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FRAMES OF  
MISINFORMATION, EXTREMISM, & CONSPIRACISM  
A Purposive Sample of Social-Media Channels, Discussion Forums,  
and Web Pages  
December 2023 Monthly Summary

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*This report contains top-line monthly numbers from a purposive sample of social-media channels, discussion forums, and web sites known for hosting misinformation, extremism, and conspiracism (MEC sector).*

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

# Activity Summary (1 of 2)

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**Methodological Notes:** Activity levels are measured as prevalence and density rates. Prevalence is defined as the % of posts with at least one key word, phrase, or stem identified with particular themes. Density is defined as the identified words, phrases, and word stems as a % of total words. Because the study of language and ideology is a key aspect of the larger project, results are limited exclusively to posts with at least 30 words (approximately 2 sentences).

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## Changes since June 2023 Report

- New sources added: Paranormal Central (Conspiracy/Fringe), Infostormer (Extreme Right), Green Med Info (Health Misinfo), and Occidental Observer (Extreme Right). Several new Extreme Left sites have already been scraped and will be ready for addition with either January or February numbers. I expect an r9k extract to be ready for February numbers.
- External benchmarks are now used to determine whether the density of violent discourse is high. The benchmark score comes from aggregating results from ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News. See Appendix B for interpretation.
- Extensive work has gone into the definition of violence and toxicity using WordNet and AI-generated word lists. Expect major changes in these numbers as additional work is done on the methodology over the next few months.
- The God & Country subframe under the Religion frame has been renamed Christian Nationhood. I am trying to avoid the term Christian Nationalism since an individual post normally would not have all the points of Christian Nationalism in it, and some basic language about God blessing America is used in mainline circles as well as conservative ones (Fig. 10).

## General Trends

- The long-term decline in the MEC sector continued. Average daily balance fell from 5,951 posts per day to 4,925 posts, a single-month decrease of 17.2%. The sector fell 35.0% since the spike in October due to the outbreak of war in Gaza. In December, overall activity levels were below March 2020, when pandemic lockdowns began (Fig. 1).
- The general decline was across all frames irrespective of their main themes and points of view. No frame experienced overall growth in December (Fig. 2 and 4).
- The December daily peak in volume is associated with the removal of Trump from the Maine primary ballot (Fig. 5).

## Violent Language

- The violent density rate fell 5.3% in December to 1.25%, which is slightly above the all-study density 1.24% (Fig. 6).
- Three frames could be regarded as having above normal levels of violent discourse: Public Safety (1.58%), Extreme-Right (1.53%), and NWO Conspiracies (1.53%) (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8). The Public Safety frame was not a surprising since it included discussions of violent crime.

# Activity Summary (2 of 2)

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## Religion

- The Religion frame fell 32% since October 2023. Nevertheless, it remained the largest frame within the purposive sample at 36.6% of posts in December (Fig. 2, Fig. 4, and Fig. 9). Religion has been the largest frame since August 2022 (Fig. 3).
- The level of prophetic material within the Religion frame remained within the 25-30% range after its rise in 2020-21 (Fig. 10).
- Public Safety remained the largest frame within the Religion frame for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive month (Fig. 11). As of yet I have not investigated the reason for this.
- The Antisemitism frame fell 32% since the outbreak of the Gaza war in October (Fig. 13). FBI Director Christopher Wray told the Senate Judiciary Committee in December about an elevated level of antisemitism after the start of hostilities between Hamas and Israel on October 7 (CNN, 12/6/2023). This Frames report is the first one since the incident, and the data confirmed the spike in antisemitic rhetoric in October. However, activity levels fell sharply since then. It is important to note that there are other indicators of antisemitism not included in this study, and some of these may yield different results.

## Health

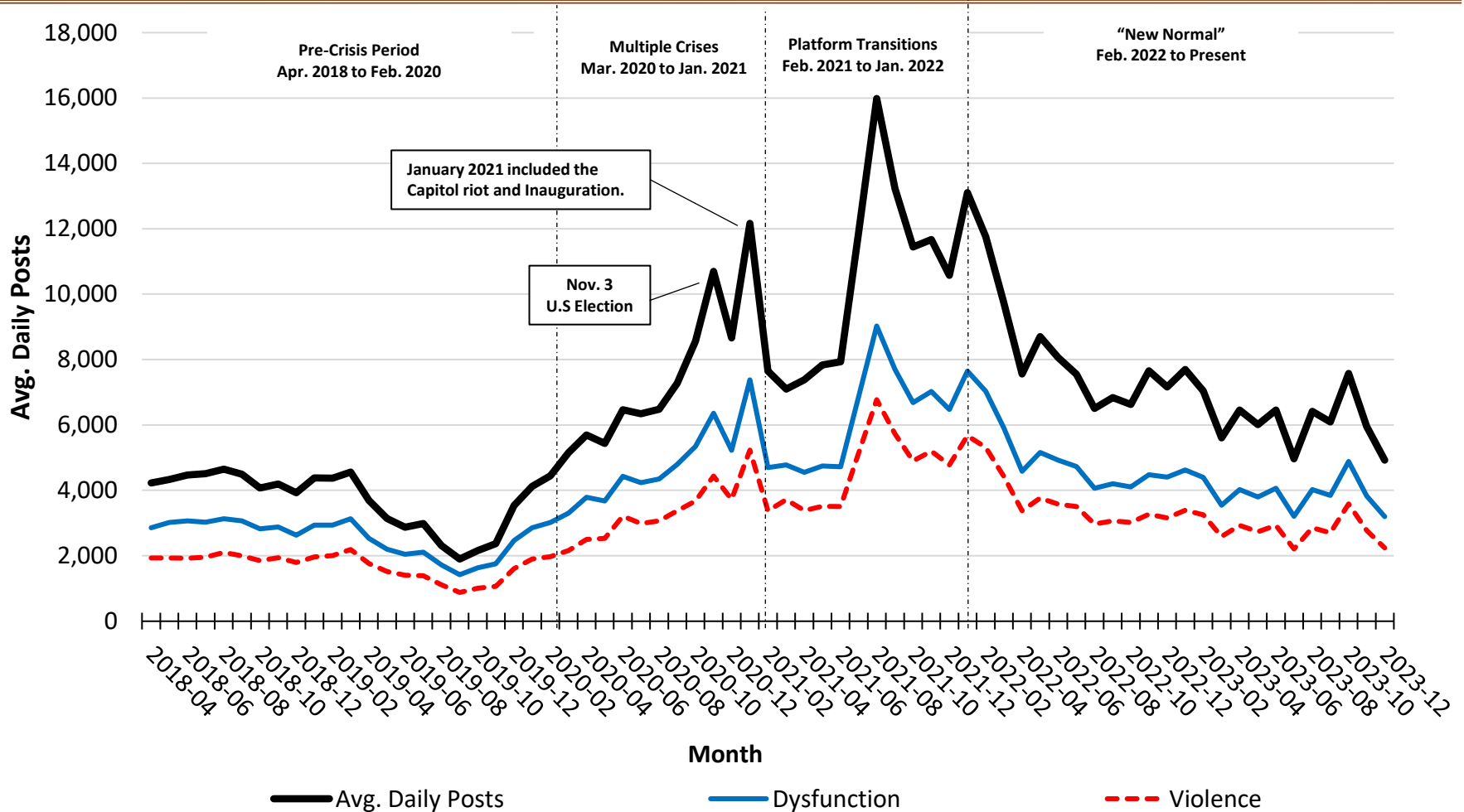
- Average daily activity for the Health frame fell 23.1% in December. While vaccination remained the largest subframe, its gap with other subframes narrowed. Nutrition was the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest subframe (Fig. 14).
- The density of violent language in the Health frame fell from 1.42% to 1.34% in December, a 6.1% decline in density, but the level of violence in discourse about addiction rose from 1.24% to 1.47%, an 18.4% increase in density (Fig. 15).
- Religion remained the largest portion of the Health frame, followed by the Public Safety frame (Fig. 16).
- The average daily volume from Health Misinformation sites fell 6.3% (Fig. 17).

## Other Comments

- The Education frame was down 21.4% (Fig. 18).
- The Public Safety frame fell 21.5% (Fig. 19).

# Figure 1

## Avg. Daily Activity by Month

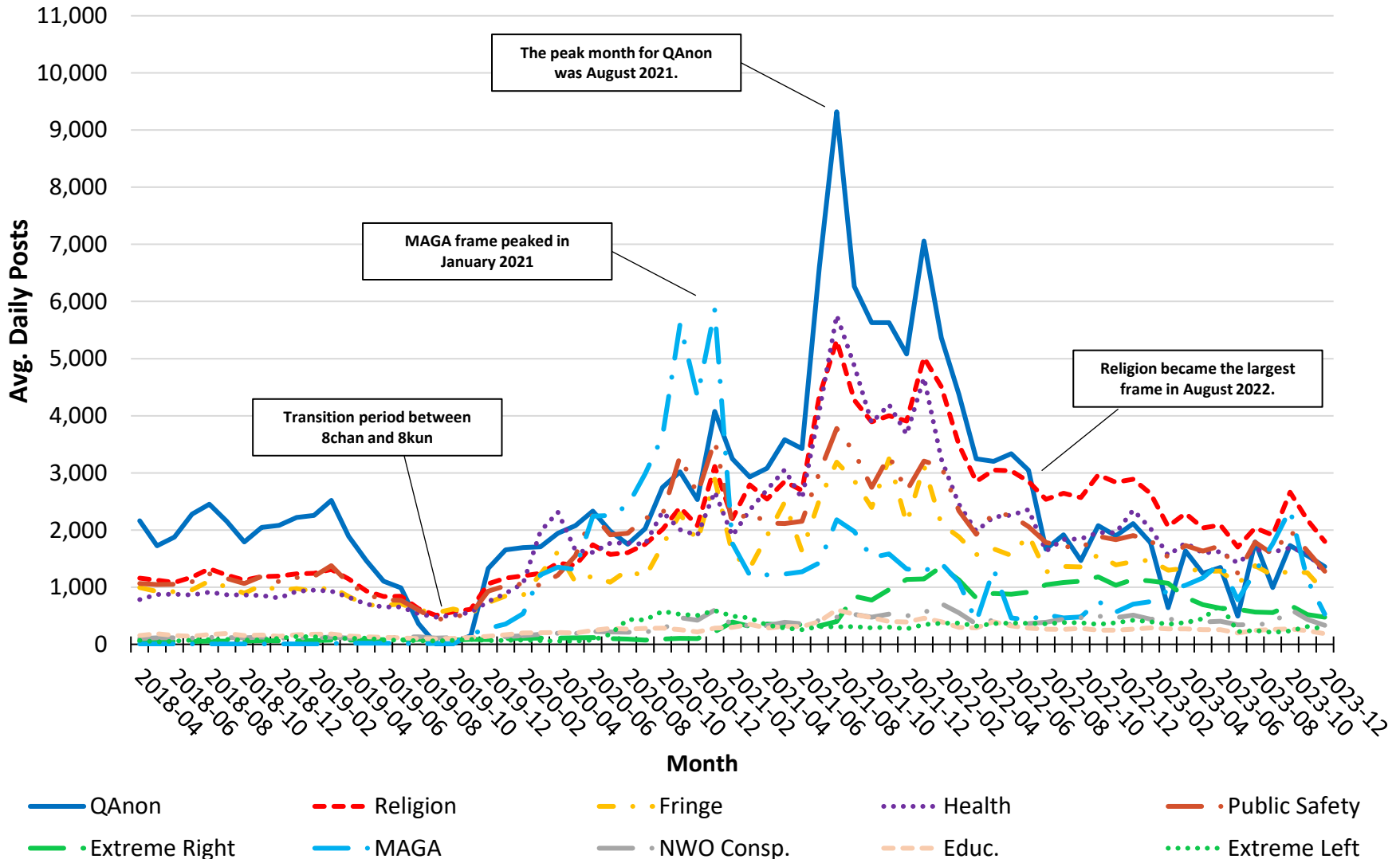


Note: See Appendix C for total recovered posts.

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

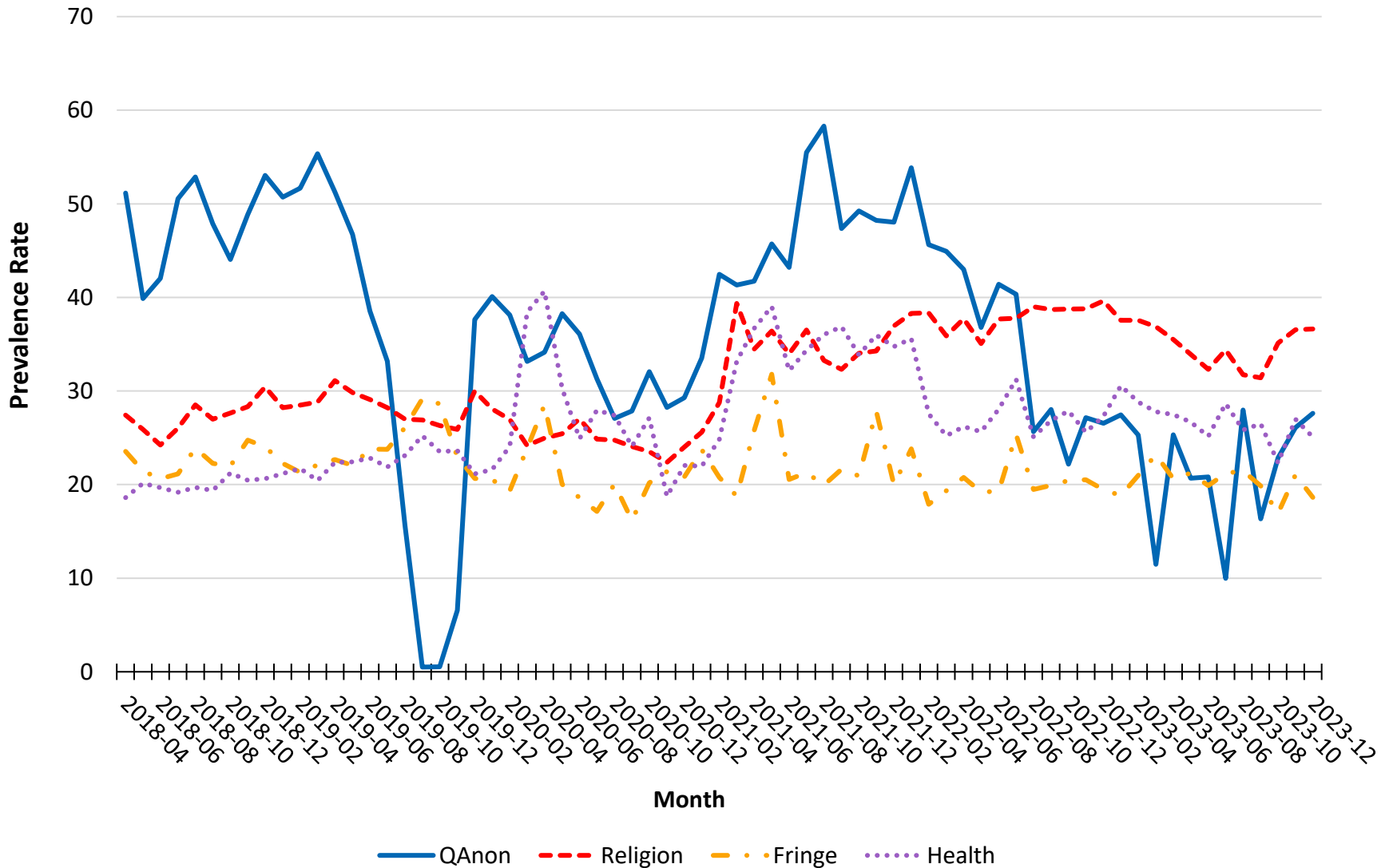
## Avg. Daily Posts by Month for Select Frames



Notes: See Appendix D for total recovered posts by frame. Frames are not mutually exclusive.

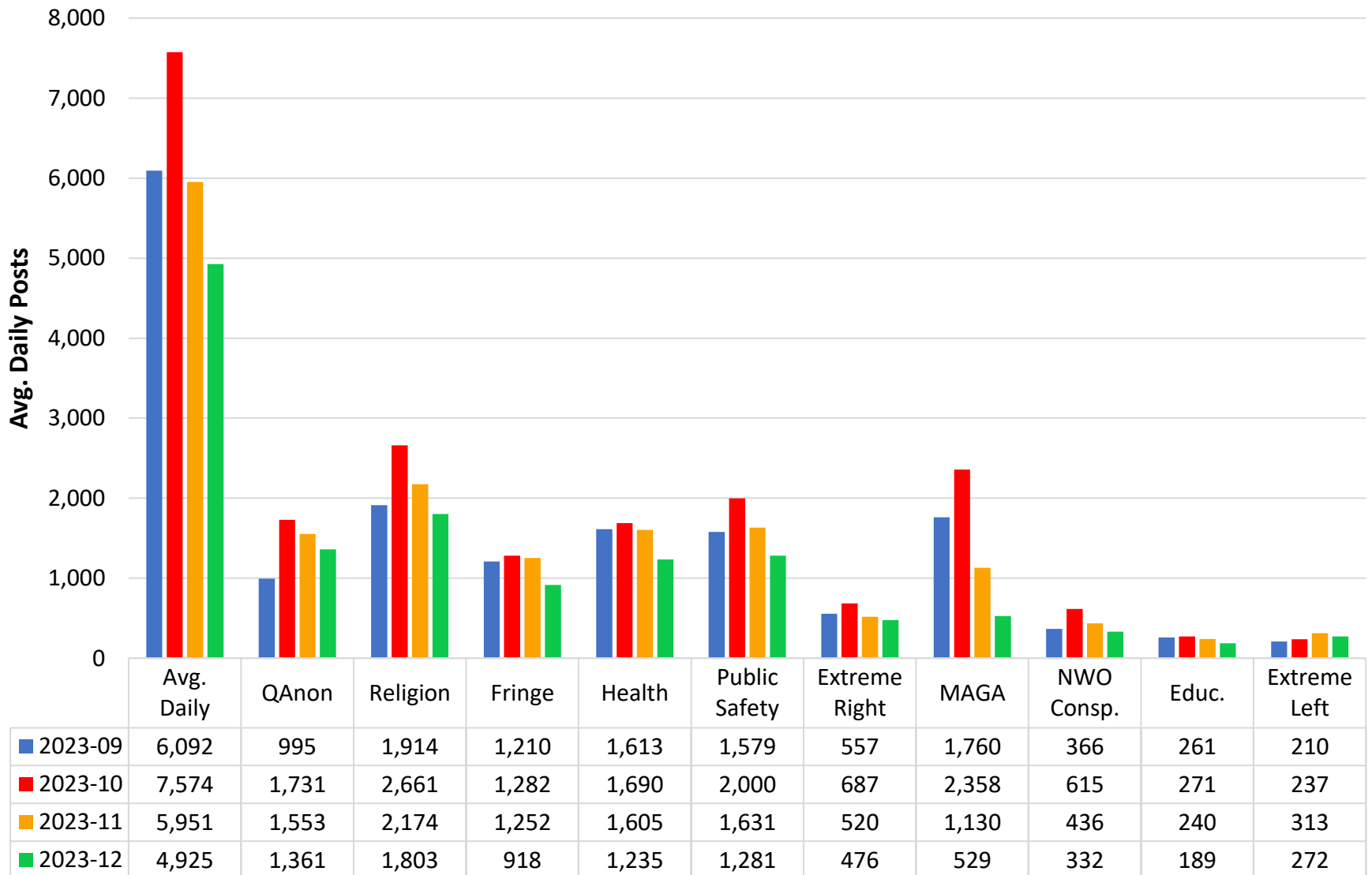
# Figure 3

## Prevalence by Month for Select Frames (Total Study Rate of 20% or More)



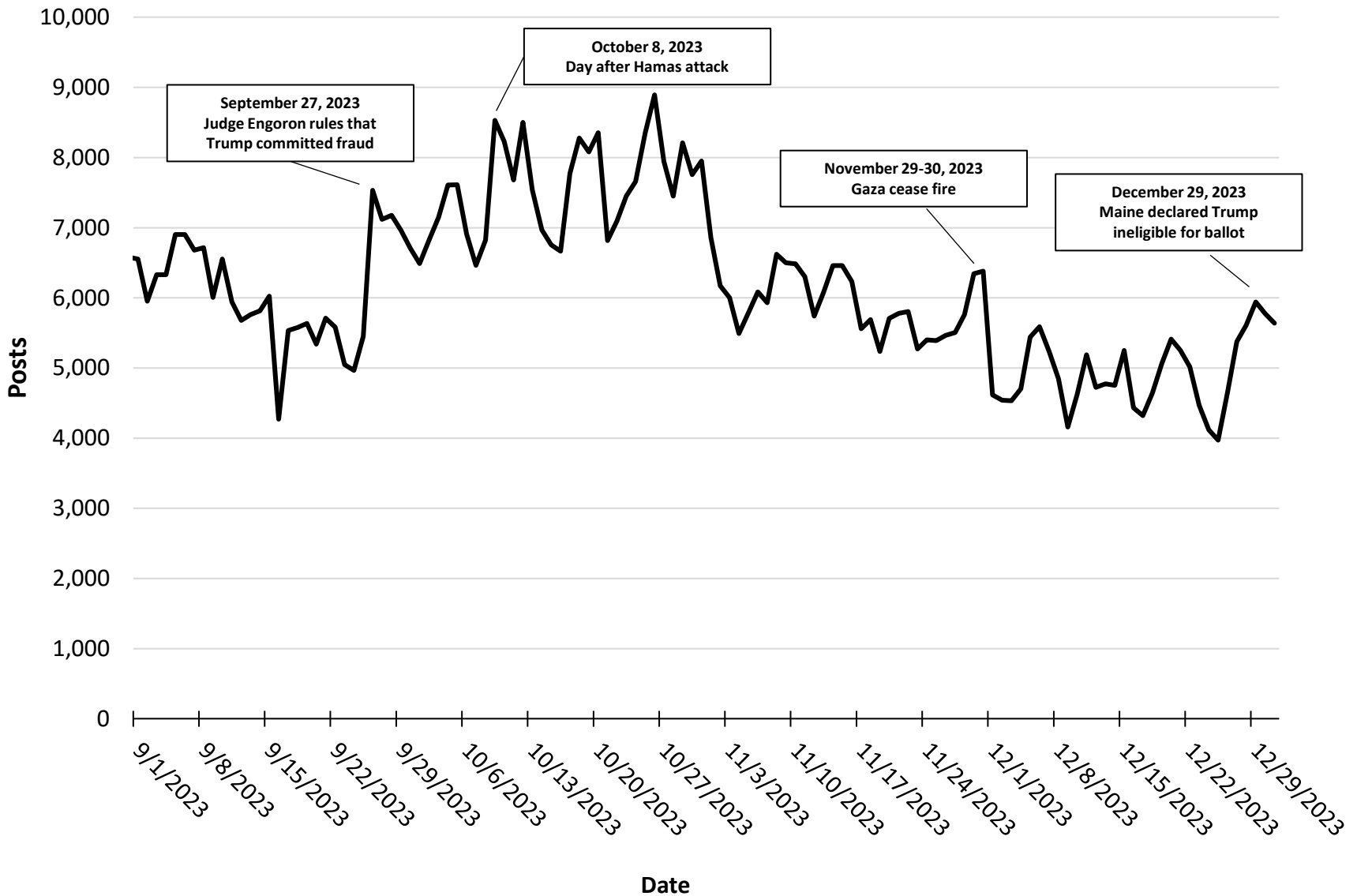
# Figure 4

## Avg. Daily Activity for Past Four Months for Select Frames



# Figure 5

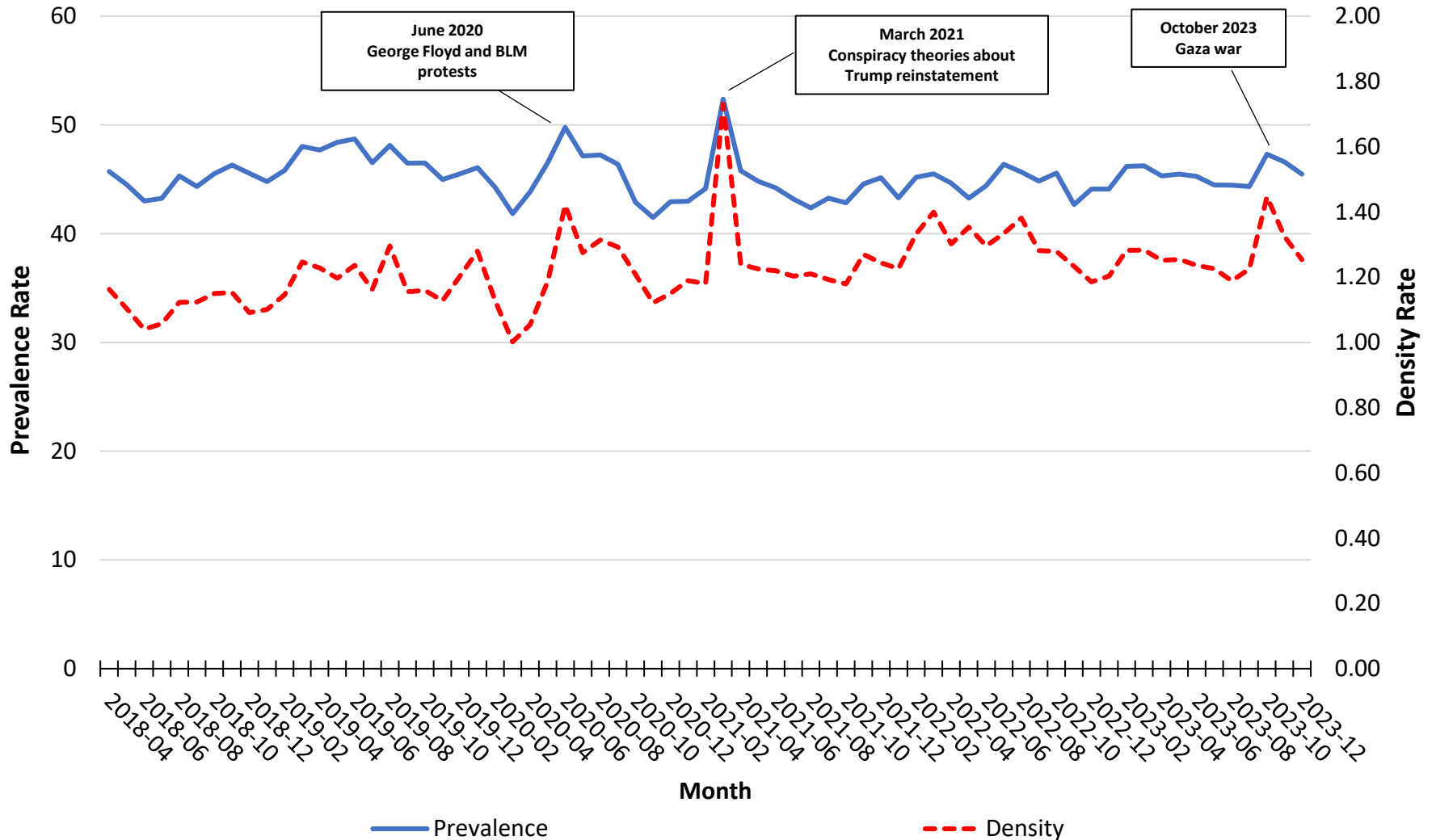
## Daily Posts for Most Recent 4 Months





# Figure 6

## Violent Prevalence and Density Rates by Month



Notes: See Appendix D for total recovered posts by frame. Frames are not mutually exclusive.

## Figure 7

### Violent Density by Select Frame by Month

	Dec. 2023	Total Study	Min.	Max.	Peak Month
Public Safety	<b>1.58</b>	<b>1.60</b> (1)	1.34	<b>2.18</b>	3/21 – Return of Trump conspiracies
Extreme Right	<b>1.53</b>	1.46 (4)	1.19	<b>1.94</b>	10/23 – Start of Gaza war
NWO Conspiracy	<b>1.53</b>	<b>1.48</b> (3)	1.20	<b>1.82</b>	10/23 – Start of Gaza war
Extreme Left	1.39	<b>1.59</b> (2)	0.81	<b>2.07</b>	6/20 – George Floyd / BLM protests
Education	1.35	1.39 (5)	1.14	1.71	5/22
Religion	1.34	1.34	1.14	<b>1.95</b>	3/21 – Return of Trump conspiracies
Health	1.34	1.33	1.04	<b>1.83</b>	3/21 – Return of Trump conspiracies?
Fringe	1.32	1.35	1.08	1.65	3/22
QAnon	1.24	1.33	1.09	<b>2.28</b>	3/21 – Return of Trump conspiracies
MAGA	1.23	1.19	0.88	<b>1.84</b>	8/19
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.73</b>	<b>3/21 – Return of Trump conspiracies</b>

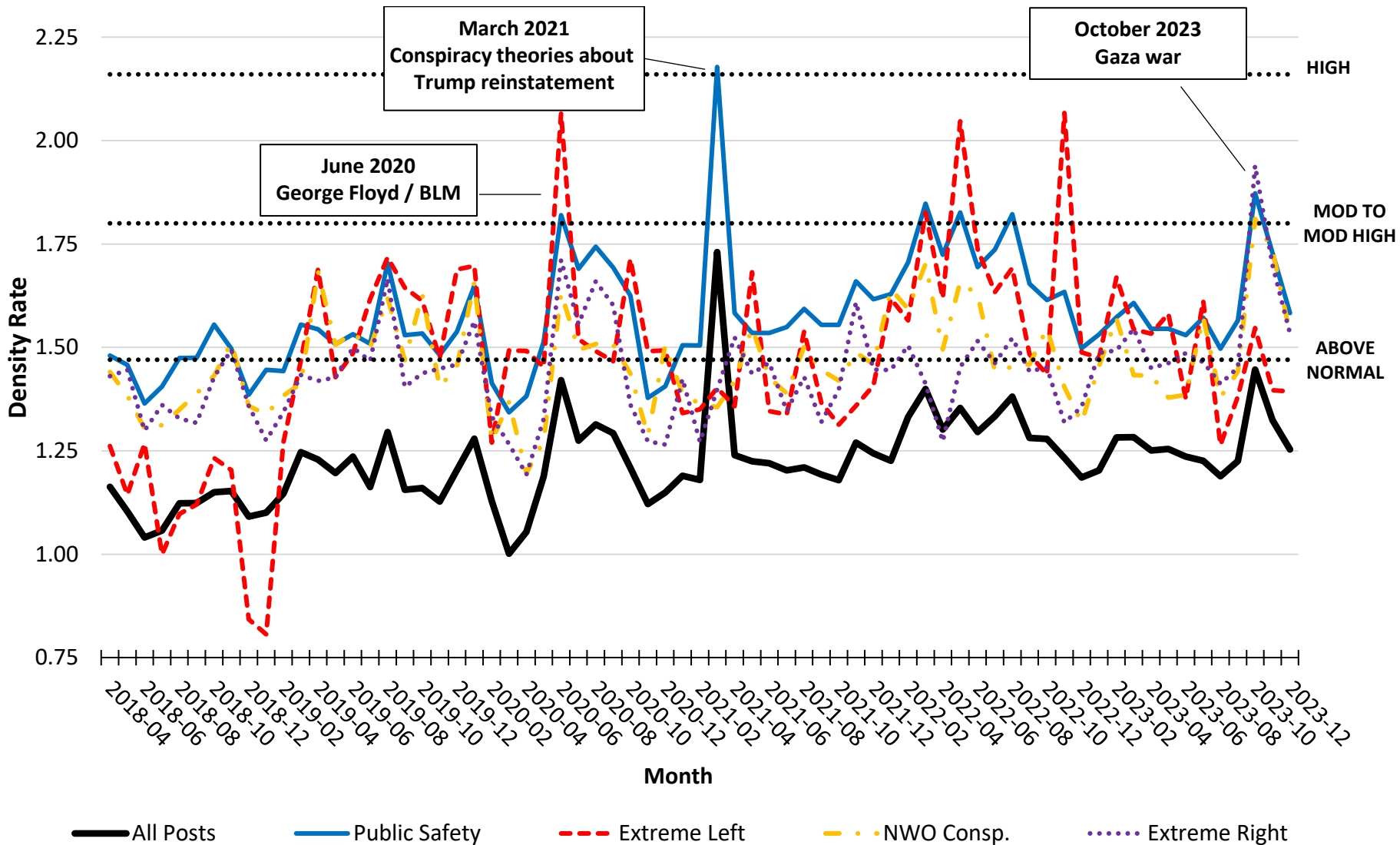
*Notes:* Total Study column includes rank number for the 5 most violent frames across the whole study. Threshold levels determined by one-sample Z-test using 5 major news web sites (ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, NBC News). For calculation and interpretation of density scores, see Appendix B.

#### VIOLENT DENSITY THRESHOLDS

2.14 **HIGH**  
 1.80 **MEDIUM TO MEDIUM HIGH**  
 1.47 **SLIGHTLY ABOVE NORMAL**  
 < 1.47 **NORMAL OR ORDINARY**

# Figure 8

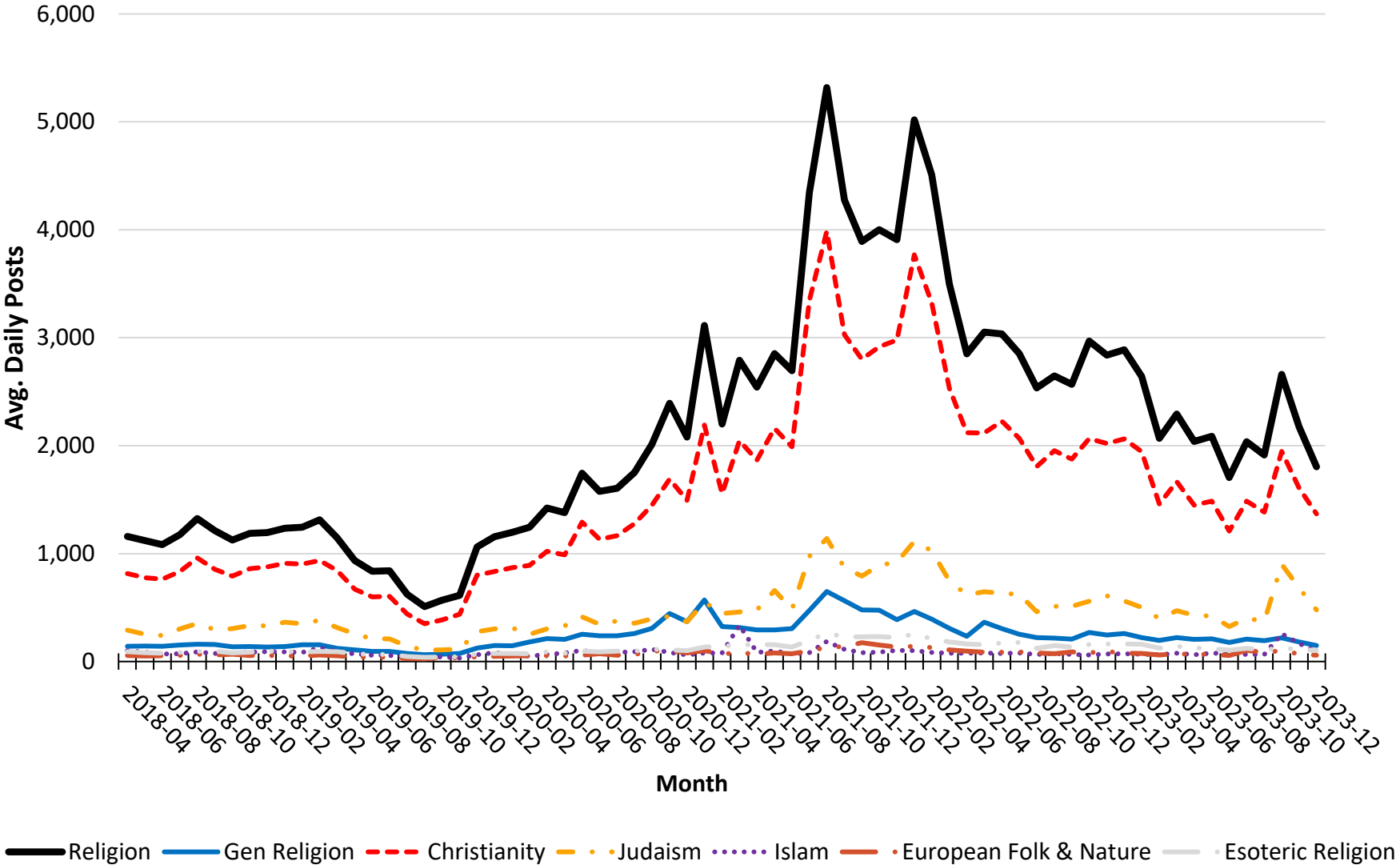
## Violent Density by Month for 5 Most Violent Frames by Month



Notes: See Appendix C for total recovered posts by frame. Frames are not mutually exclusive. QAnon and NWO Conspiracy are subframes of a composite NWO Conspiracy frame.

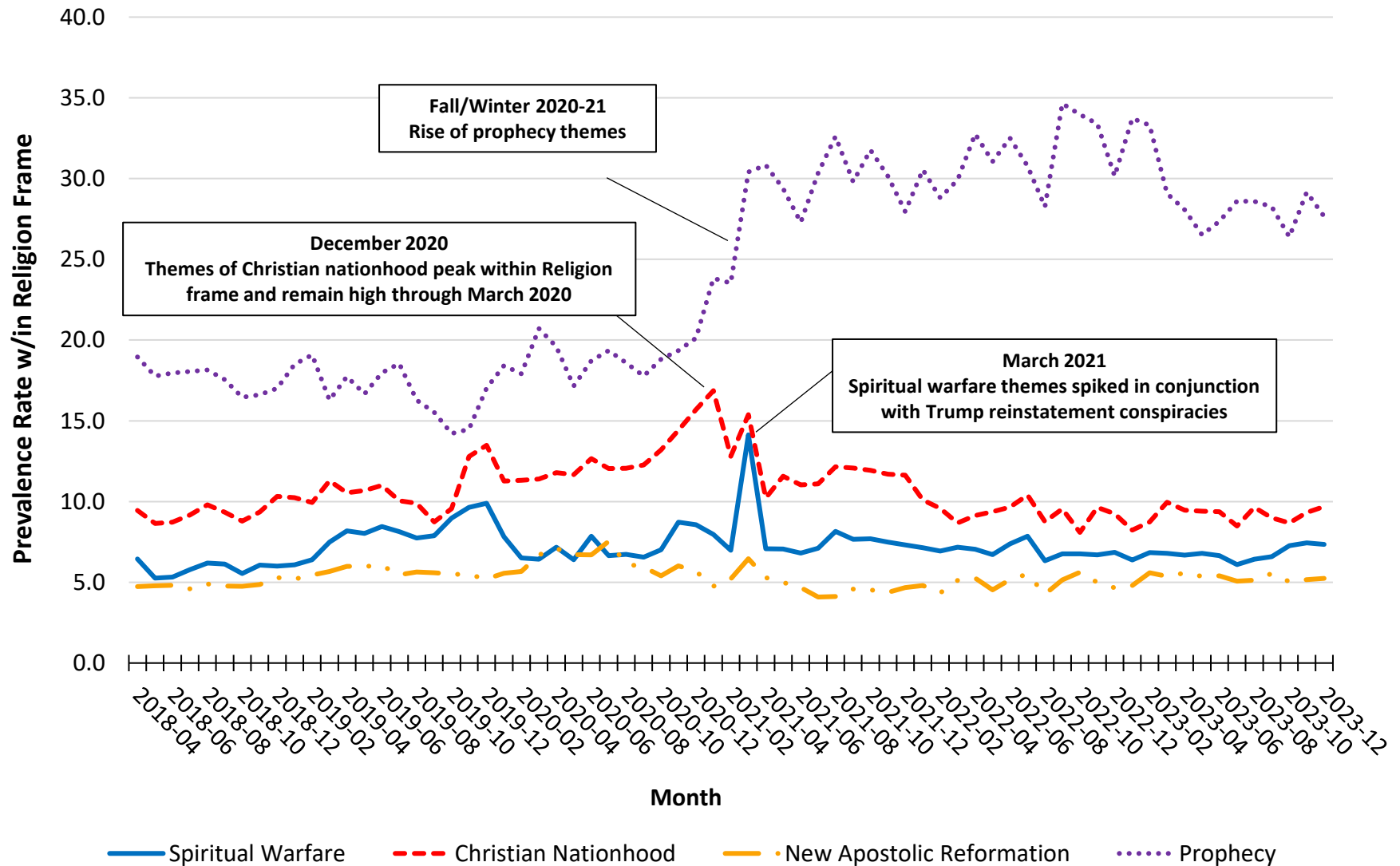
# Figure 9

## Avg. Daily Posts by Month for Religion Frame



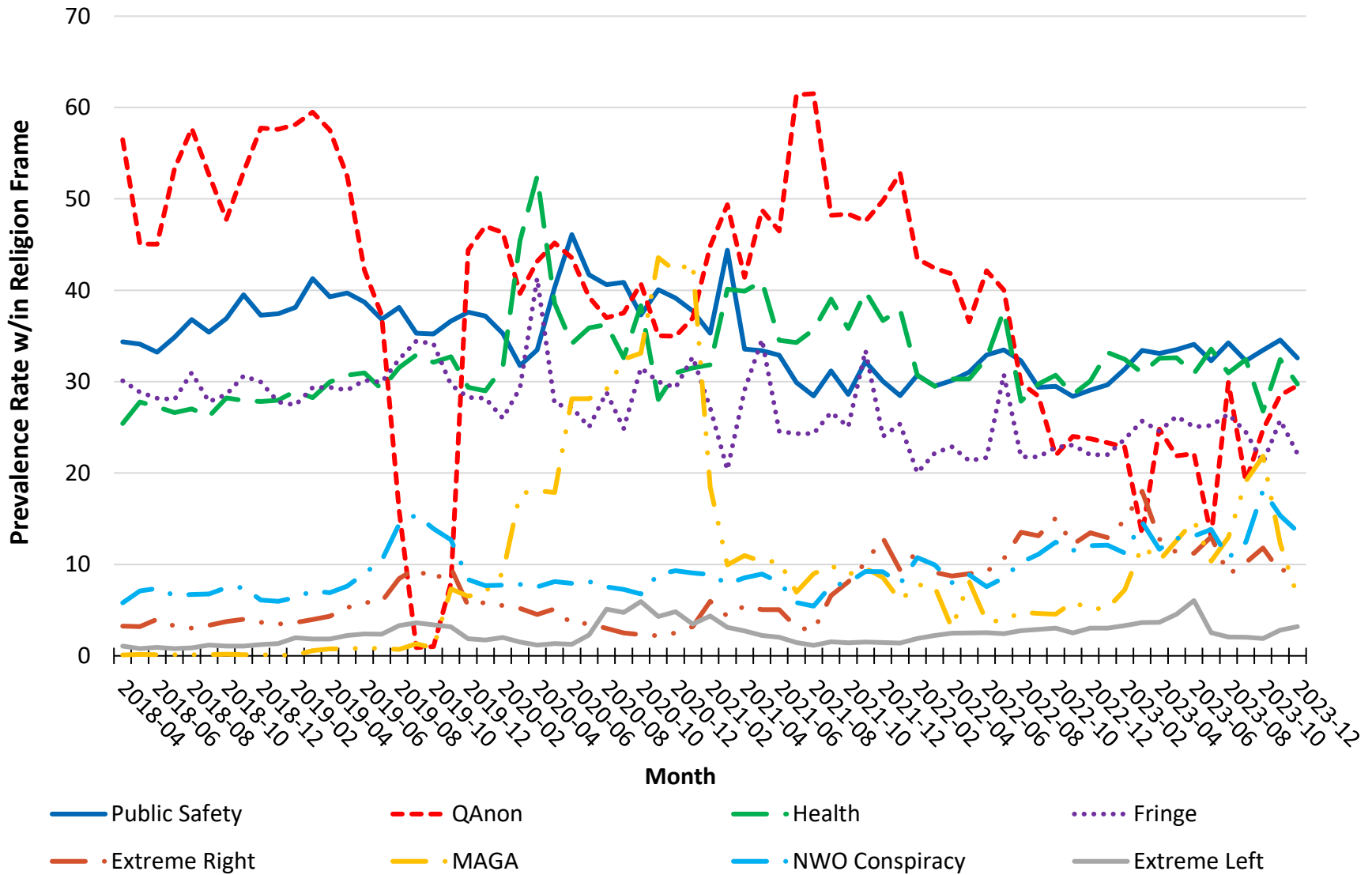
# Figure 10

## Prevalence Rate w/in Religion Frame for Select Religion Themes by Month



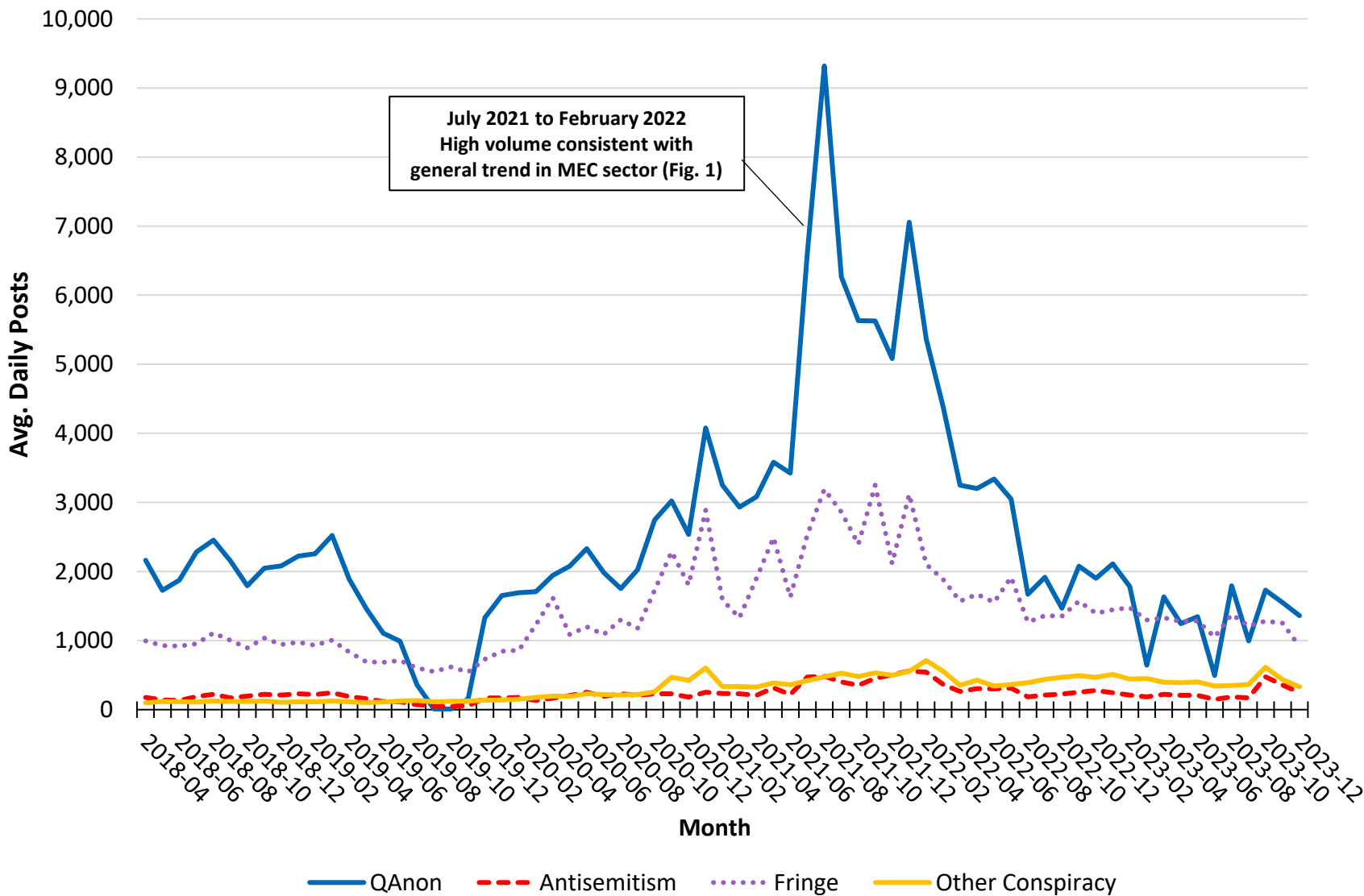
# Figure 11

## Prevalence w/in Religion Frame for Select Frames by Month



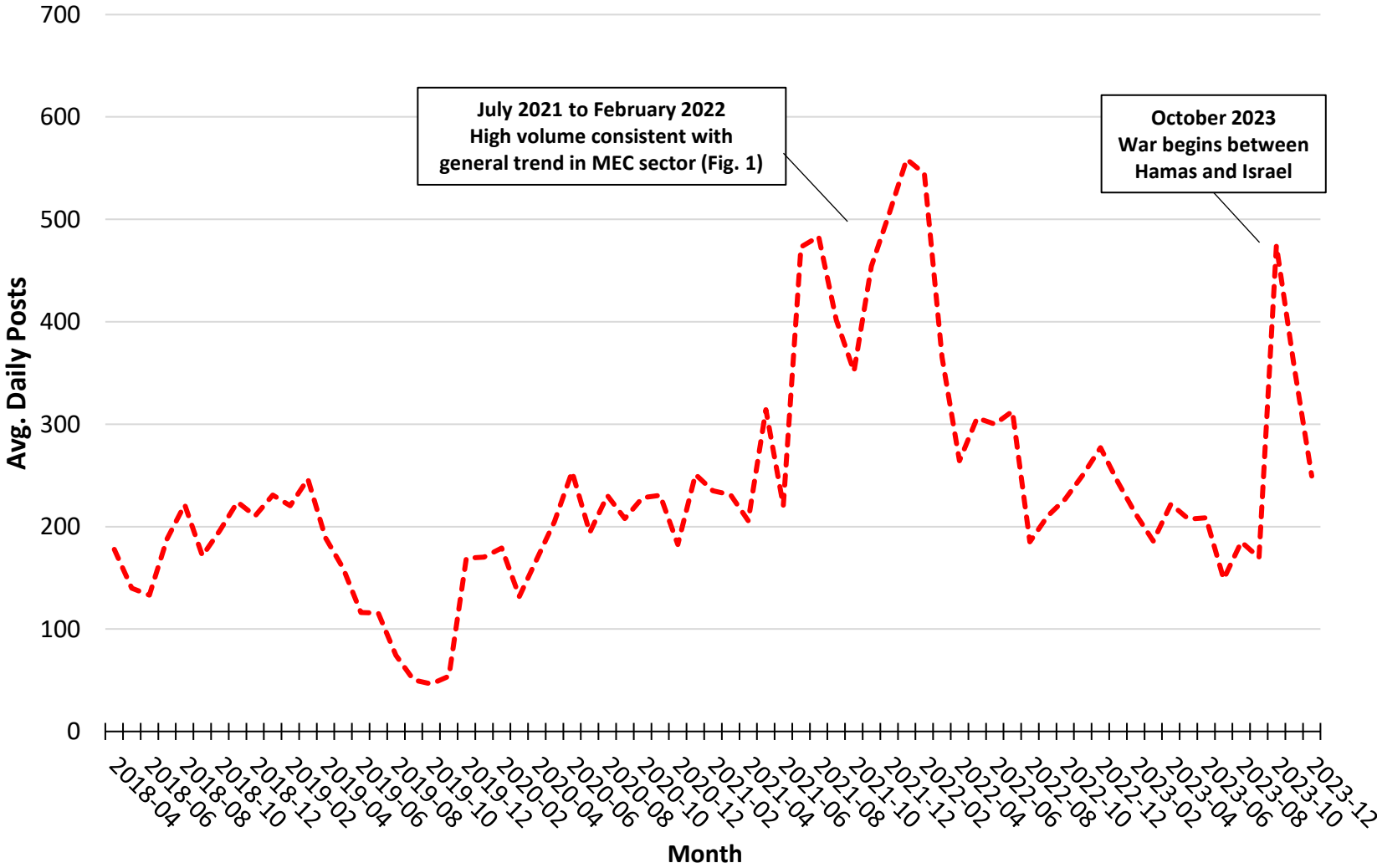
# Figure 12

## Avg. Daily Posts for Conspiracy and Fringe Frames by Month



# Figure 13

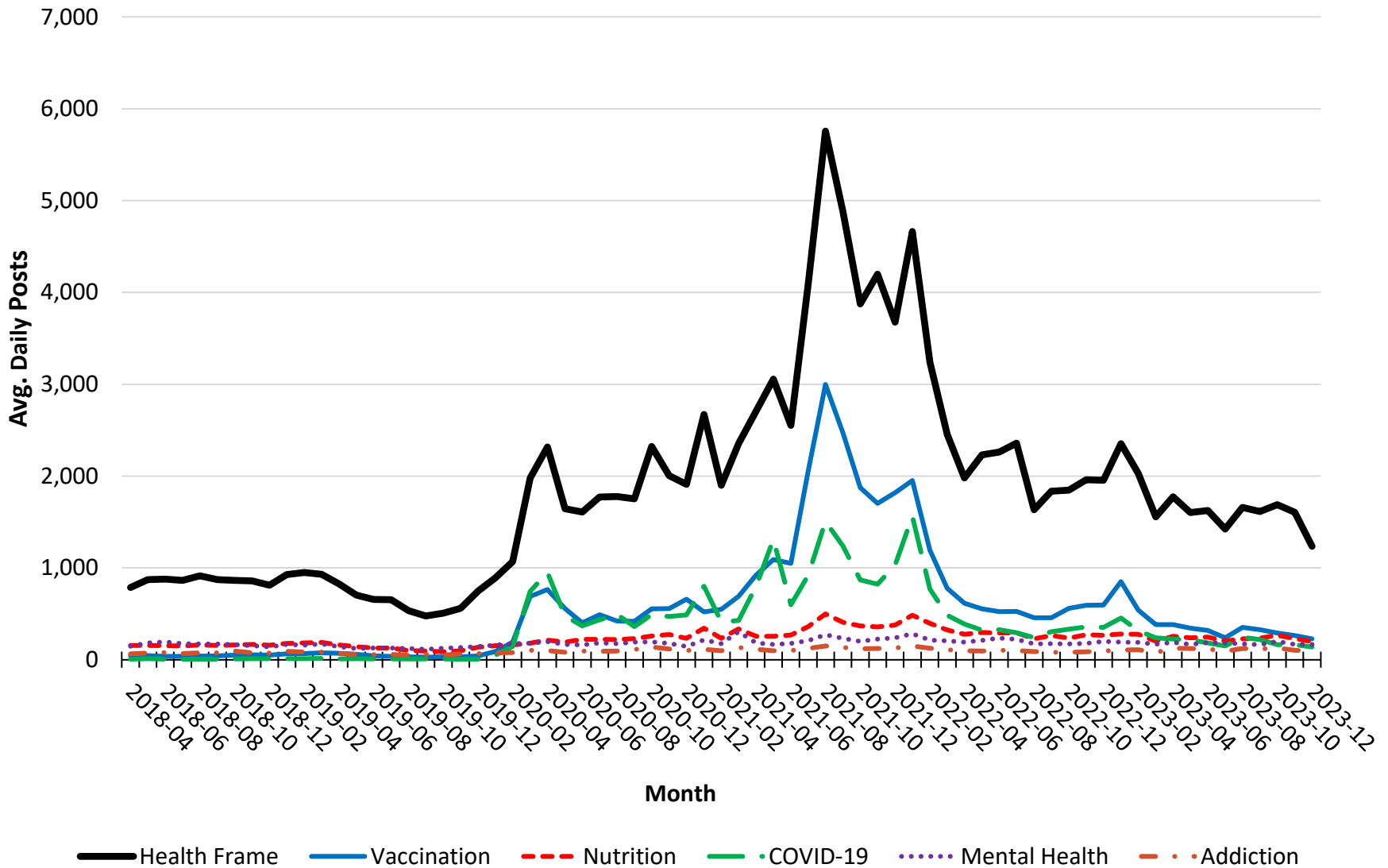
## Avg. Daily Posts for Antisemitism by Month





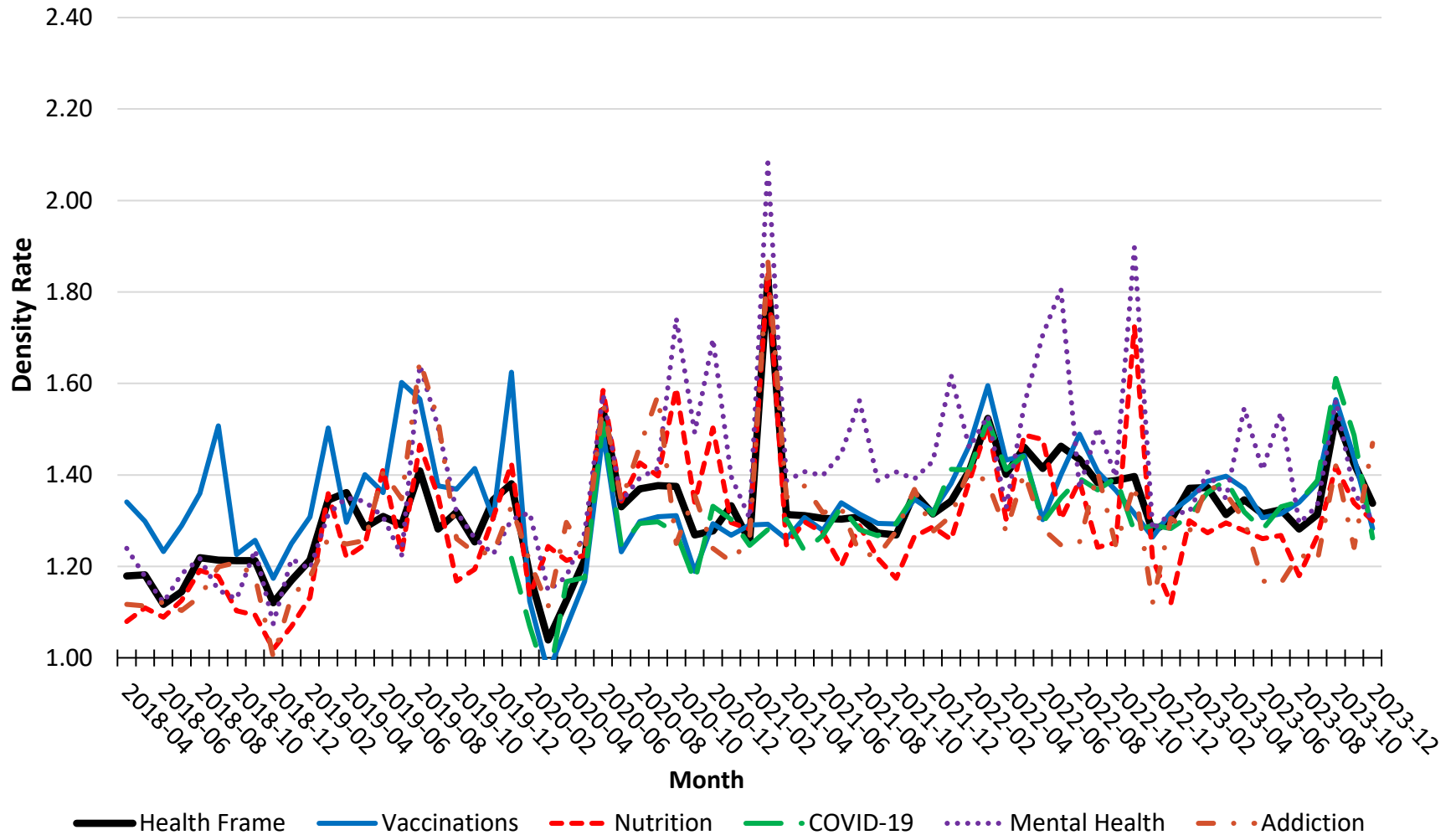
# Figure 14

## Health Frame Avg. Daily Activity including Most Topics by Month



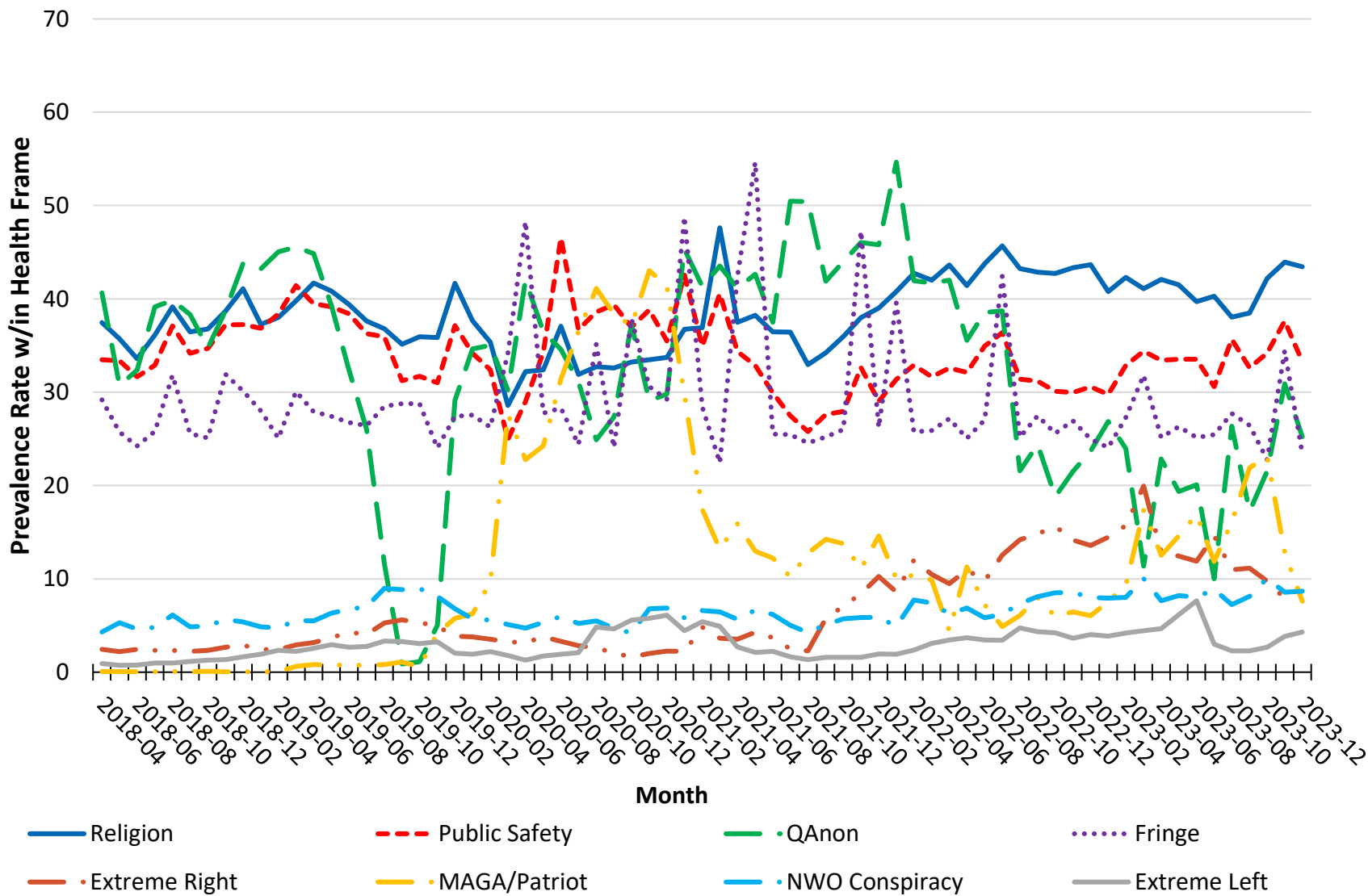
# Figure 15

## Violent Density by Health Frame including Most Cited Topics by Month



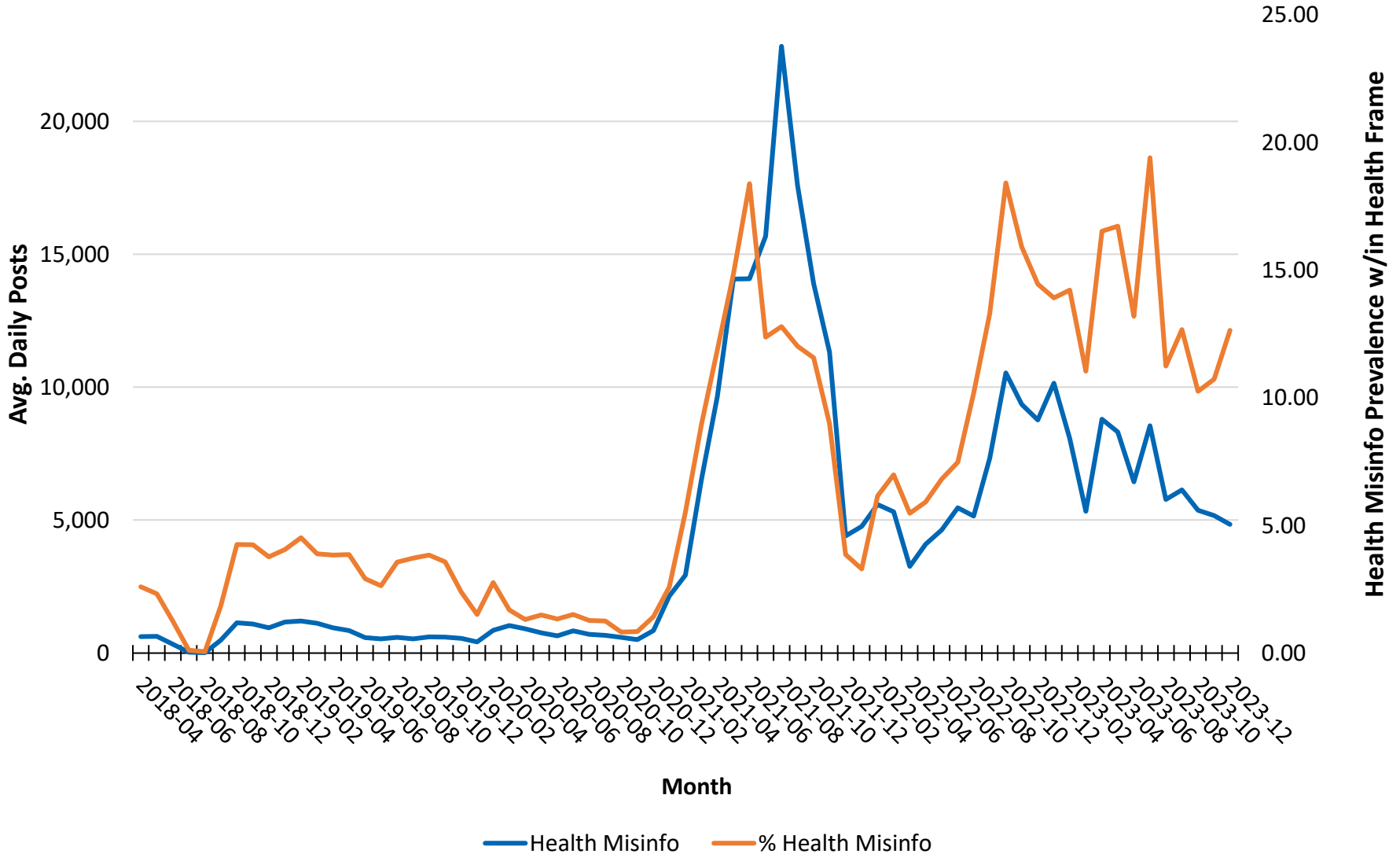
# Figure 16

## Frame Prevalence w/in Health Frame for Select Frames by Month



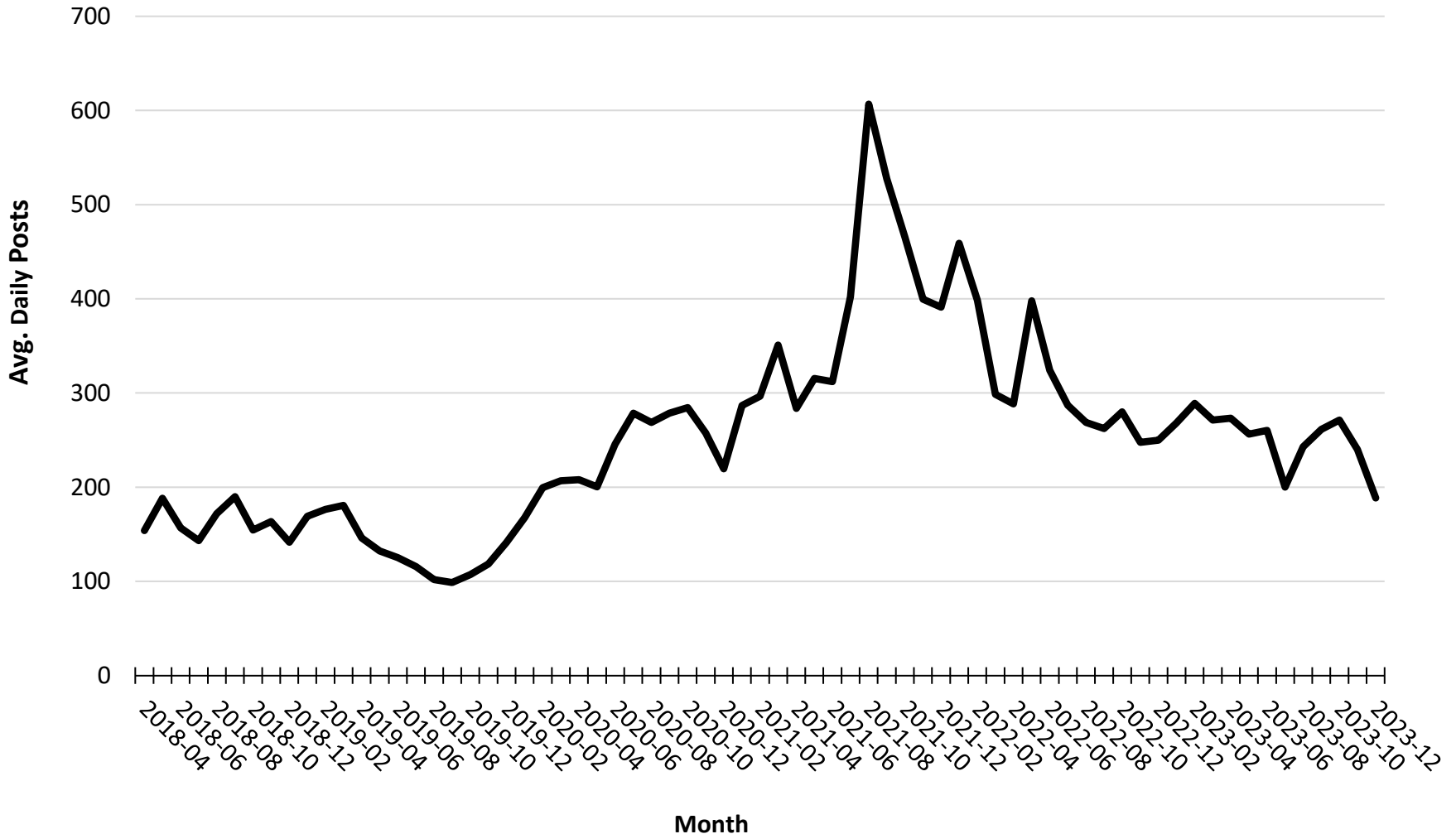
# Figure 17

## Health Misinformation Sites Avg. Daily Posts by Month



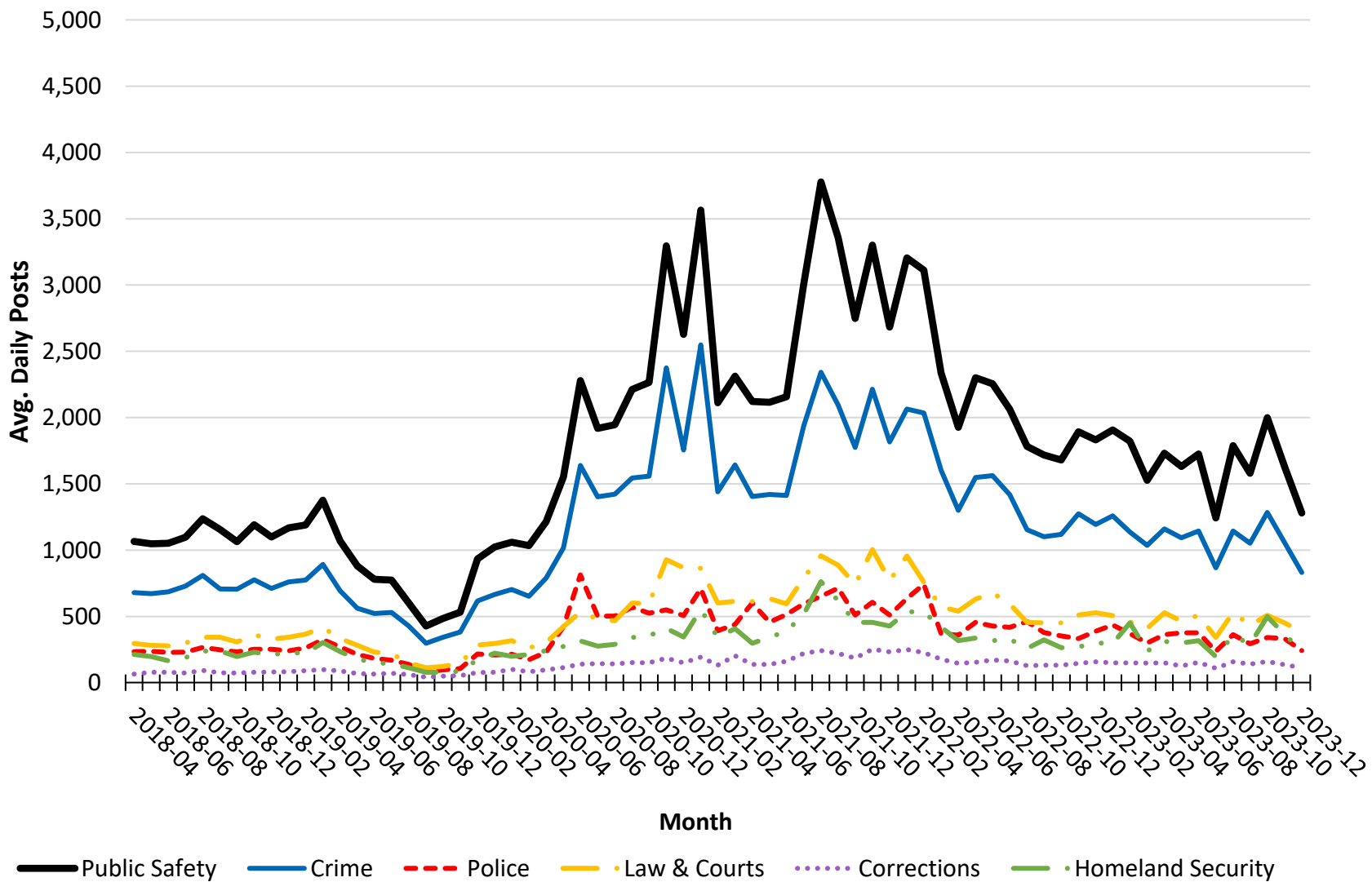
# Figure 18

## Avg. Daily Activity for Education Frame by Month



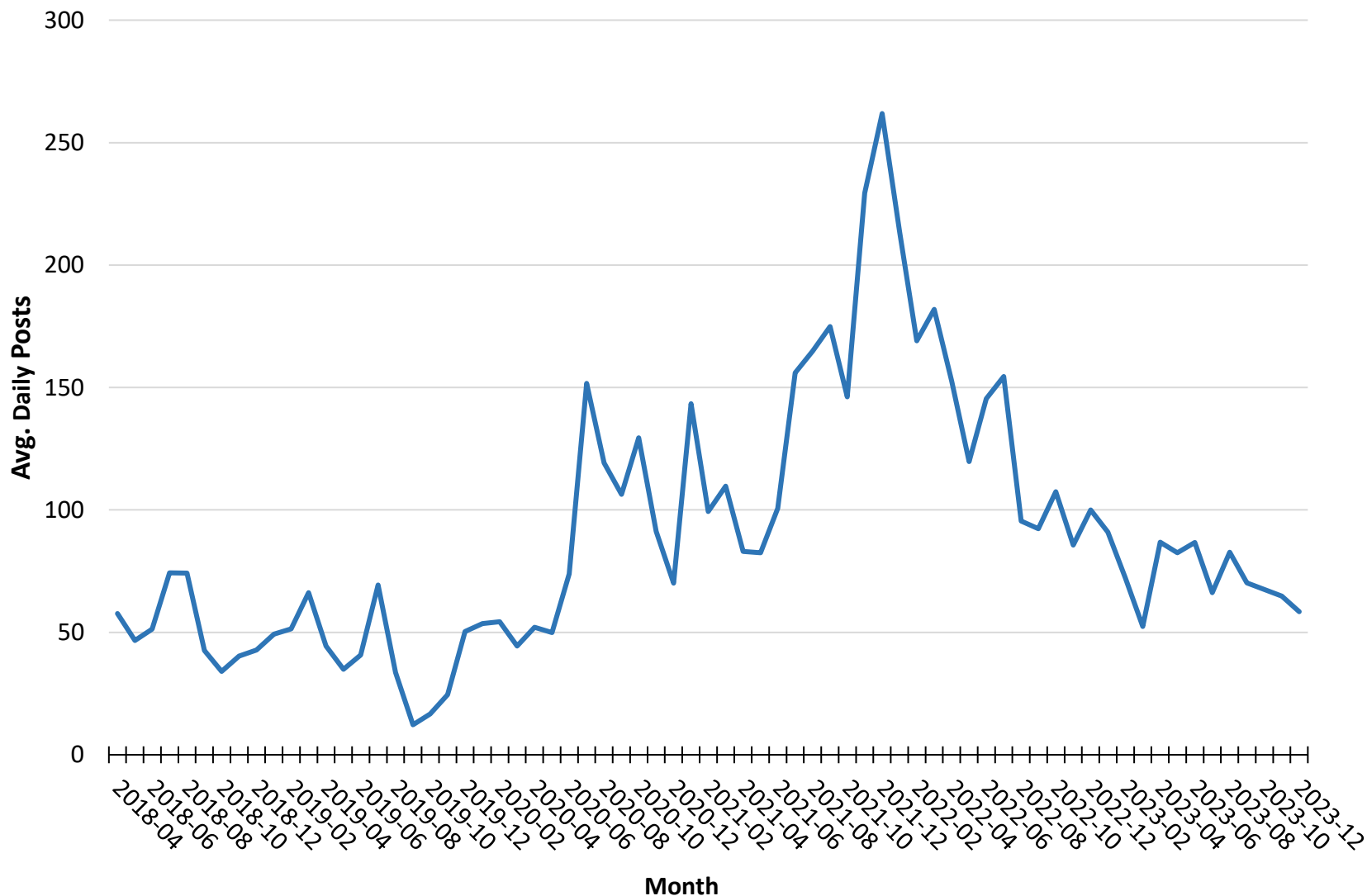
# Figure 19

## Avg. Daily Posts for Public Safety Frame and Subframes by Month



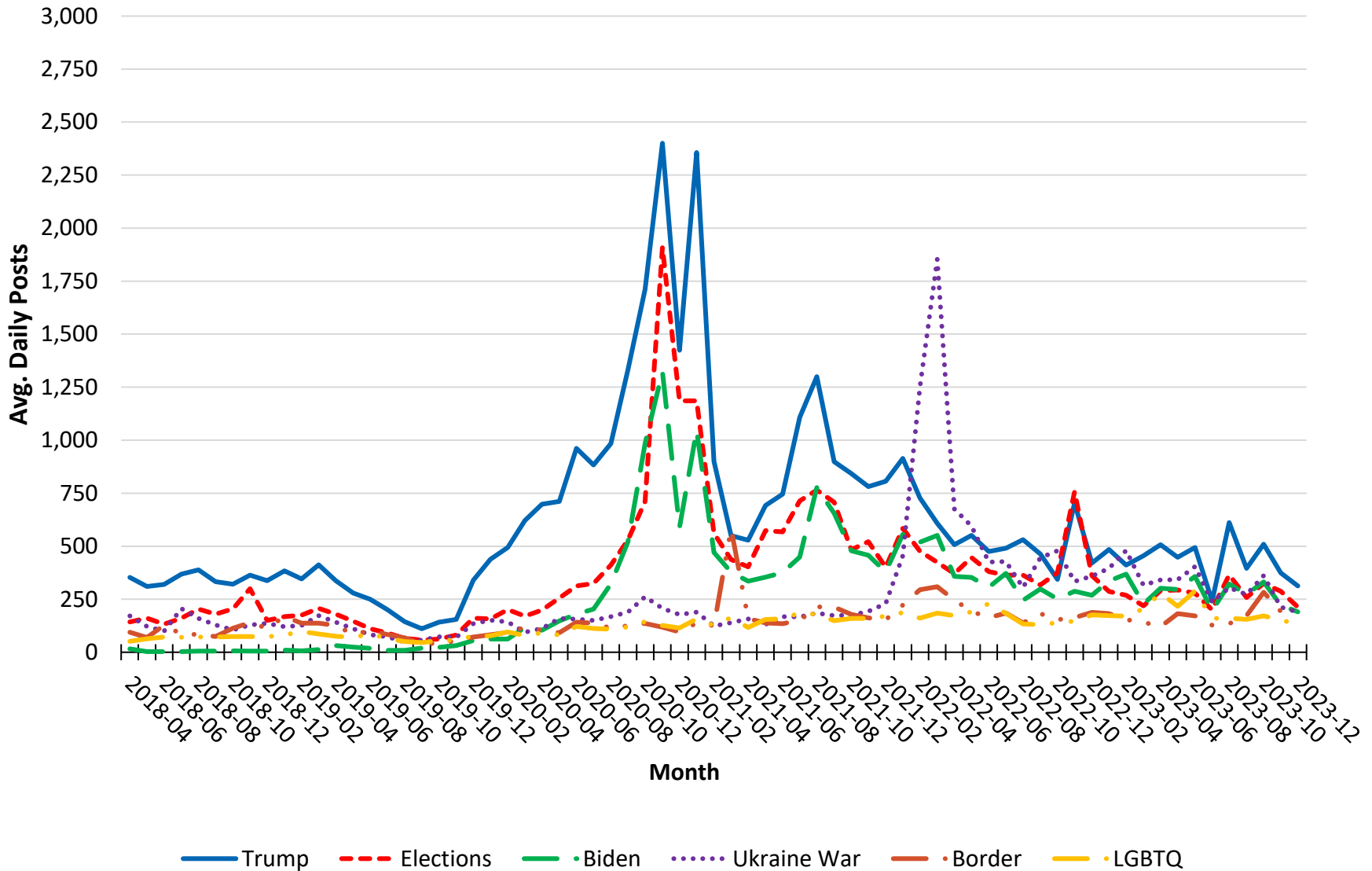
# Figure 20

## Avg. Daily Posts for Pedophilia and Child Sex Trafficking



# Figure 21

## Avg. Daily Posts for Contemporary Topics by Month





# Appendix A

## Types of Information and Purposive Sample

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### Types of Information

**Misinformation:** Factually unsupported statements. Pseudo-science and pseudo-history are included here, even when they are not malicious.

**Extremism:** Discourse that it is either (1) outside the boundaries of normal political discourse and/or (2) demeans or excludes people based on stereotypical characteristics.

**Conspiracism:** Belief in a sinister or secret plot steering events behind the scene.

### Purposive Sample

The sample is a purposive sample. Social-media channels, discussion boards, and web sites were selected deliberately to represent certain points of view or emphases. The sample was built to ensure the diversity of the sample and to enable drilling down into a select group of perspectives without relying on a single forum. .

The purposive sample does not attempt to measure precisely the overall size of the MEC sector. It provides an important look at trends, but it is not the only way that “market” activity can be measured. In this sense, metrics about sample trends are like stock market indices – interesting in their own right but not representative of every aspect of the market. Nonetheless, many of the best-known channels in the sector are included in the study, so the trends within a frame or online-community type are noteworthy.

Forums were selected based on either their self-identification or an external identification with MEC content. To verify the validity of their inclusion, a hierarchical set of criteria was used to identify platforms, forums, and channels: (1) name of channel, (2) descriptive info provided with channel or affiliated sites, (3) reputation in the media, and (4) subjective selection on the part of the researcher to diversify the sample or capture the activity of specific groups. As a safeguard to minimize bias in subjective selection, sites are reviewed to make sure they have a prevalence rate of 15% for MEC content, and they are removed if they do not hit this target number. This prevalence rate may be raised as I work with benchmarks more.

The sample oversampled some groups to achieve diversity. Religion was oversampled in order to identify the social location of certain minute points.

Selection of a site for inclusion in the study was based on MEC content, not on violent content. Violence language is a dependent variable in some analyses, and inclusion of a site in this study does not mean it is violent.

The study does not knowingly include web sites and social media owned by major political parties, their candidates, and the candidate’s national campaign staffs when they are known. Pseudonymic forums are common in some digital spaces, and the use of political pseudonyms should not be confused with channels that are directly affiliated with a politician or political operation.

Protecting site content: Material is collected under fair use for research. I use a dissemination strategy to manage the complications of informed consent and protect confidentiality and copyright ownership of content creators and platforms (franzke et al., 2020). Generally, I do not discuss the contents of individual channels, but I may make mention of comments made by public figures who use these channels. I do not “dox” individual channels or channel participants. Any derivative data set that is released will have channel and content creator pseudonyms removed, and the original text will also be removed. The policy on derivative data will be review early in 2026.

# Appendix B

## Definitions

### Frame Analysis and Activity Metrics

**Activity Level:** Most activity is reported on a monthly basis. To smooth out differences in the numbers of days per month, average daily posts is used as the principal measure of activity volume.

**Average Daily Posts:** The number of posts divided by the number of days in the time period.

**Frame:** A group of posts identified by theme or online-community type

**Theme:** Based on key words, phrases, or stems

**Community:** A self-defined forum or channel on a web site or social-media platform. Communities with other communities of the same type defined by point of view or thematic emphasis.

### Rate Definitions and Calculations

**Prevalence Rate:** The percent of posts where a particular theme is present.

**Density Rate:** The percent of words where a particular them is present. Assuming the typical English-language sentence is 15 words and a theme is mentioned once in a sentence, the maximum density rate would be 6.67. Density levels of slightly above normal, moderate to moderately high, and high are established using a standardized difference of means and Cohen’s d.

MEC density rates are compared against benchmarks taken from 5 majors news web sites – ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News. The comparison is based on a one-sample Z-test where the population mean and standard deviation are regarded as known based on the benchmark with key breaks identified using Cohen’s d. Currently two benchmarks are in use – one for all content and one specifically for the Health frame.

Interpretation	Prevalence	MEC Density	Health Density
High	.35	2.14	1.63
Moderate to Moderately High	.25	1.80	1.30
Above Normal	.15	1.47	0.96
Benchmark	.00	1.24	0.73
Below Normal	n/a	1.01	0.50
Moderate to Moderately Low	n/a	0.68	0.17
Low	n/a	0.34	*

# Appendix C

## Sources for Community Types

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See comments on how forums are included in purposive sample in Appendix A. Inclusion and assignment is currently being reviewed, and I anticipate this review will be completed by the March data run, after which the full list will be posted. Given the currently fluidity of the sample causes by changes, the current number of channels is approximate.

**Conspiracy:** Sites promoting a sinister or secret plot steering events behind the scene. AboveTopSecret, Telegram (19 broadcast and chat channels).

**Extreme Left:** Sites promoting socialism, anarchism, antifa, or misinformation from a progressive perspective. Anarchist News, Lemmy (1 forum), Palmer Report, Raddle, Telegram (8 channels), Unicorn Riot.

**Extreme Right:** Sites promoting neo-Naziism, White supremacism, news sites and podcasters associated with the Alt-Right, and right-wing misinformation. 8kun (1 forum), American Renaissance, Christogenea, Daily Stormer, EndChan (2 forums), Gateway Pundit, Infostormer, Occidental Observer, Stormfront, Taki's Magazine, Telegram (118 broadcast and chat channels).

**Fringe:** Sites promoting pseudo-history and pseudo-science, including the paranormal. 8kun (1 forum), GrahamHancock, Paranormal Forum, Telegram (5 channels).

**HealthMisinfo:** Sites with a reputation from others for promoting misinformation on health-related topics. Children's Health Defense, Green Med info, Health.News, Telegram (36 broadcast and chat channels). Children's Health Defense is a site separate from RFK Jr.'s campaign site.

**Libertarian/Freedom:** Includes paleo-libertarians, Tea Party, freedom and patriot movements, and sovereign citizens / American state nationals. 8kun (1 forum), Communities.win (1 forum), Ron Paul / Liberty Forum, Telegram (19 broadcast and chat channels). The Ron Paul site is not affiliated formally with Ron or Rand Paul as individuals or their campaigns.

**MAGA:** Sites that self-identify with MAGA – does not knowingly include Trump campaign sites or campaign staff. Communities.win (1 forum), Telegram (6 channels). This community type has outlived its usefulness, and its channels will be placed in other communities or removed.

**QAnon:** 8kun (3 forums), Telegram (39 broadcast and chat channels).

**Religion:** Sites associated with Christianity and New Age movement; special emphasis on prophecy sites. Rapture Forums, Telegram (108 broadcast and chat channels), WND.com.

## Appendix D

### Select Frame Counts

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<b>Frame</b>	<b>8/23 or Before</b>	<b>9/23 or Later</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Total	13,567,388	842,652	14,410,040	100.0
QAnon	5,677,372	258,710	5,936,082	41.2
Religion	4,197,110	281,115	4,478,225	31.1
Fringe	3,980,092	163,306	4,143,398	28.8
Health	3,789,715	221,637	4,011,352	27.8
Dysfunction	3,599,192	226,765	3,825,957	26.6
Public Safety	3,586,979	223,061	3,810,040	26.4
Extreme Right	2,743,598	201,693	2,945,291	20.4
MAGA	2,103,470	188,294	2,291,764	15.9
NWO Conspiracy	589,814	49,546	639,360	4.4
Extreme Left	434,337	57,635	491,972	3.4

# 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

- franzke, a. s., Bechmann, A., Zimmer, M., Ess, C., and the Association of Internet Researchers (2020). *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0*. Association of Internet Researchers. <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>
- Hagen, S., Straume, Ø., Bishop, E., Vavra, M., Koščík, M., Štebe, J., Ryan, L., Rød, L.M., Payne, E., Somby, A., L'Hours, H., Emery, T., Cizek, T., Krejci J., Høgetveit, M., & Jessop, C. (2019). *Guidelines on the use of social media data in survey research. Deliverable 6.2 of the SERISS project funded under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme GA No: 654221*. <https://seriss.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SERISS-D6.2.-Guidelines-social-media-data-.pdf>
- 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>