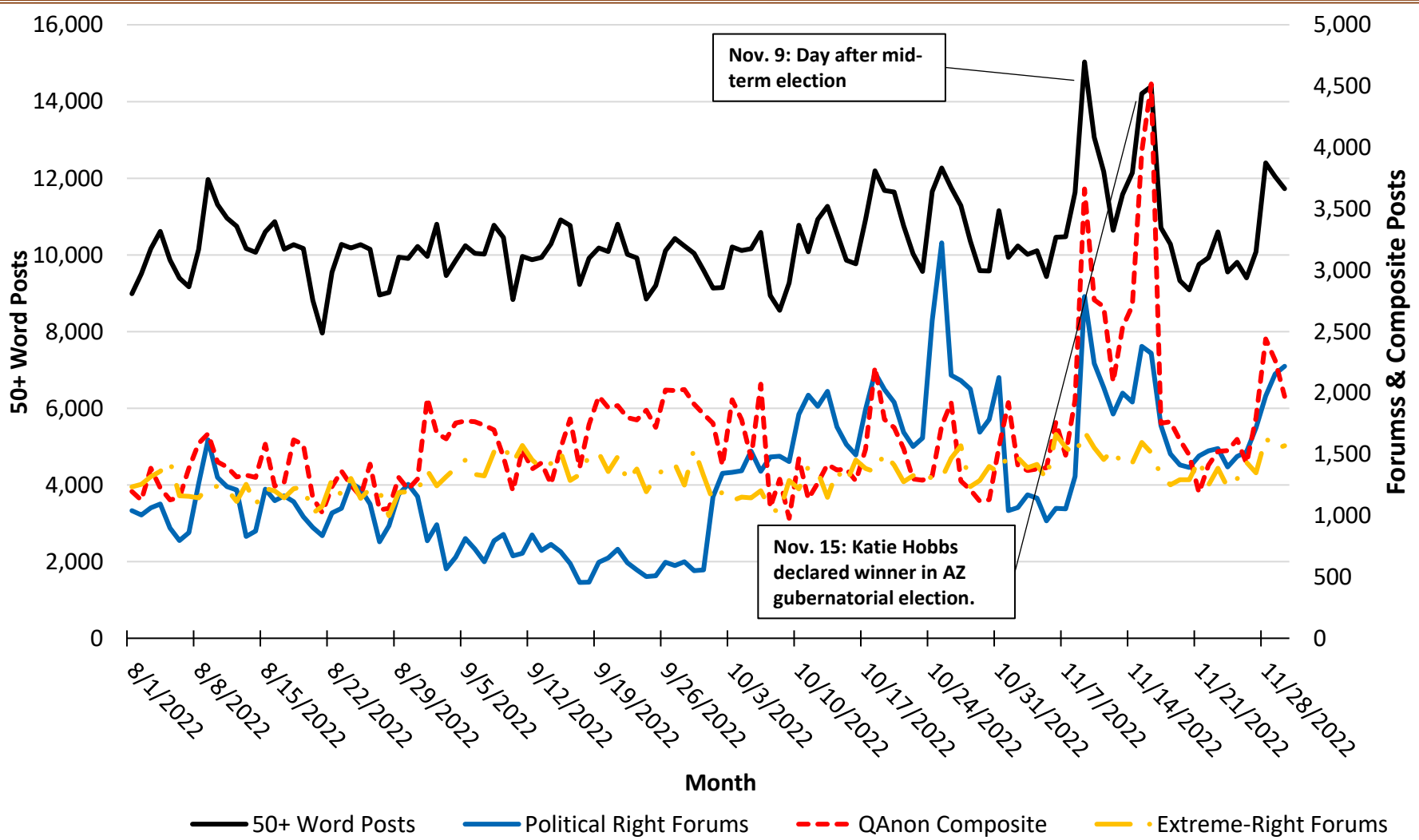
### Avg. Daily Activity for Alt-Right Forums for Past Four Months



Note: 453,964 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

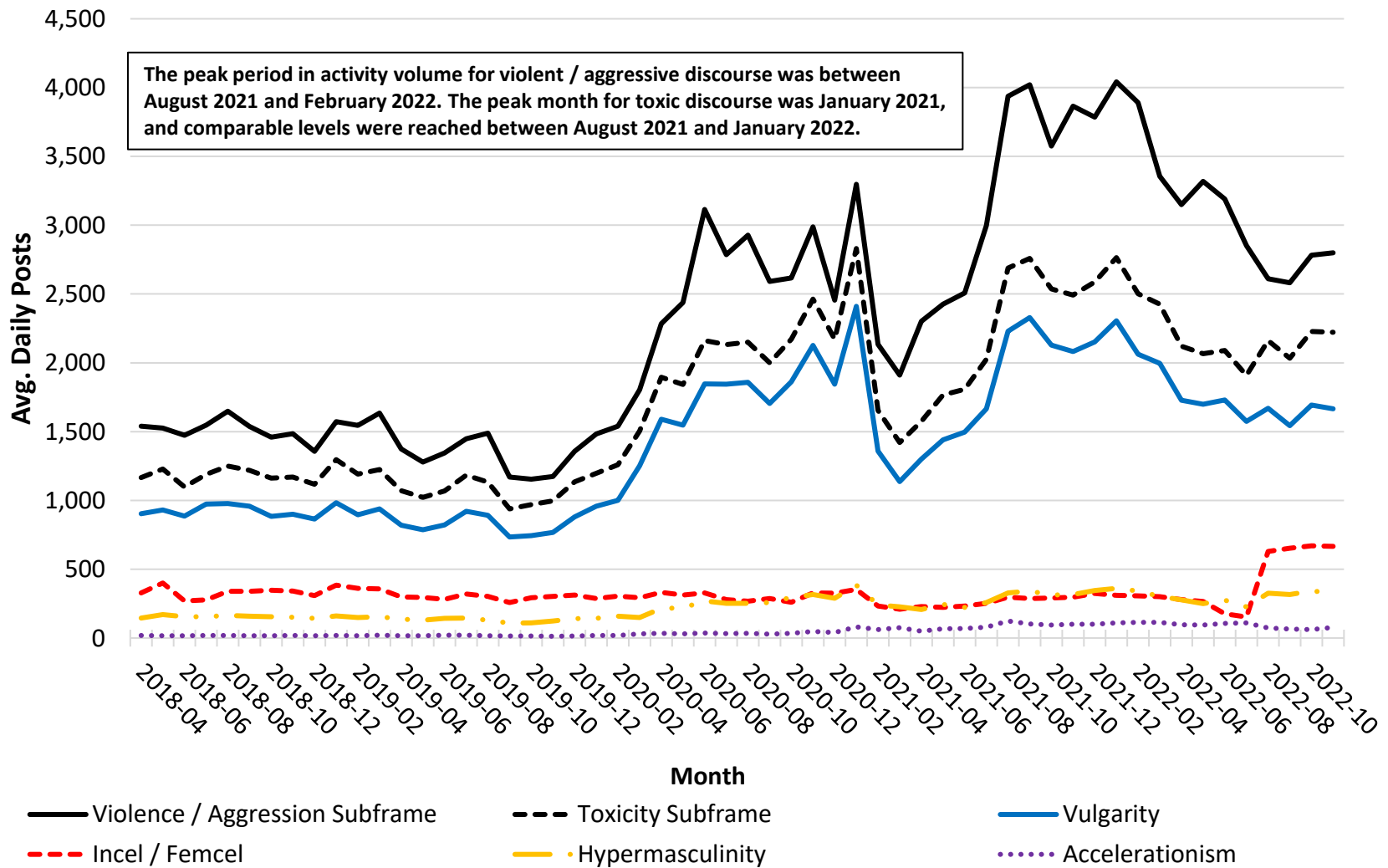
## Daily Activity for Past 4 Months



Note: 1,265,288 recovered posts with at least 50 words

# Figure 6

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

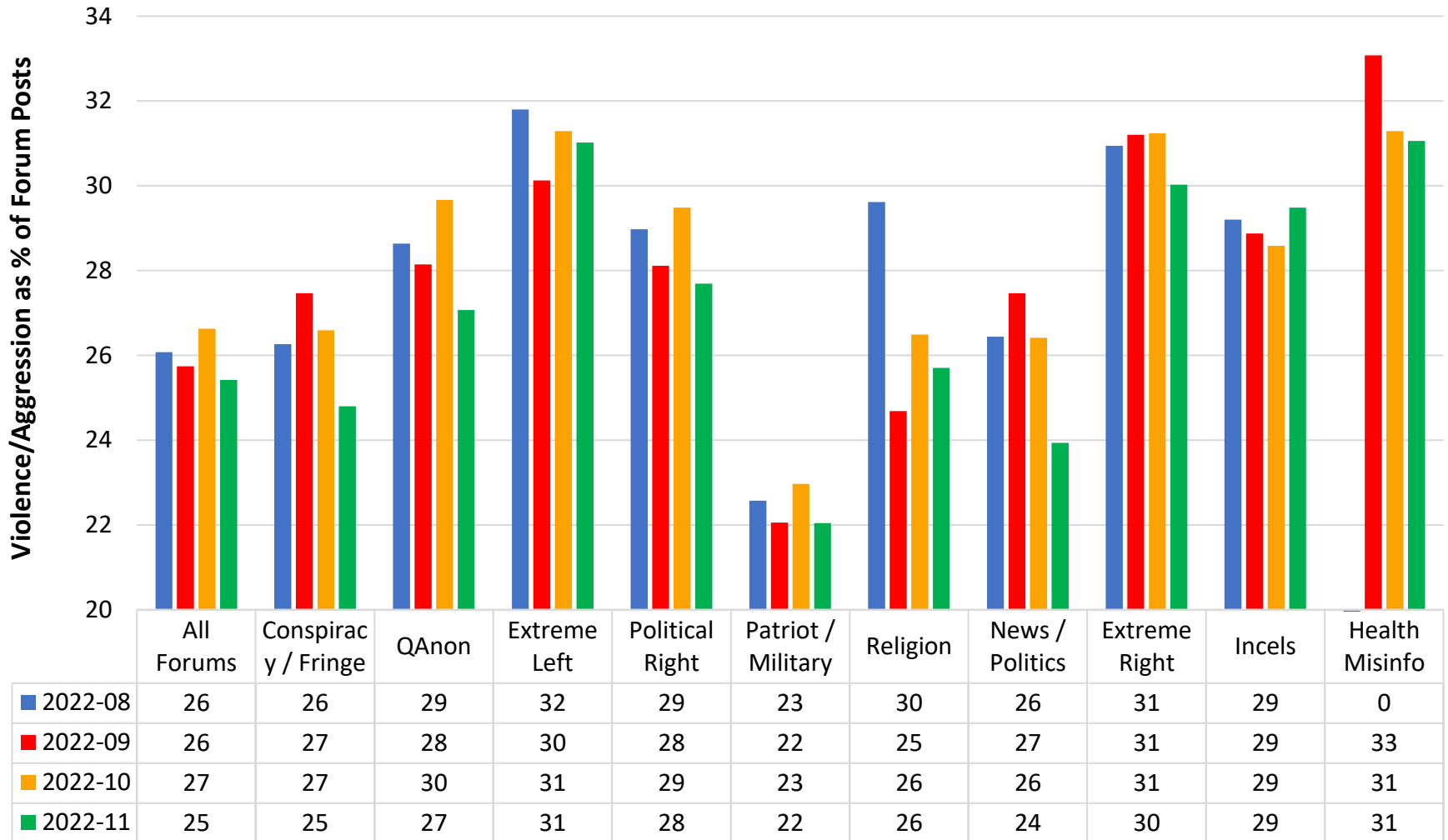


Note: The Violence / Aggression subframe had 3,972,322 recovered posts. The Toxicity subframe had 2,968,118 recovered posts. The subframes are not mutually exclusive. Violent /Aggressive discourse is a standalone subframe in the Values frame and excludes references identified with the Military frame. 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 7

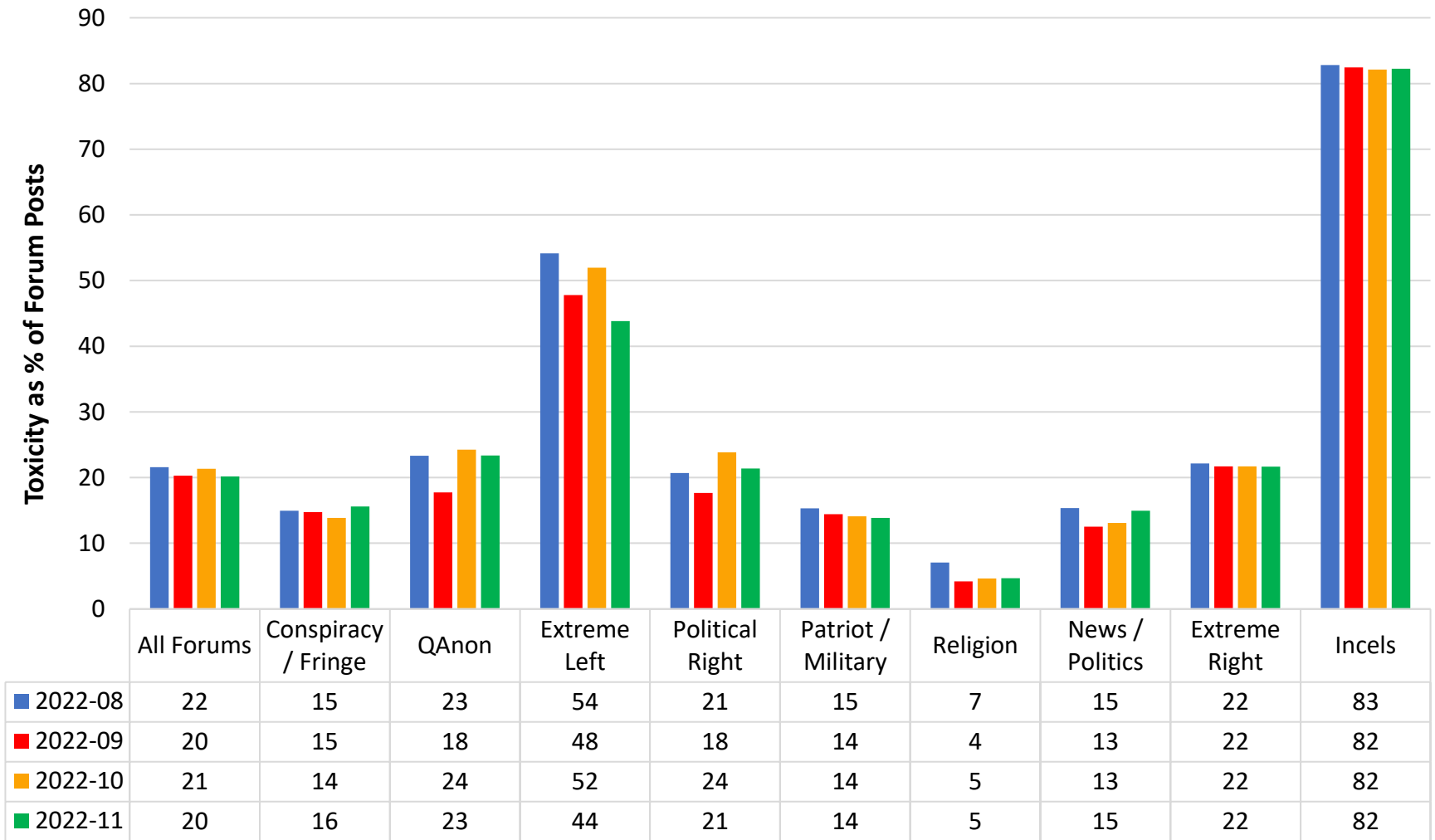
## % Posts with Violent / Aggressive Discourse by Forum for Past Four Months



Note: 453,964 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 8

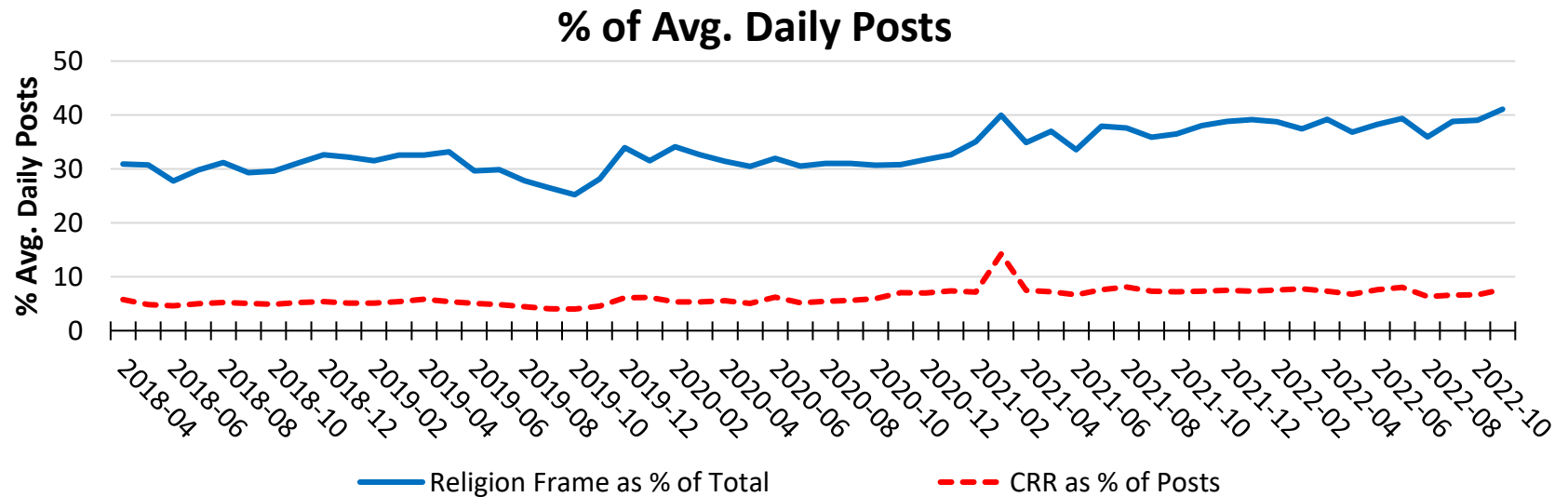
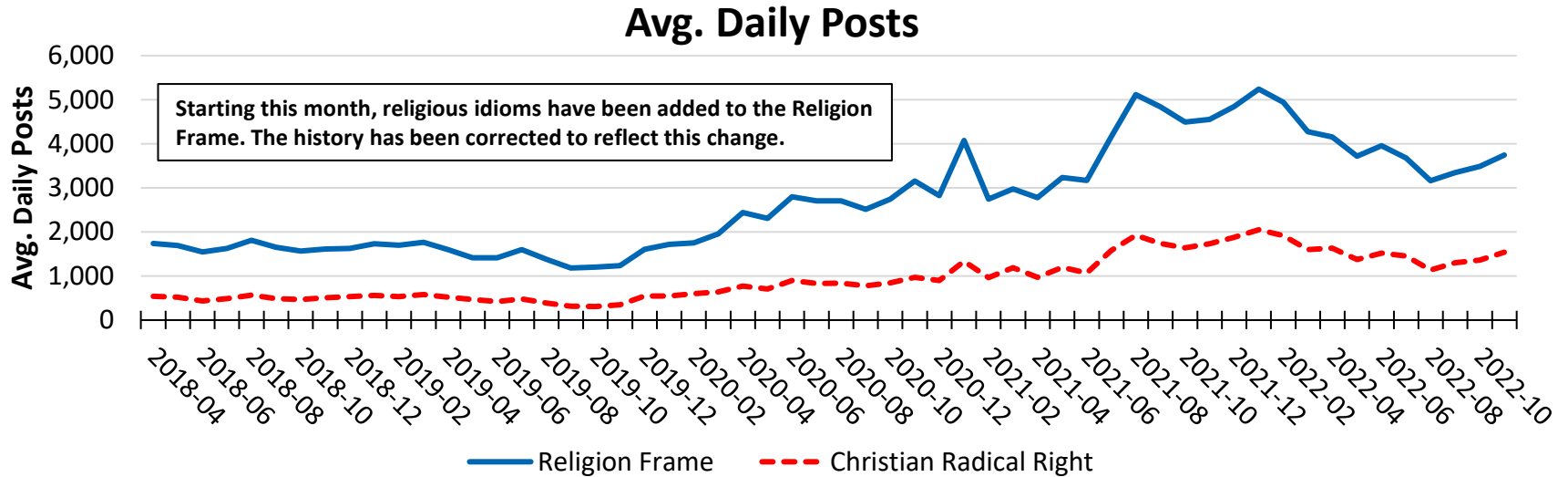
## % Posts with Toxic Discourse by Forum for Past Four Months



Note: 468,313 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 9

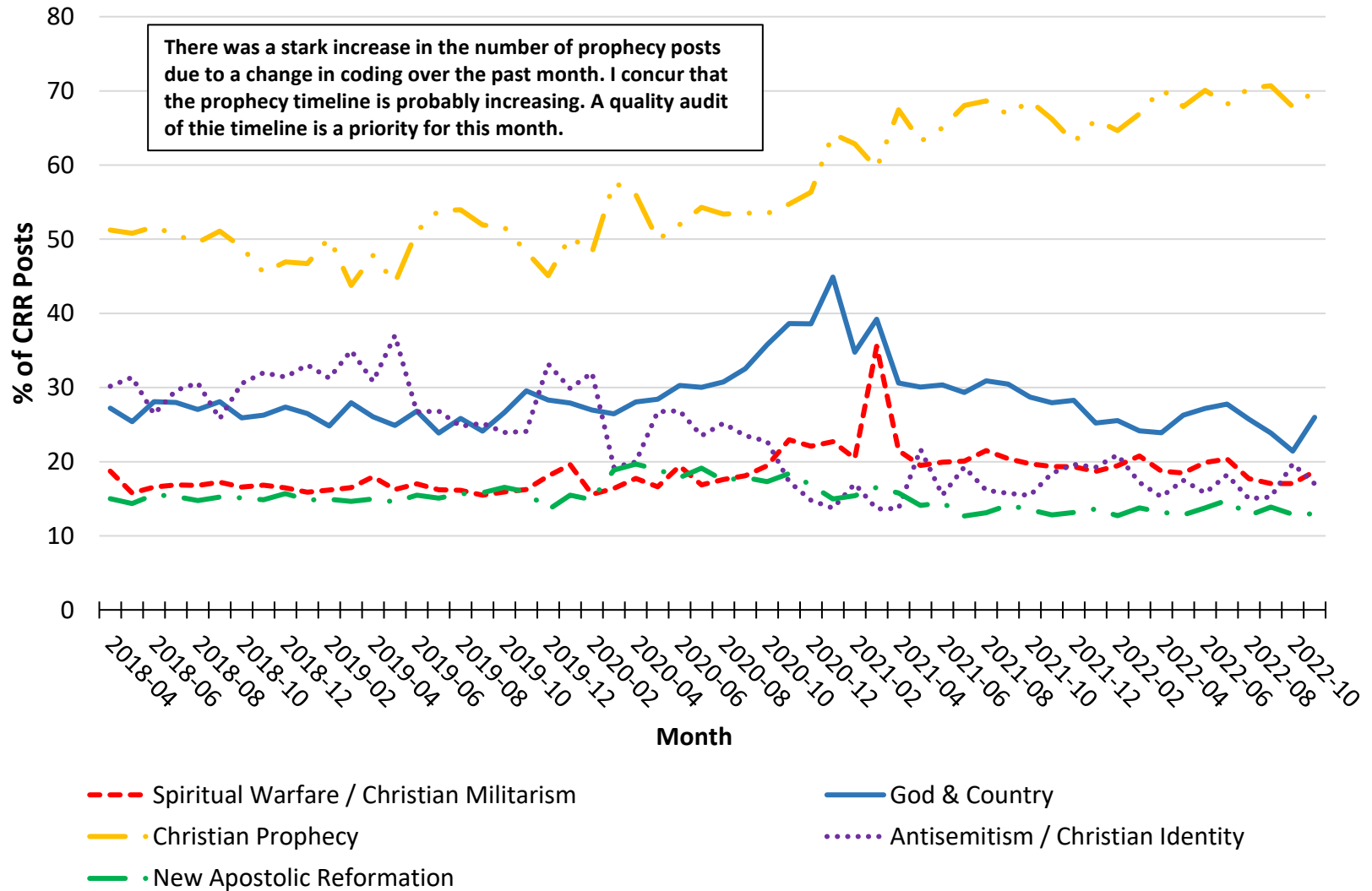
## Activity for Religion Frame since April 2018



Note: The Religion frame had 4,655,205 recovered posts.

# Figure 10

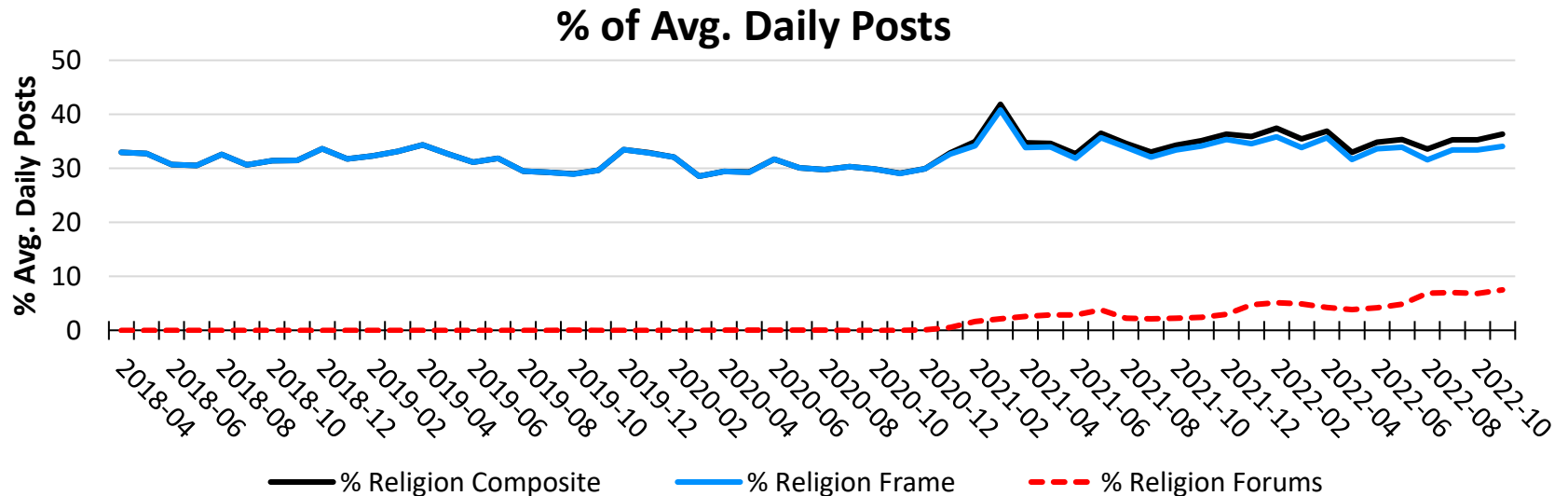
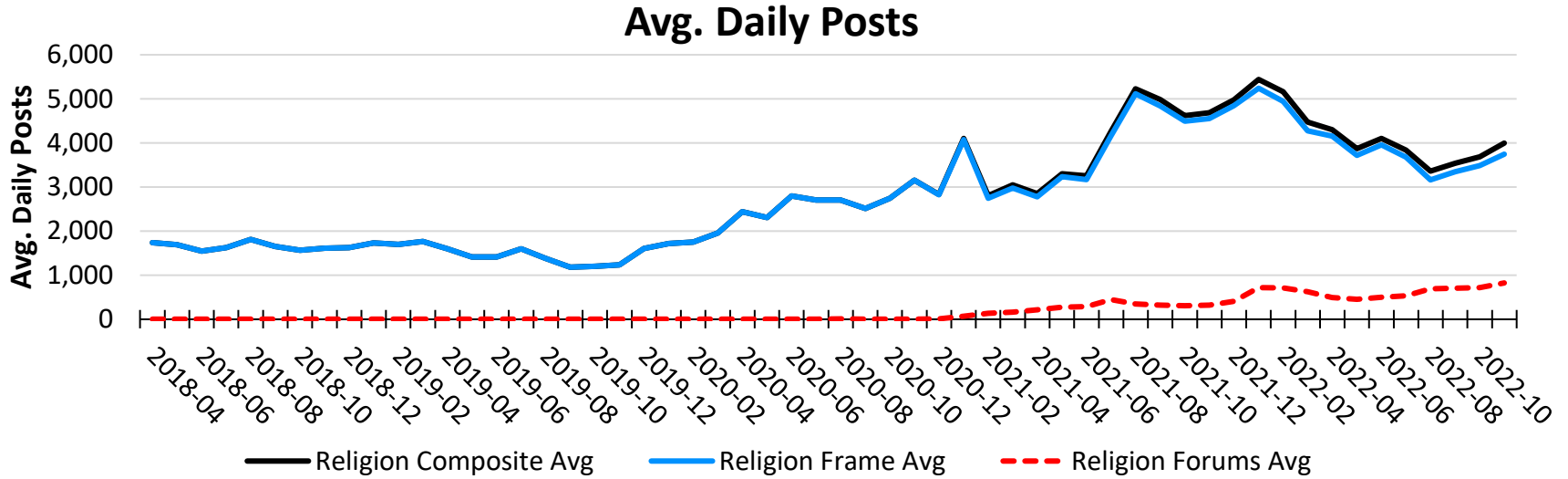
## Components of Christian Radical Right as % of CRR



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

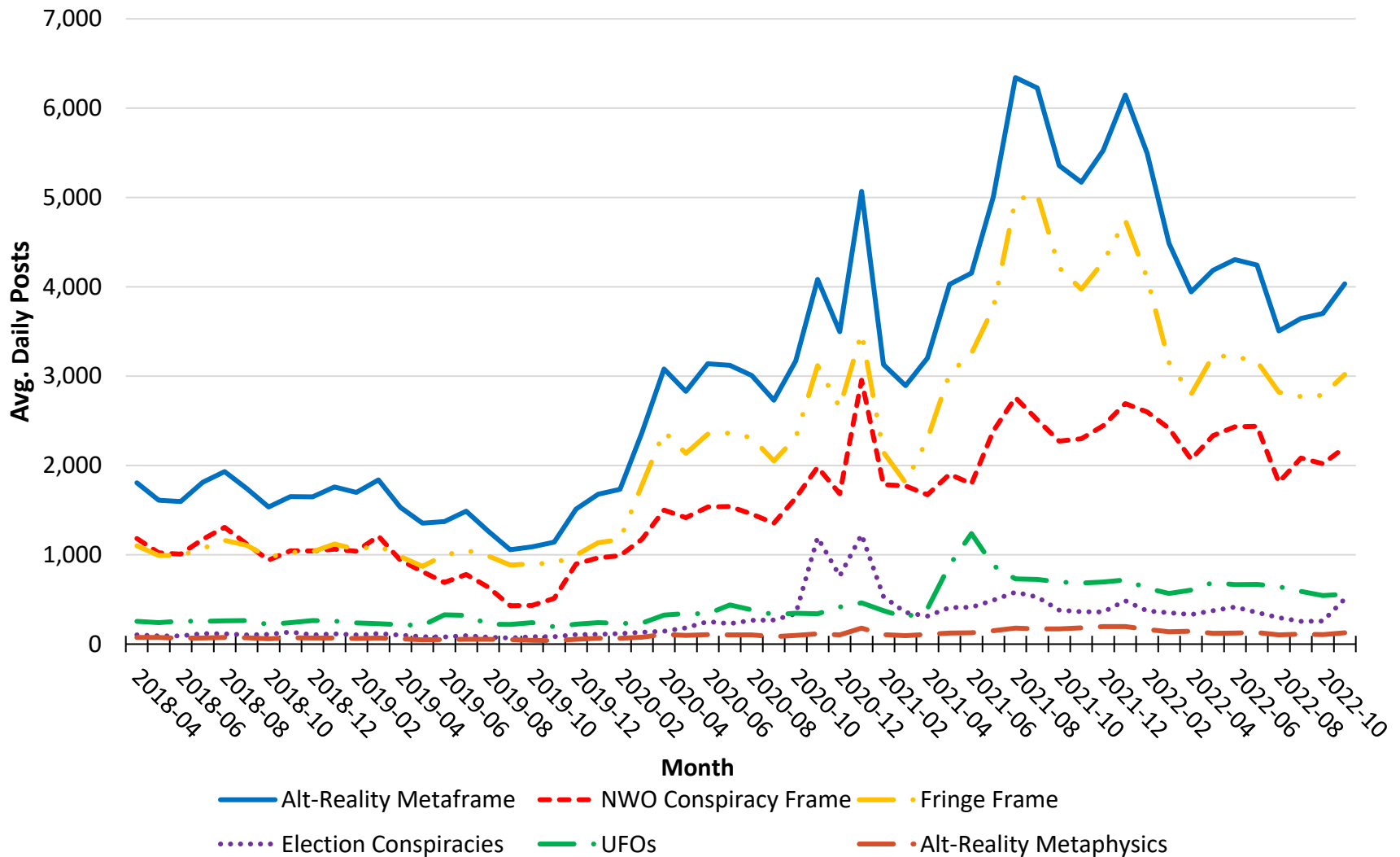
## Activity for Religion Composite since April 2018



Note: The Religion frame had 4,201,837 recovered posts. Posts identified with the Religion Frame and Religion Forums are not mutually exclusive.

# Figure 12

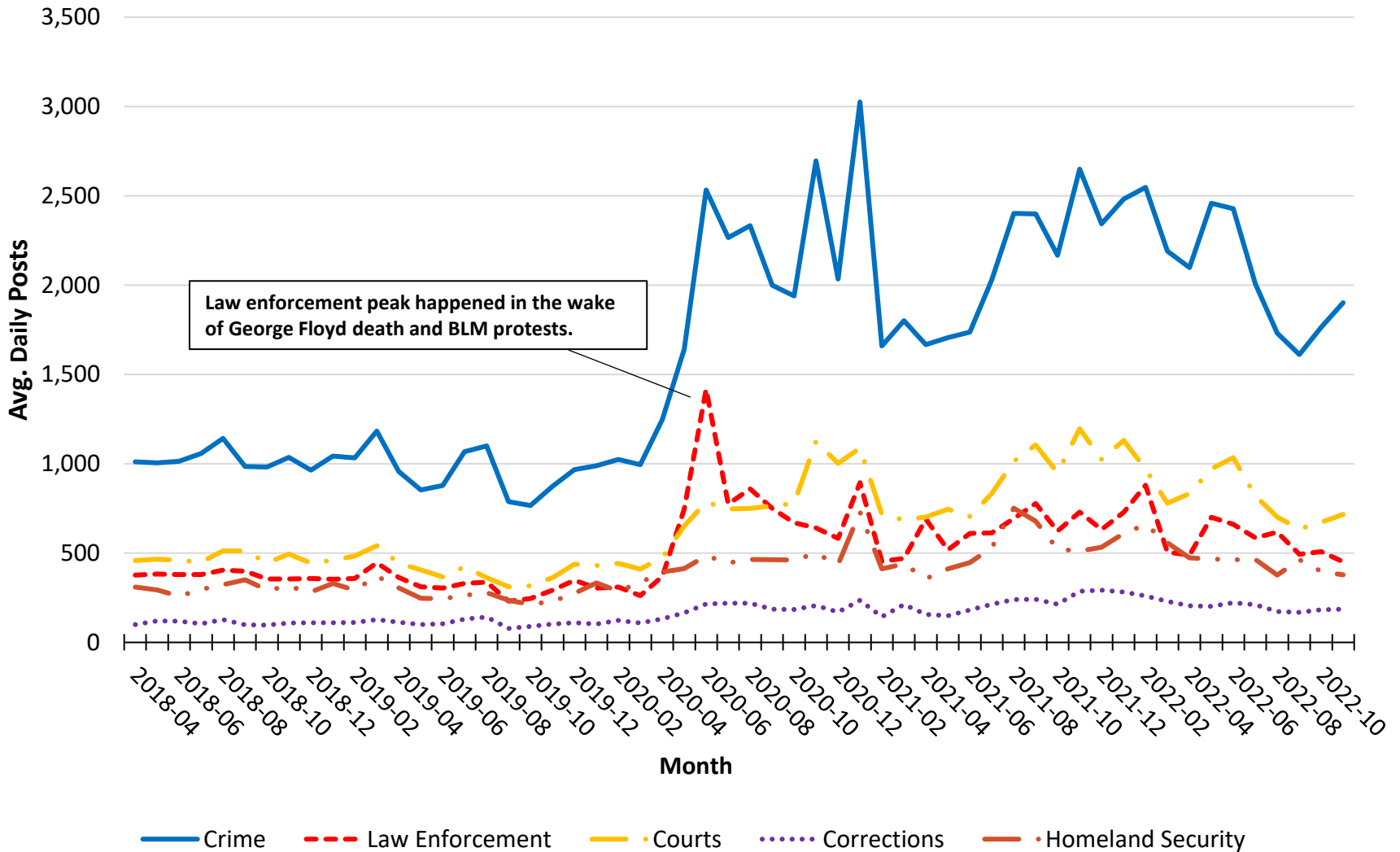
## Avg. Daily Activity for Select Alt-Reality Themes by Month



Note: The Alt-Reality metaframe had 5,196,096 recovered posts. 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 13

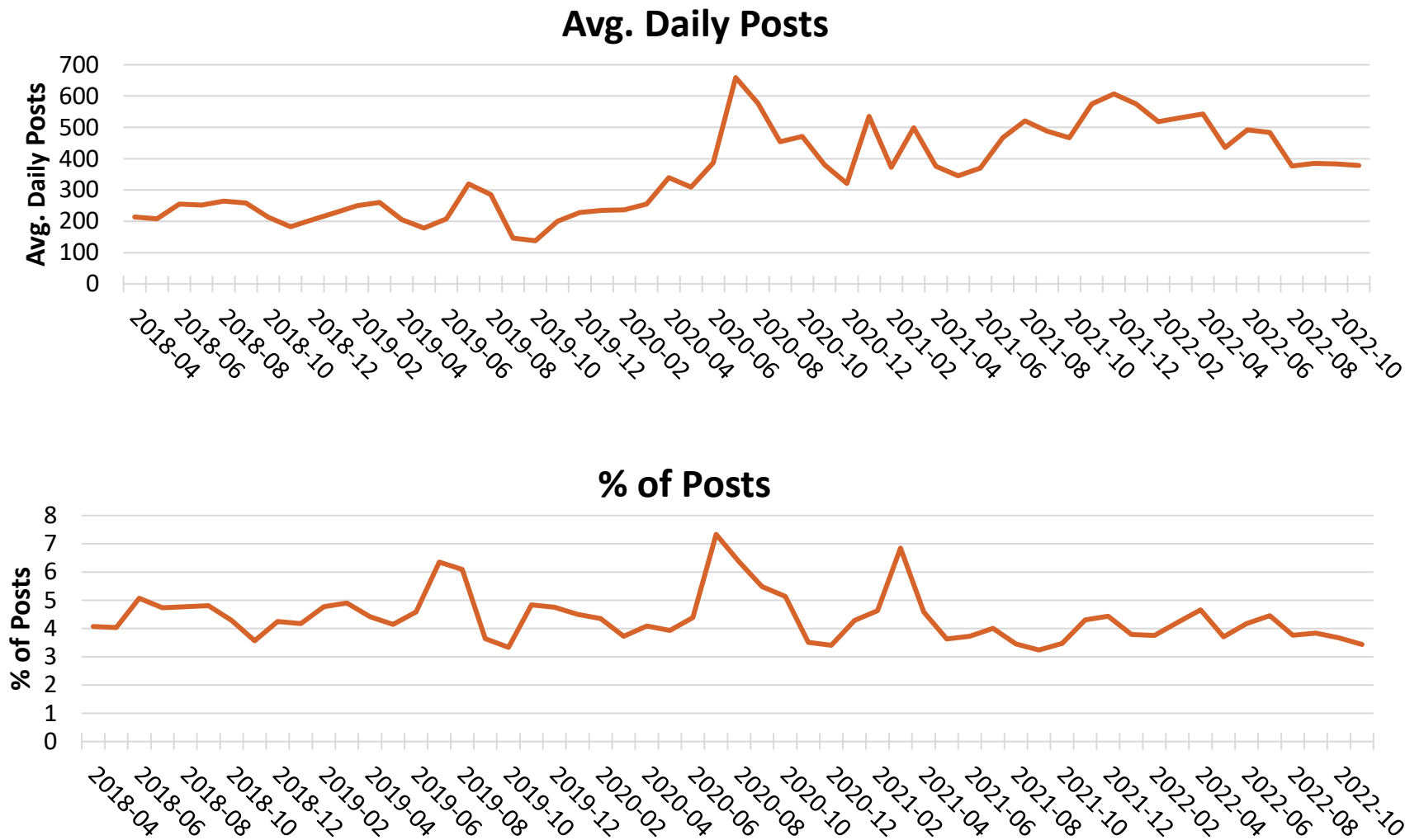
## Avg. Daily Activity for Public Safety Components by Month



Note: The Public Safety frame had 4,184,644 recovered posts.

# Figure 14

## Sex Crime References since April 2018

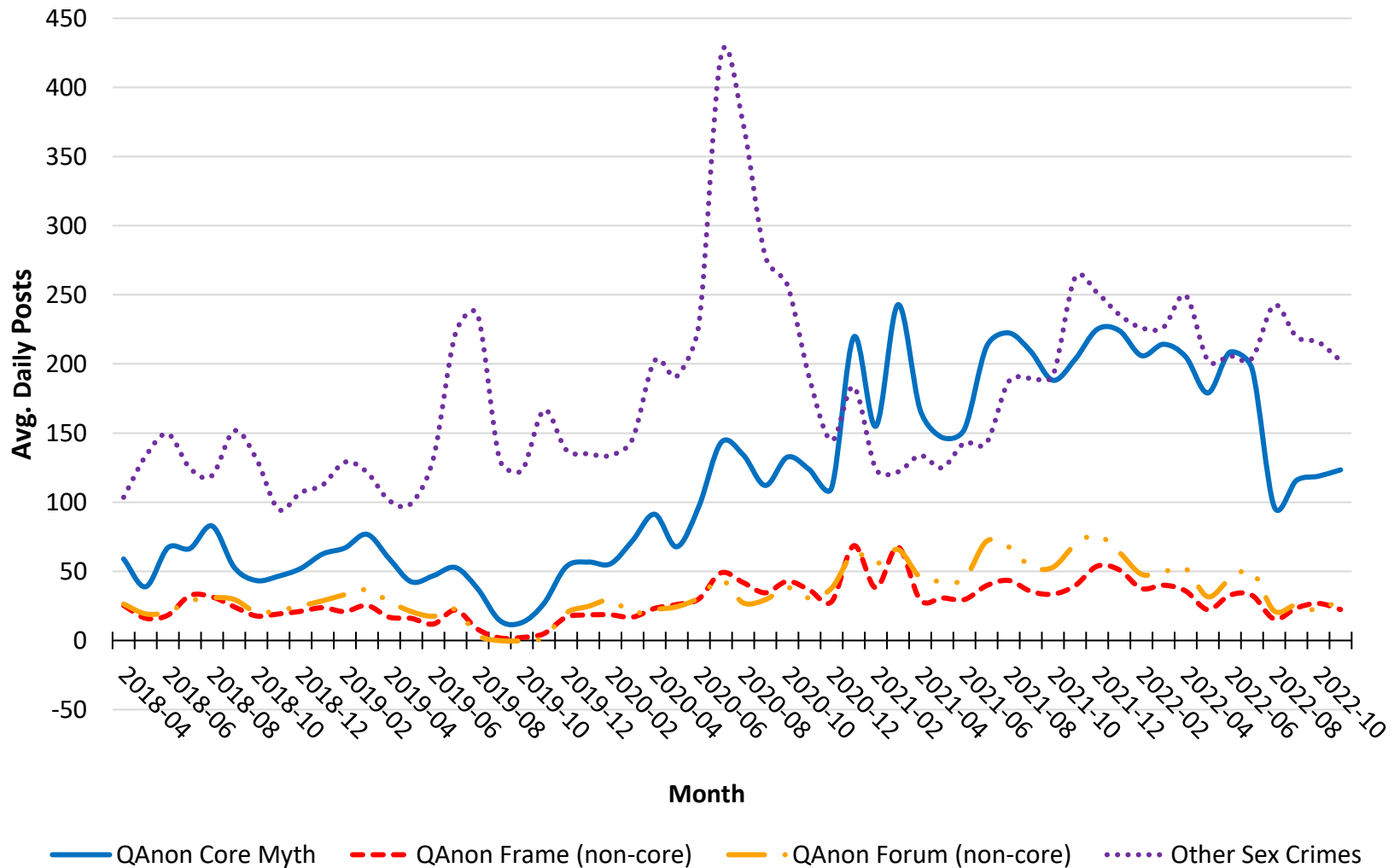


Note: Sex-crime-related themes were found in 610,529 recovered posts.



# Figure 15

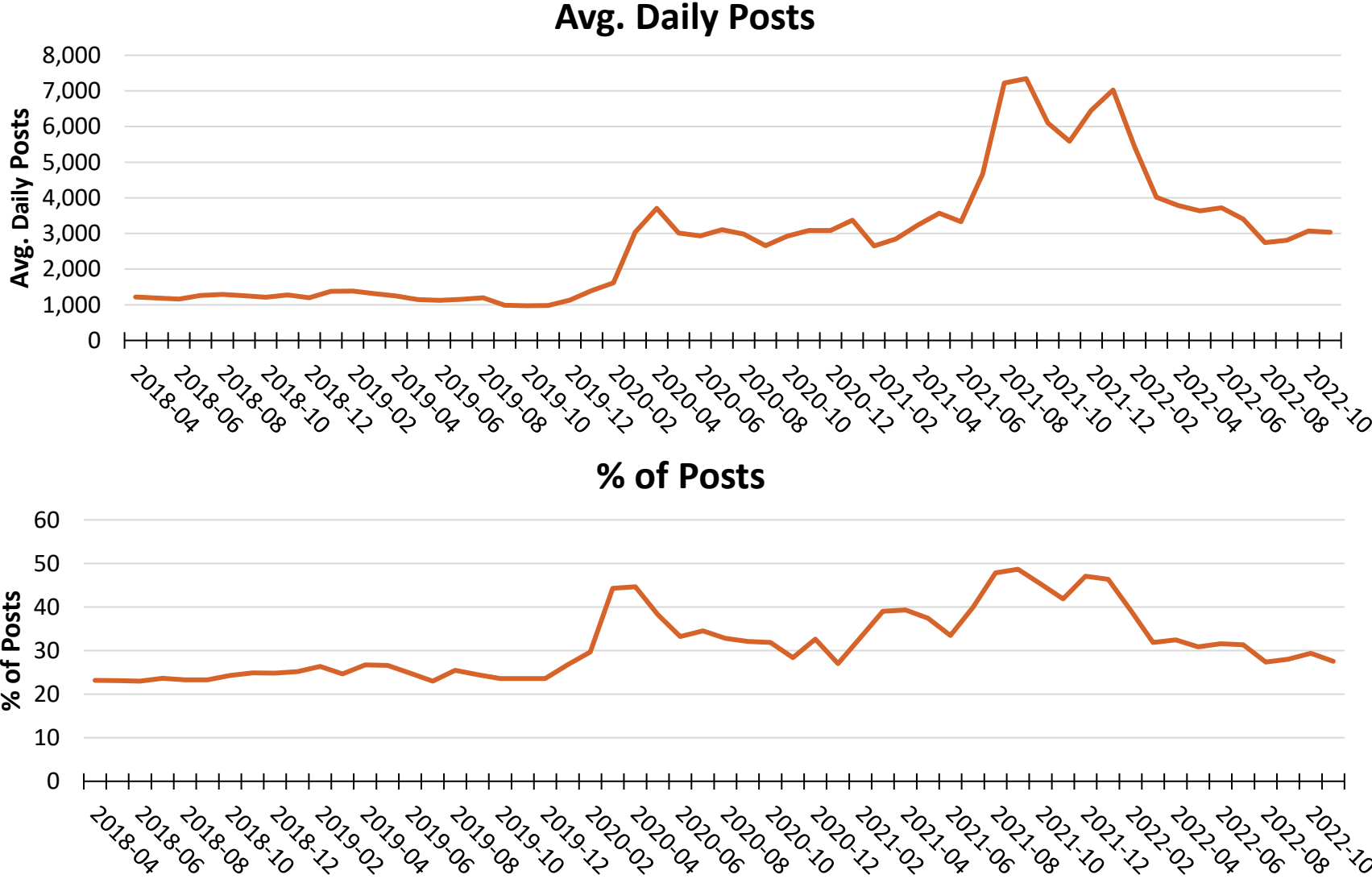
## Sex Crime References by Source and Month



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.

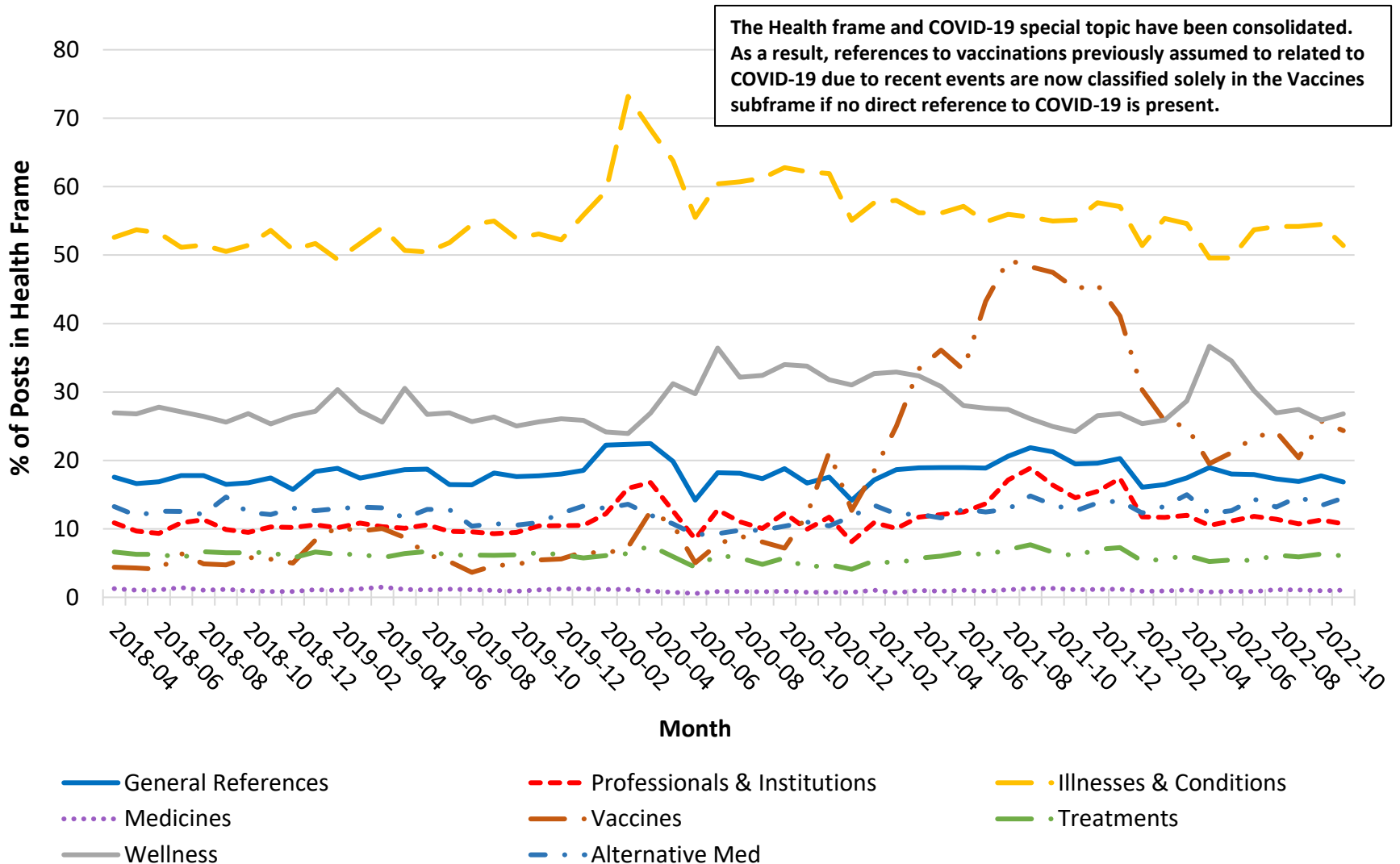
# Figure 16

## Activity for Health Frame since April 2018



# Figure 17

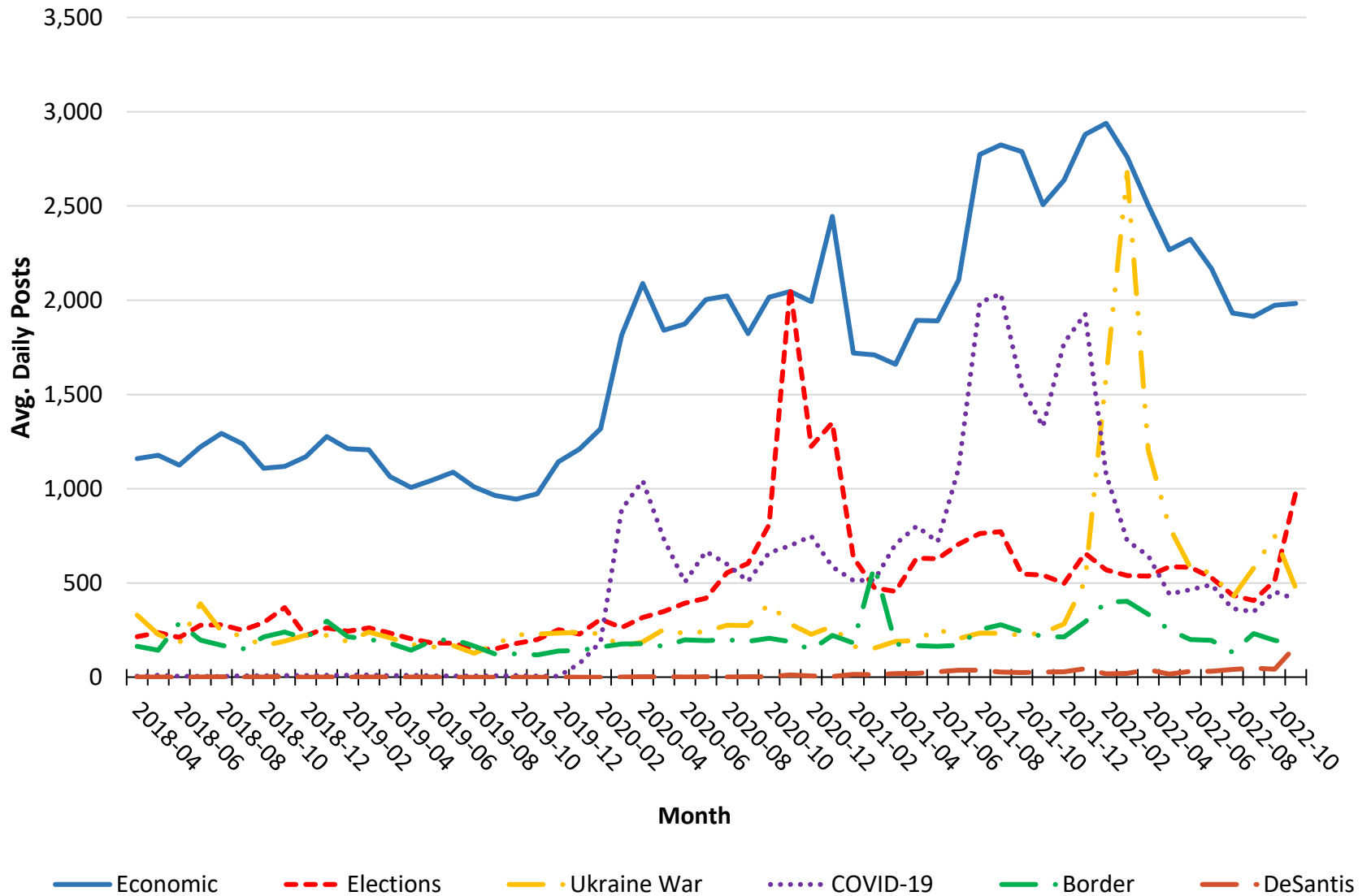
## Health Subframes as a % of Health Frame by Month



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 18

## Avg. Daily Posts for Contemporary Topics by Month



# Definitions

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**Forum:** A self-defined forum or channel on a web site or social-media platform

**Frame:** A group of posts identified with a particular theme based on key words, phrases, or stems

**Composite:** The combination of forums and frames related to the same subject matter. Composites were started to highlight the presence of a large amount of material that falls outside related forums. E.g., most religious discourse happens outside Religion forums.

**Activity:** % of posts with at least one key word, phrase, or stem identified with particular themes

## Forum Types

- **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 incelibate.cThese 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 November 2022

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<b>Platforms</b>	<b>50+ Word Posts</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b># Tagged Posts</b>	<b>% Posts Tagged</b>
Reddit (18 subreddits)	140,440	42.5%	134,780	96.0%
Telegram (350+ channels)	109,891	33.3%	107,355	97.7%
Win Boards (2 forums)	37,664	11.4%	36,649	97.3%
Incel.is	19,943	6.0%	19,638	98.5%
8kun (7 forums)	10,814	3.3%	10,644	98.4%
Above Top Secret	7,888	2.4%	7,485	94.9%
Stormfront	1,751	0.5%	1,746	99.7%
Raddle.me	1,006	0.3%	928	92.3%
Liberty Forums	579	0.2%	562	97.1%
EndChan (2 forums)	134	0.0%	134	100.0%
Christogenea	76	0.0%	73	96.1%
White Biocentrism	67	0.0%	67	100.0%
PinkPill.co	0	0.0%	0	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>330,253</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>320,062</b>	<b>96.9%</b>

# References

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## 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

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>