



3rd Biennial Conference
Amsterdam August 2018

Decoding the Alt-Right

Analyzing Online Toxicity on Social Media

Simon Roth¹ & Fabio Votta²

2018-20-08

¹ E-Mail: nomis.roth@gmx.com

² E-Mail: fabio.votta@gmail.com

Slides: <https://decoding-the-altright.netlify.com/>

What is the Alt-Right?

Non-ironic Nazism masquerading as ironic Nazism.

~Andrew Anglin, Founder of the *The Daily Stormer*

What is the Alt-Right?

A group of loosely aligned individuals and subgroups that predominately consist of white, young & male frequent internet user. Although adherence to these beliefs varies, these are some common themes within the Alt-Right:

What is the Alt-Right?

A group of loosely aligned individuals and subgroups that predominately consist of white, young & male frequent internet user. Although adherence to these beliefs varies, these are some common themes within the Alt-Right:

- Antipathy towards both liberals (“*social justice warriors*”) and conservatives (“*cuckservatives*”)

What is the Alt-Right?

A group of loosely aligned individuals and subgroups that predominately consist of white, young & male frequent internet user. Although adherence to these beliefs varies, these are some common themes within the Alt-Right:

- Antipathy towards both liberals (“*social justice warriors*”) and conservatives (“*cuckservatives*”)
- Fighting a “*culture war*” against perceived liberal consensus within the establishment

What is the Alt-Right?

A group of loosely aligned individuals and subgroups that predominately consist of white, young & male frequent internet user. Although adherence to these beliefs varies, these are some common themes within the Alt-Right:

- Antipathy towards both liberals (“*social justice warriors*”) and conservatives (“*cuckservatives*”)
- Fighting a “*culture war*” against perceived liberal consensus within the establishment
- Belief that freedom of speech is being threatened by “*political correctness*”

What is the Alt-Right?

A group of loosely aligned individuals and subgroups that predominately consist of white, young & male frequent internet user. Although adherence to these beliefs varies, these are some common themes within the Alt-Right:

- Antipathy towards both liberals (“*social justice warriors*”) and conservatives (“*cuckservatives*”)
- Fighting a “*culture war*” against perceived liberal consensus within the establishment
- Belief that freedom of speech is being threatened by “*political correctness*”
- Strong animosity towards feminism, multiculturalism and immigration (“*cultural marxism*”)

What is the Alt-Right?

A group of loosely aligned individuals and subgroups that predominately consist of white, young & male frequent internet user. Although adherence to these beliefs varies, these are some common themes within the Alt-Right:

- Antipathy towards both liberals (“*social justice warriors*”) and conservatives (“*cuckservatives*”)
- Fighting a “*culture war*” against perceived liberal consensus within the establishment
- Belief that freedom of speech is being threatened by “*political correctness*”
- Strong animosity towards feminism, multiculturalism and immigration (“*cultural marxism*”)
- Belief in biological differences in between races and genders that justifies separate treatment

What is the Alt-Right?

A group of loosely aligned individuals and subgroups that predominately consist of white, young & male frequent internet user. Although adherence to these beliefs varies, these are some common themes within the Alt-Right:

- Antipathy towards both liberals (“*social justice warriors*”) and conservatives (“*cuckservatives*”)
- Fighting a “*culture war*” against perceived liberal consensus within the establishment
- Belief that freedom of speech is being threatened by “*political correctness*”
- Strong animosity towards feminism, multiculturalism and immigration (“*cultural marxism*”)
- Belief in biological differences in between races and genders that justifies separate treatment
- Ambiguous and troll-like behavior as to ensure *plausible deniability*

What is the Alt-Right?

The Alt-Right isn't a single cohesive movement. It should rather be understood as a collection of subgroups that share similar talking points as well as tactics and beliefs.

The Alt-Right meanders between sub-groups that sometimes have very different agendas or are more or less committed to their beliefs.



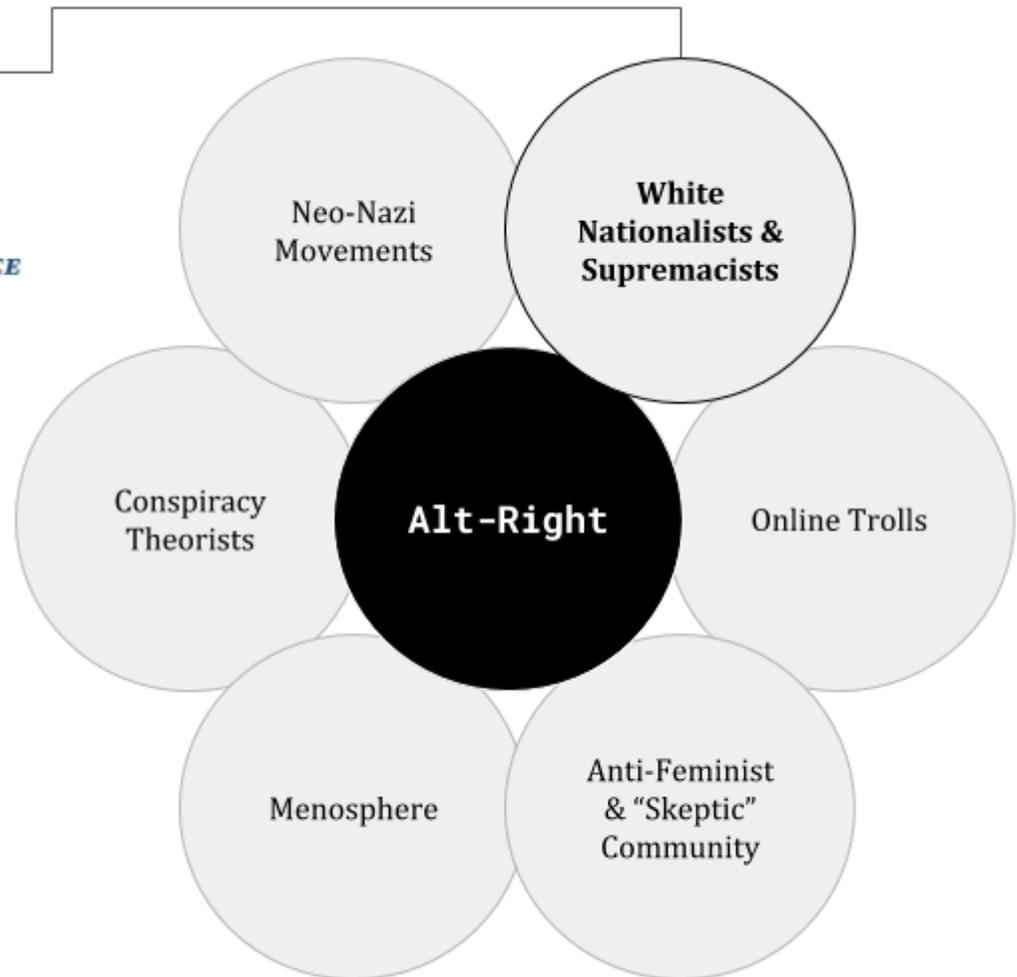
What is the Alt-Right?

Neo-Nazi Movements



What is the Alt-Right?

White Nationalists & Supremacists



What is the Alt-Right?

Online Trolls



4chan



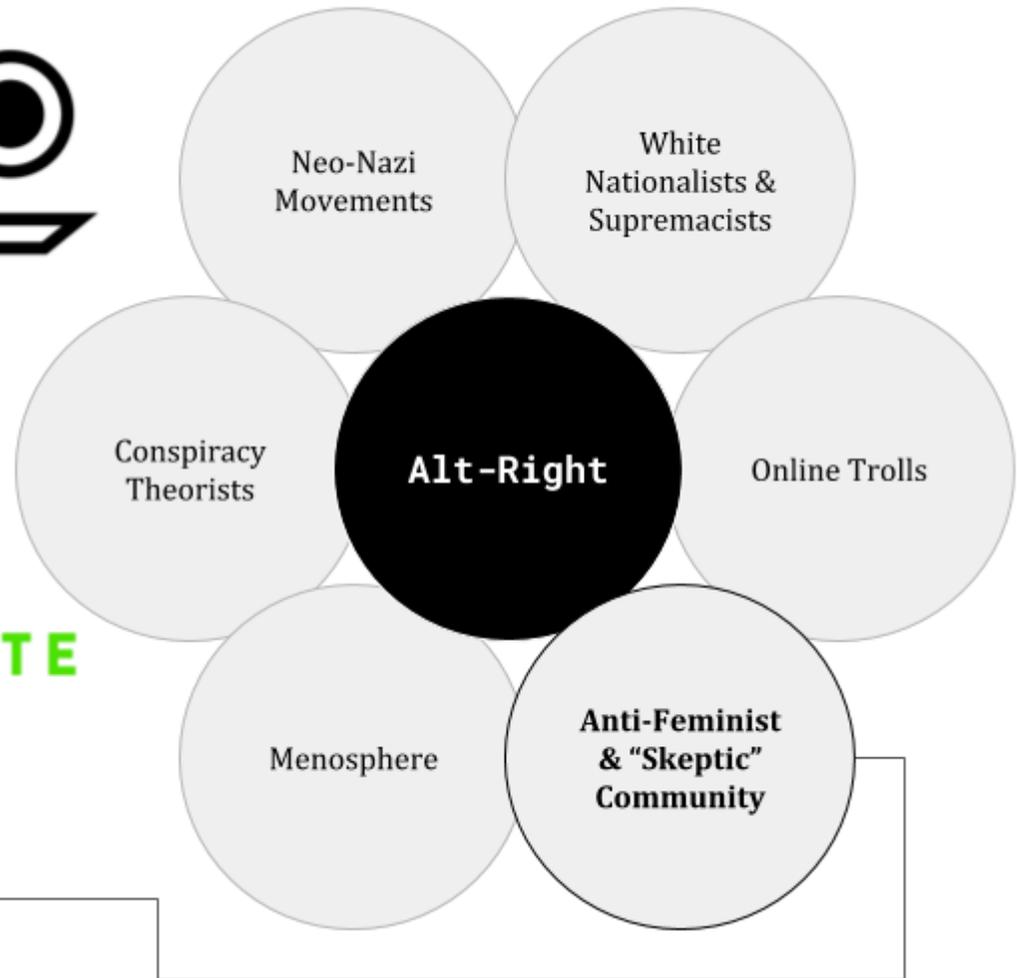
What is the Alt-Right?



#GAMERGATE



Anti-Feminist & "Skeptic" Community



What is the Alt-Right?



Menosphere



What is the Alt-Right?



Conspiracy Theorists



Data Collection

What data did we collect?

What data did we collect?

- Text data from three Platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube



What data did we collect?

- Text data from three Platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube



- Comments from 36 Alt-Right connected profiles/YouTube channels

What data did we collect?

- Text data from three Platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube



- Comments from 36 Alt-Right connected profiles/YouTube channels
- Comments from 6 Media Outlets (CNN, MSNBC, ABC, Fox News, Washington Post, New York Times)



What data did we collect?

- Text data from three Platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube



- Comments from 36 Alt-Right connected profiles/YouTube channels
- Comments from 6 Media Outlets (CNN, MSNBC, ABC, Fox News, Washington Post, New York Times)



- Comments from the entire year 2017

What data did we collect?

- Text data from three Platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

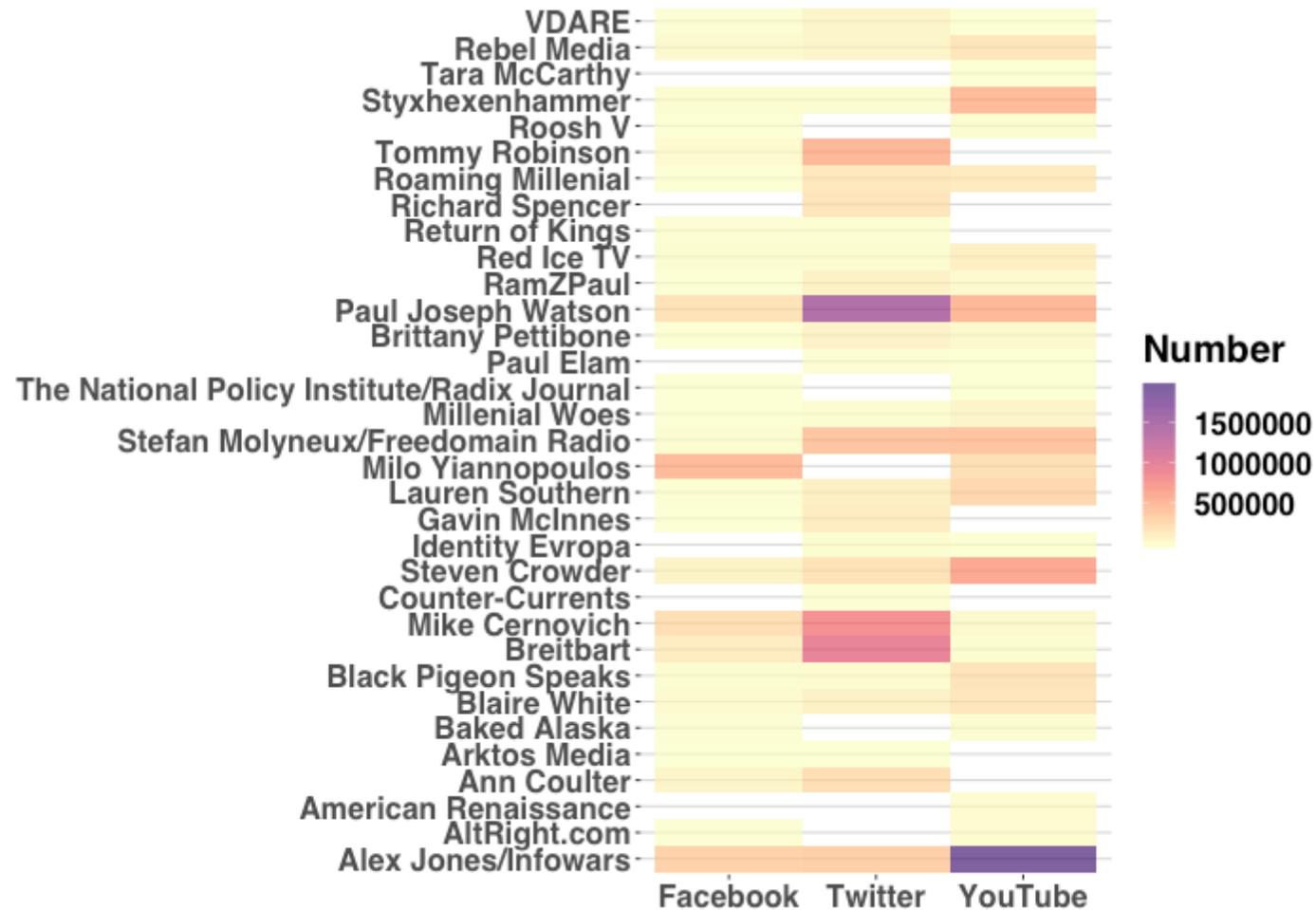


- Comments from 36 Alt-Right connected profiles/YouTube channels
- Comments from 6 Media Outlets (CNN, MSNBC, ABC, Fox News, Washington Post, New York Times)

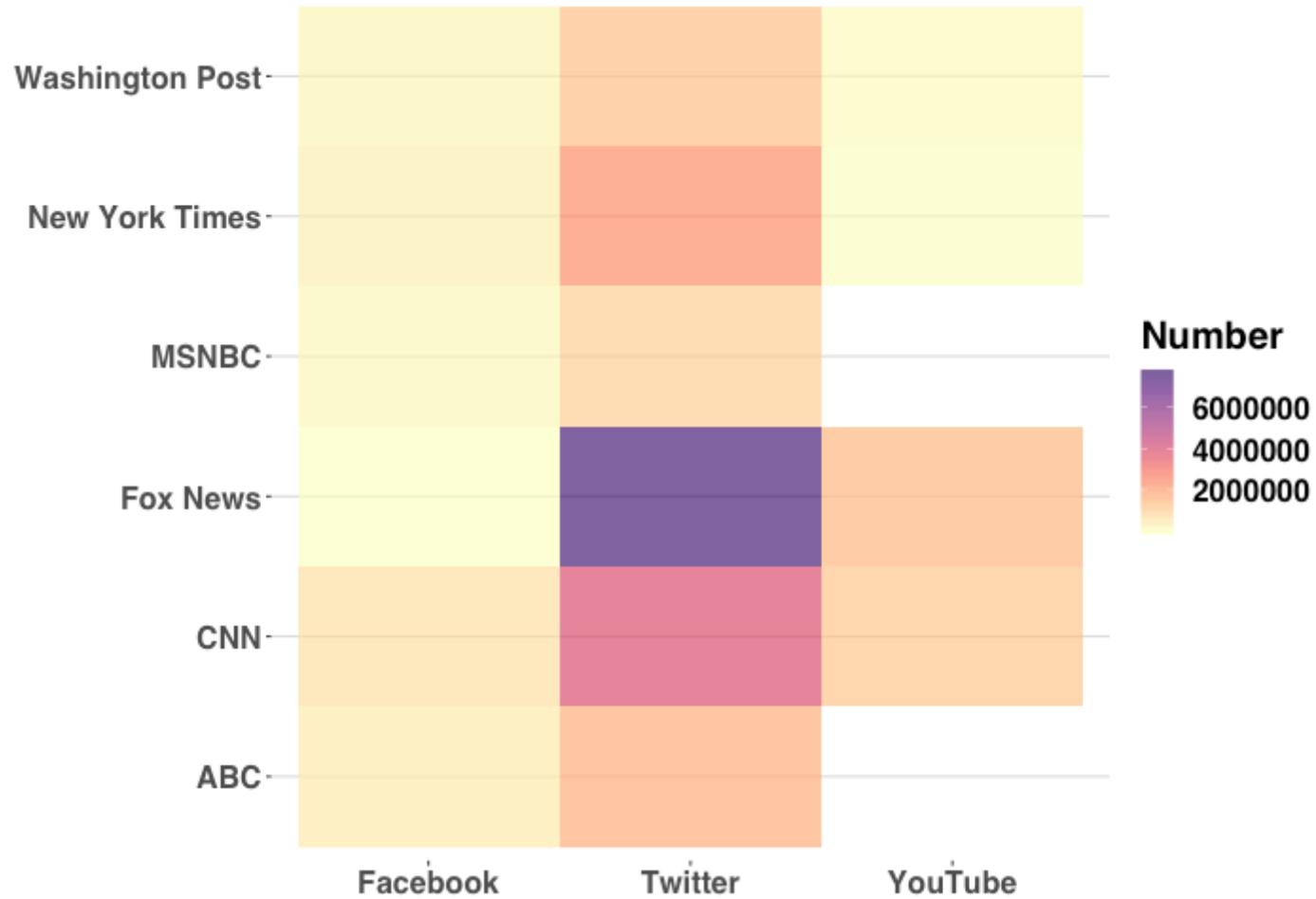


- Comments from the entire year 2017
- In total over 30 million comments/tweets

Who did we scrape? Alt-Right



Who did we scrape? - Media



Language Modeling: Toxicity

Language Predictions

Data

- Cooperation between Wikipedia and Jigsaw
- Five thousand crowd-workers were involved
- Approx. 160k comments annotated with **toxicity** scores
- The dataset is documented [here](#).



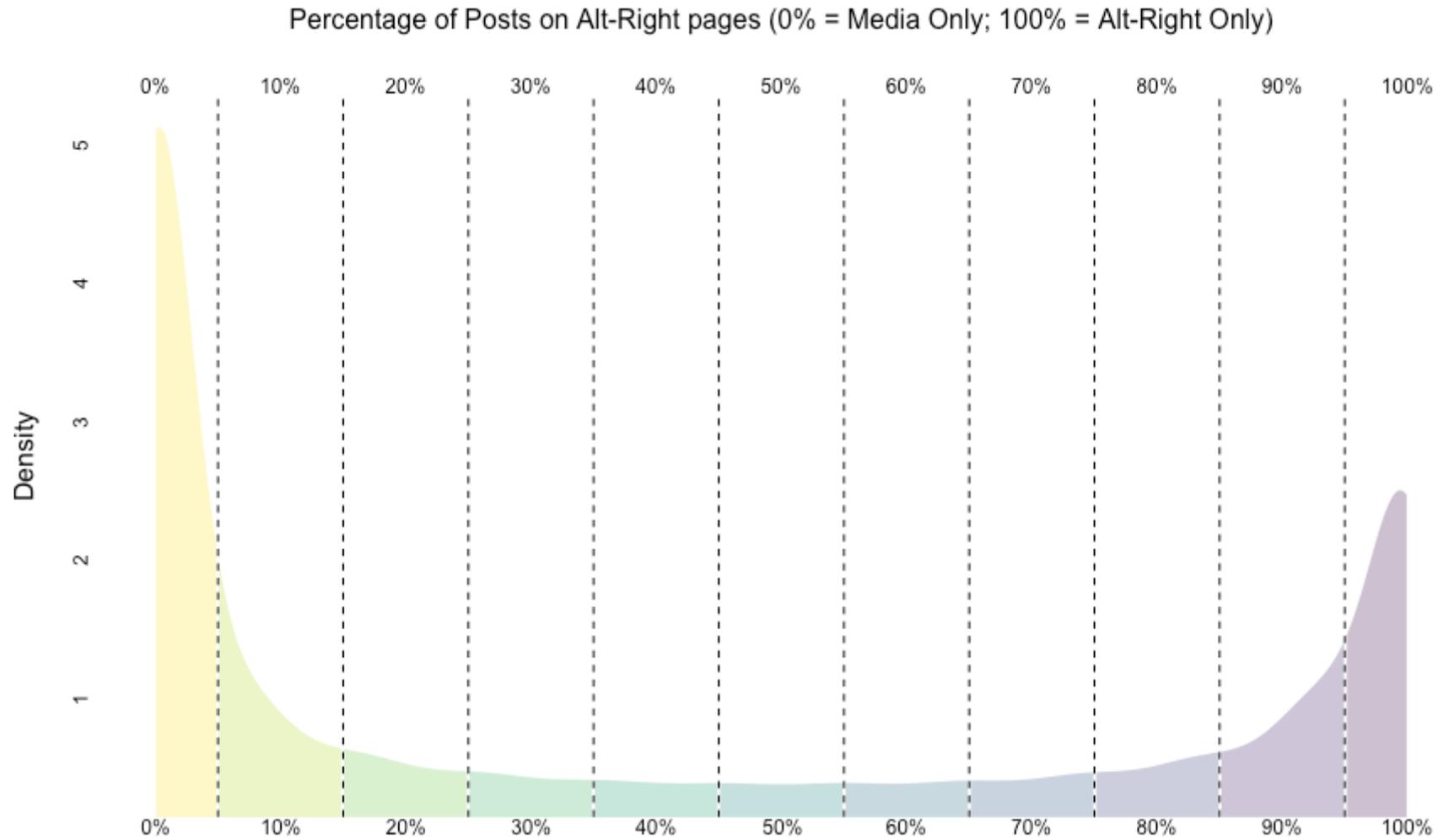
Machine Learning

- Balanced data to 30.000
- Text Normalization
- Different Keras Models (Accuracy ~90%)
- Prediction scores (*toxicity*) for each comment in the entire corpus

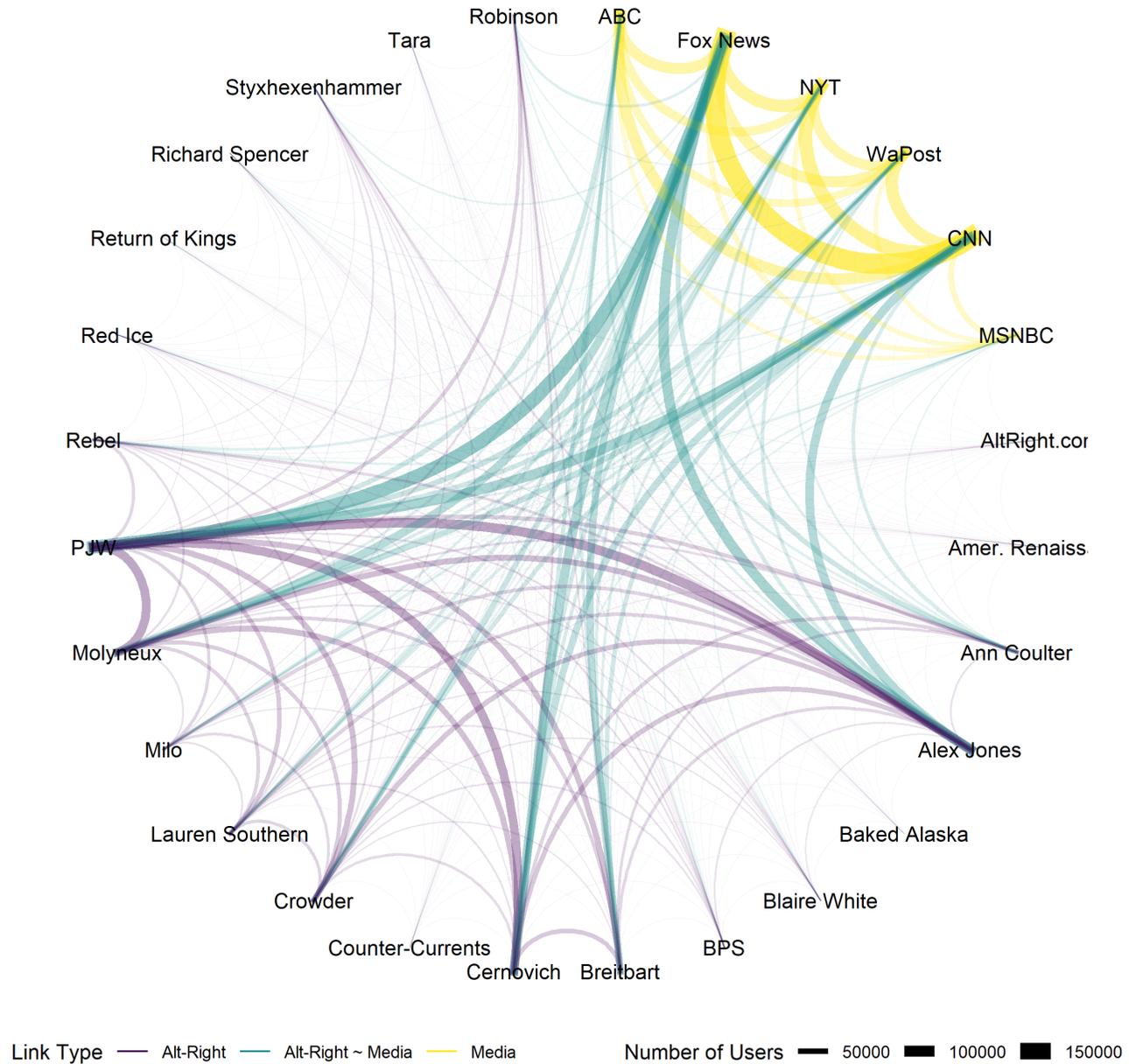
User Activity Types

How do Media and Alt-Right interact online?

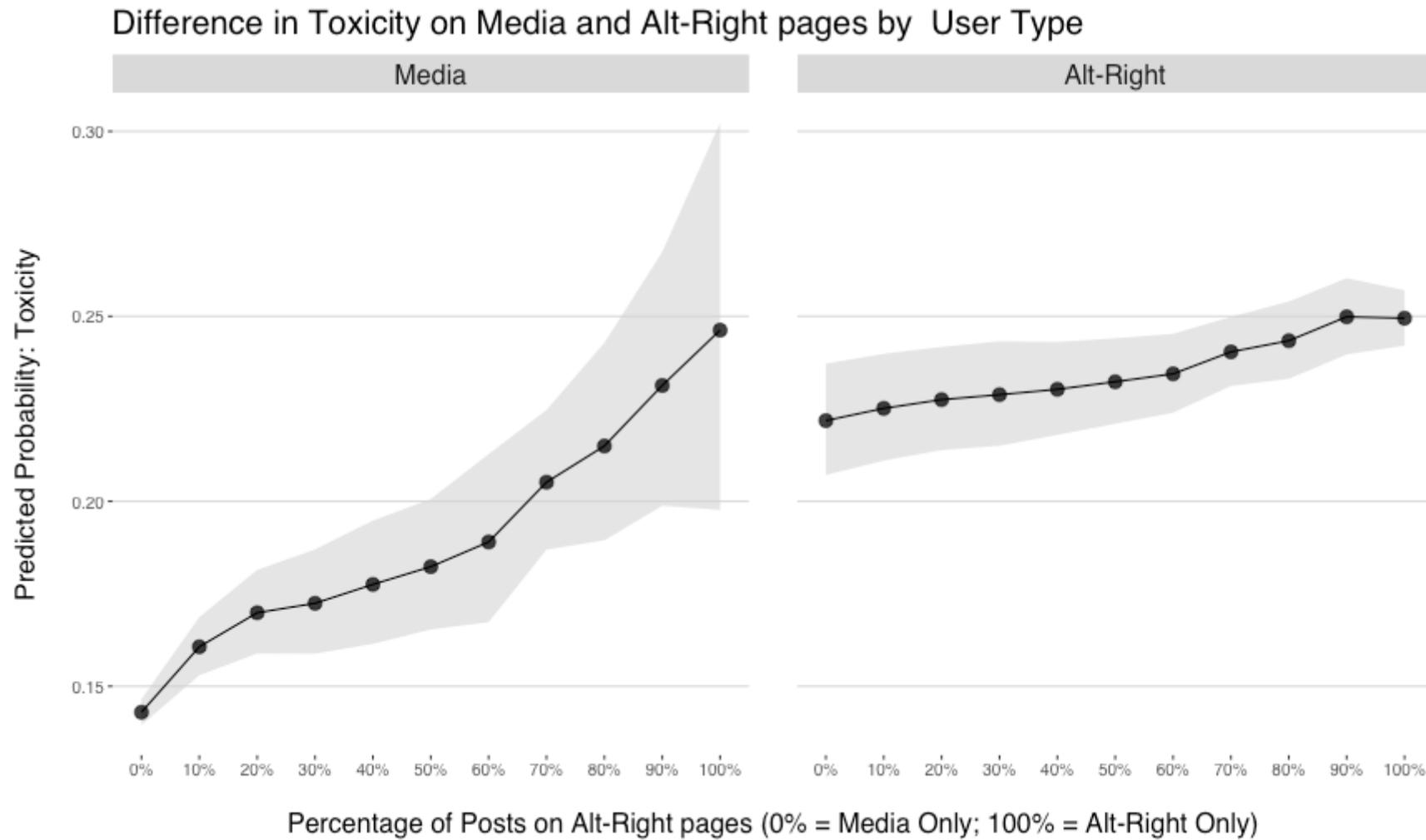
Differentiating between User Activity Types



Shared Active Users: Alt-Right Profiles and Media Outlets

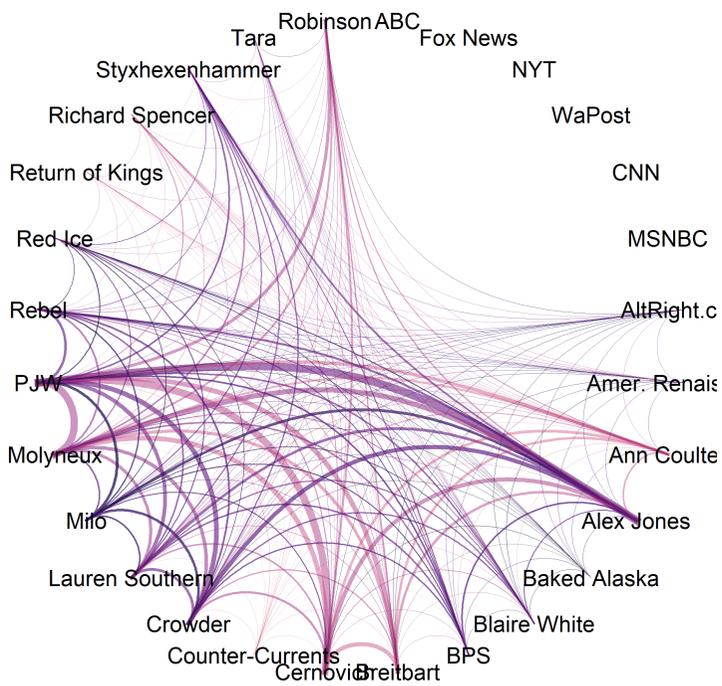


Multilevel Logit Regression:

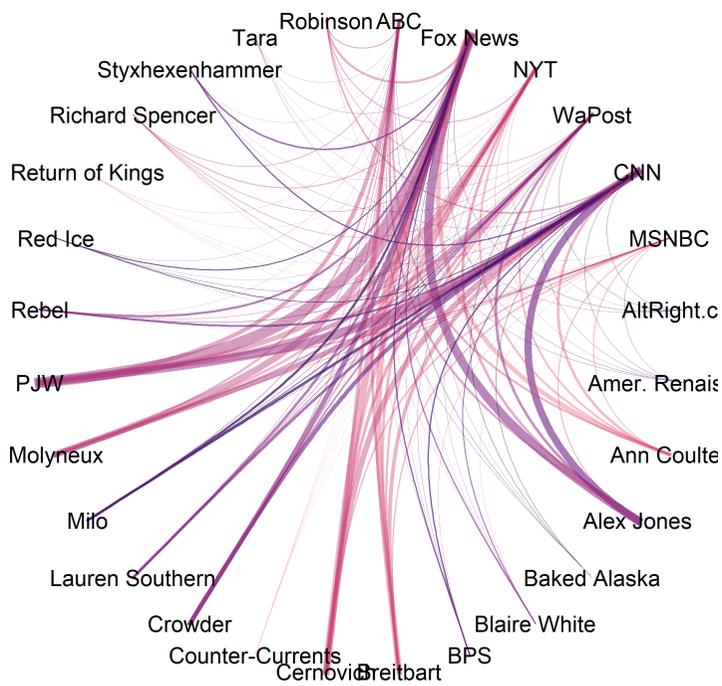


The Flow of Toxicity

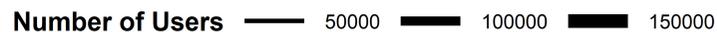
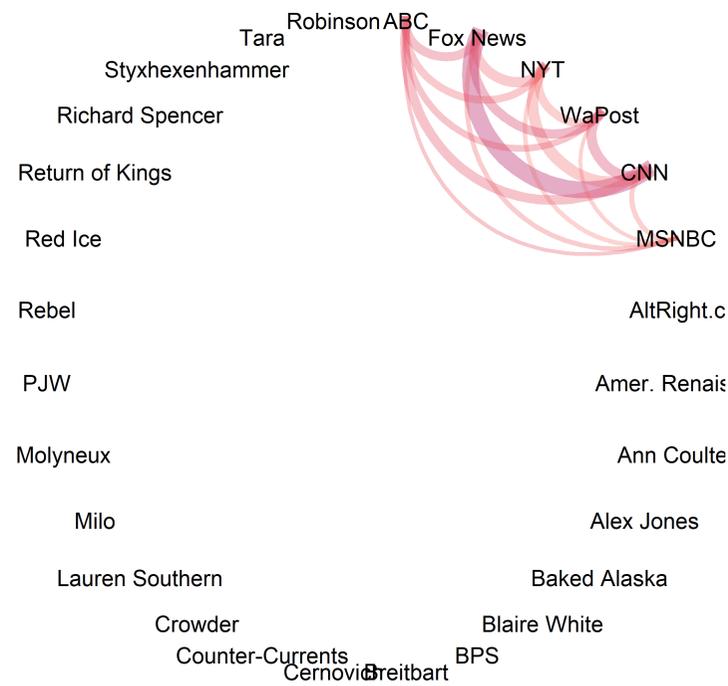
Alt-Right



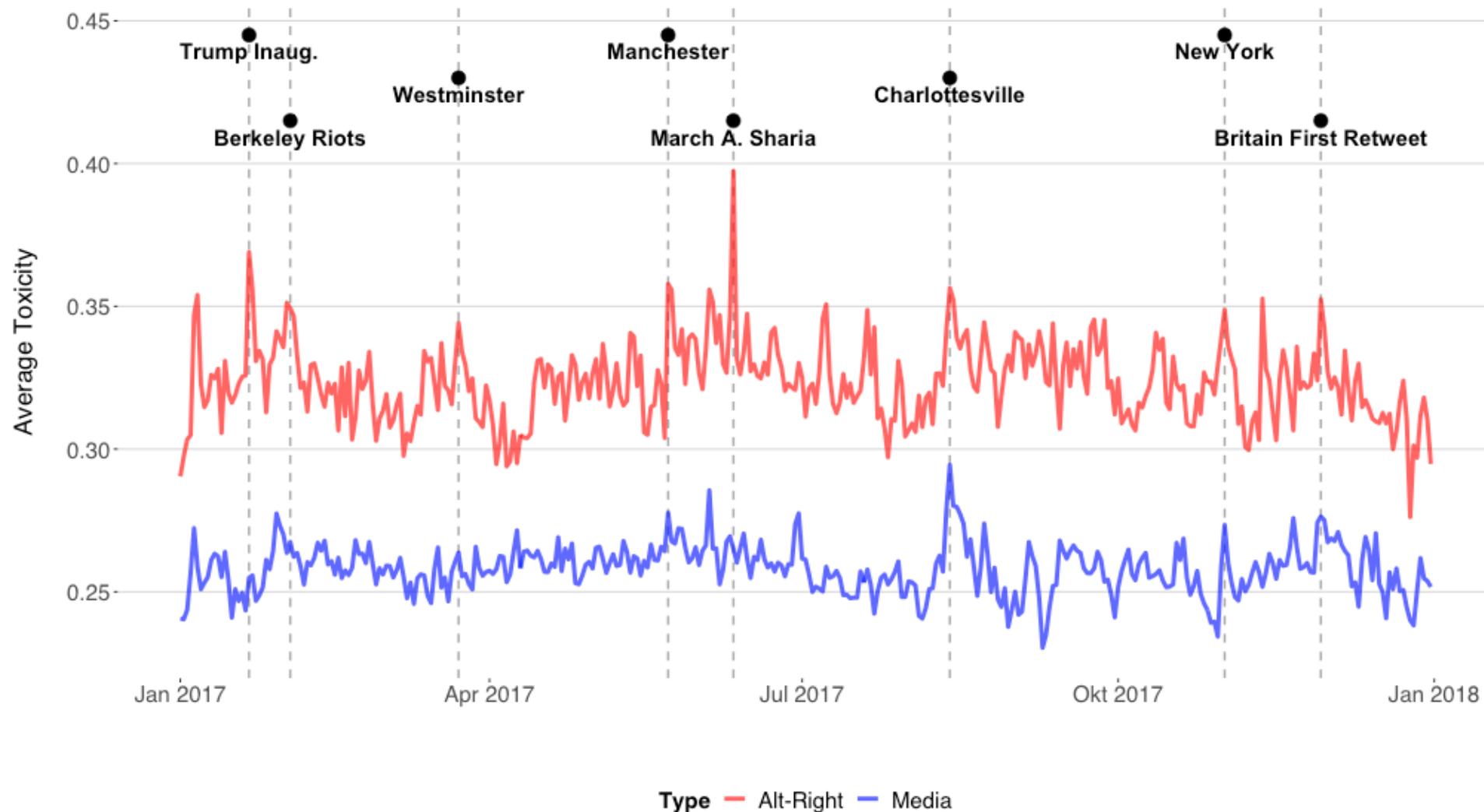
Alt-Right ~ Media



Media



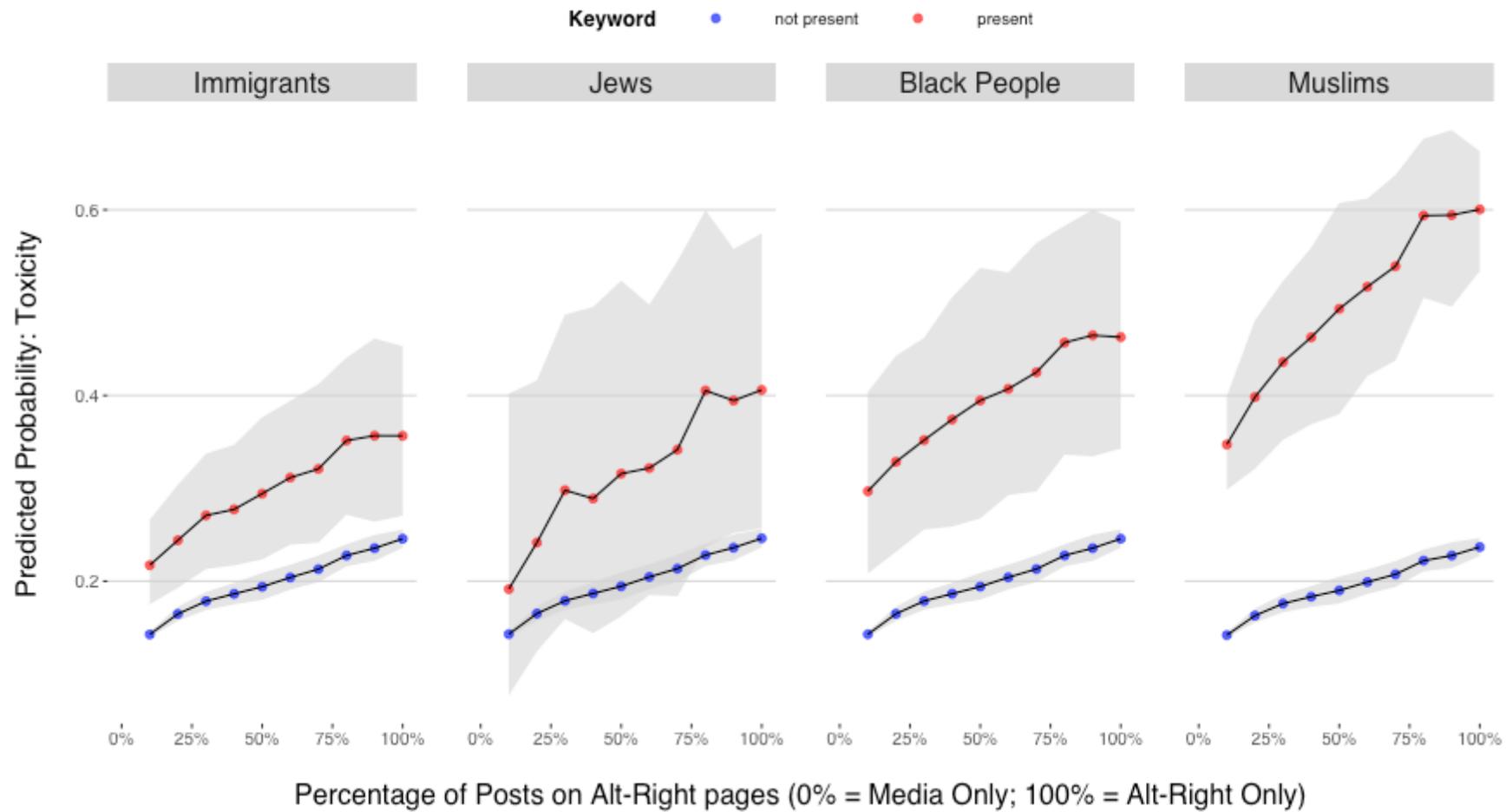
Average Toxicity by Day



Content Analysis

Multilevel Logit Regression:

Difference in Toxicity by User Type and Keywords



Conclusions

Conclusions

- Alt-Right pages exhibit much greater levels of toxicity than Media equivalents

Conclusions

- Alt-Right pages exhibit much greater levels of toxicity than Media equivalents
- Alt-Right toxicity spikes on days of Trump administration news and major Terror attacks

Conclusions

- Alt-Right pages exhibit much greater levels of toxicity than Media equivalents
- Alt-Right toxicity spikes on days of Trump administration news and major Terror attacks
- There is a good share of users that comment both on Alt-Right and Media pages

Conclusions

- Alt-Right pages exhibit much greater levels of toxicity than Media equivalents
- Alt-Right toxicity spikes on days of Trump administration news and major Terror attacks
- There is a good share of users that comment both on Alt-Right and Media pages
- *Alex Jones* and *Paul Joseph Watson* share a considerable user base with each other as well as with *Fox News* and *CNN*

Conclusions

- Alt-Right pages exhibit much greater levels of toxicity than Media equivalents
- Alt-Right toxicity spikes on days of Trump administration news and major Terror attacks
- There is a good share of users that comment both on Alt-Right and Media pages
- *Alex Jones* and *Paul Joseph Watson* share a considerable user base with each other as well as with *Fox News* and *CNN*
- Highest levels of toxicity on Media pages are from polarized Alt-Right users

Conclusions

- Alt-Right pages exhibit much greater levels of toxicity than Media equivalents
- Alt-Right toxicity spikes on days of Trump administration news and major Terror attacks
- There is a good share of users that comment both on Alt-Right and Media pages
- *Alex Jones* and *Paul Joseph Watson* share a considerable user base with each other as well as with *Fox News* and *CNN*
- Highest levels of toxicity on Media pages are from polarized Alt-Right users
- On Alt-Right pages, polarized Media users are almost as toxic as Alt-Right users

Conclusions

- Alt-Right pages exhibit much greater levels of toxicity than Media equivalents
- Alt-Right toxicity spikes on days of Trump administration news and major Terror attacks
- There is a good share of users that comment both on Alt-Right and Media pages
- *Alex Jones* and *Paul Joseph Watson* share a considerable user base with each other as well as with *Fox News* and *CNN*
- Highest levels of toxicity on Media pages are from polarized Alt-Right users
- On Alt-Right pages, polarized Media users are almost as toxic as Alt-Right users
- Polarized Alt-Right users use much more toxic language when talking about Immigrants, Black people and Muslims

Thanks for Listening!

Slides: <https://decoding-the-altright.netlify.com/>

References

Hawley, G. (2017). *Making Sense of the Alt-right*. Columbia University Press.

Marwick, A., & Lewis, R. (2017). *Media manipulation and disinformation online*. New York: Data & Society Research Institute.

Appendix

Milo Yiannopolous' characterization of the Alt-Right: ¹

*The alt-right is a movement born out of the youthful, subversive, **underground edges of the internet**. 4chan and 8chan are hubs of alt-right activity. For years, members of these forums – political and non-political – have delighted in **attention-grabbing, juvenile pranks**. Long before the alt-right, 4channers turned **trolling** the national media into an in-house sport.*

Marwick and Lewis 2017

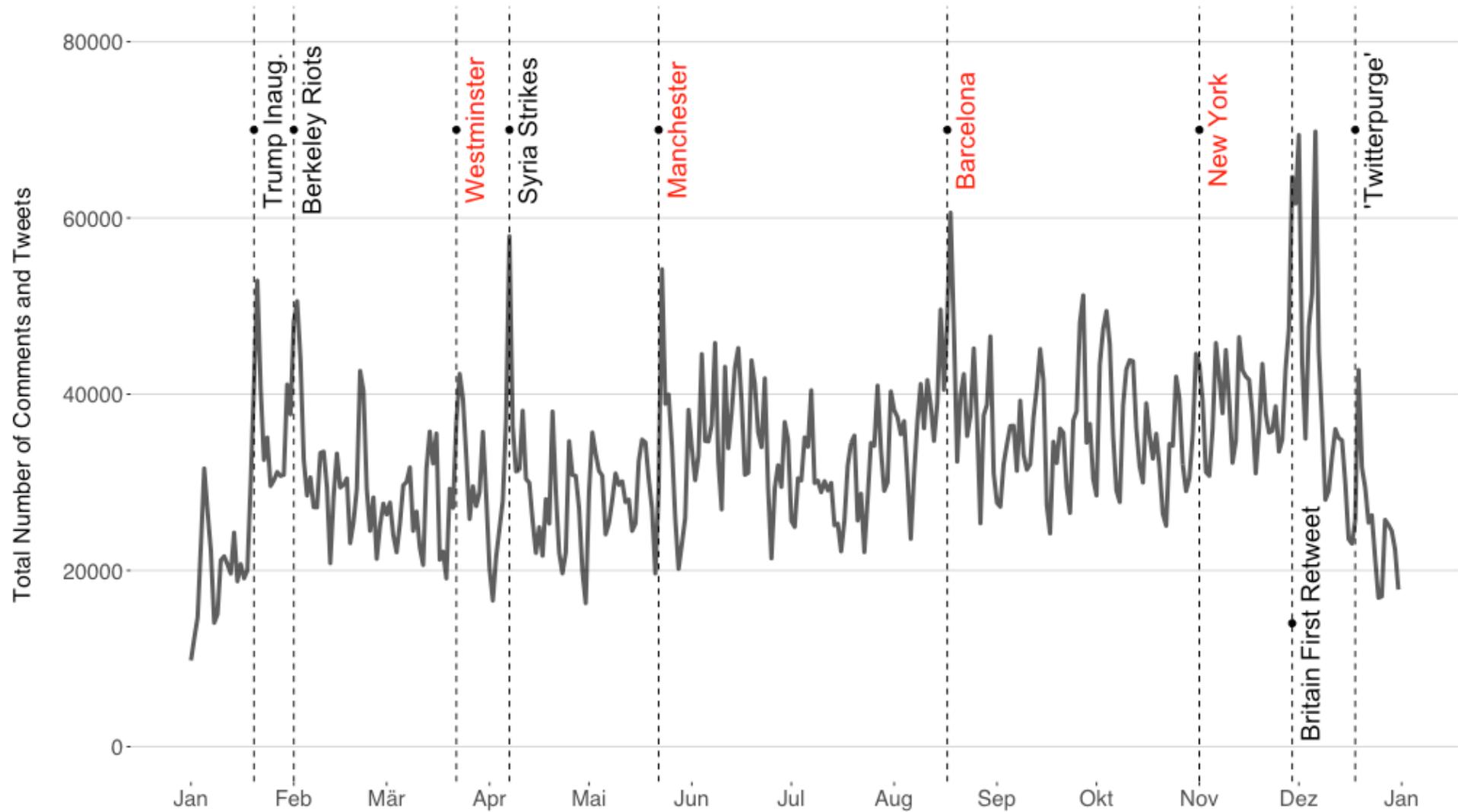
*Term coined by Richard Spencer to describe a version of **white nationalism** that positions itself as comprised of **younger, wealthier, and better-educated individuals** than traditional white supremacist groups like the Klu Klux Klan. Deeply entwined with social media and staples of **internet culture, like memes**. Believes that **“political correctness” threatens individual liberty**. Example: Jared Taylor of the American Renaissance, Mike Cernovich of Danger and Play.*

Hawley 2017

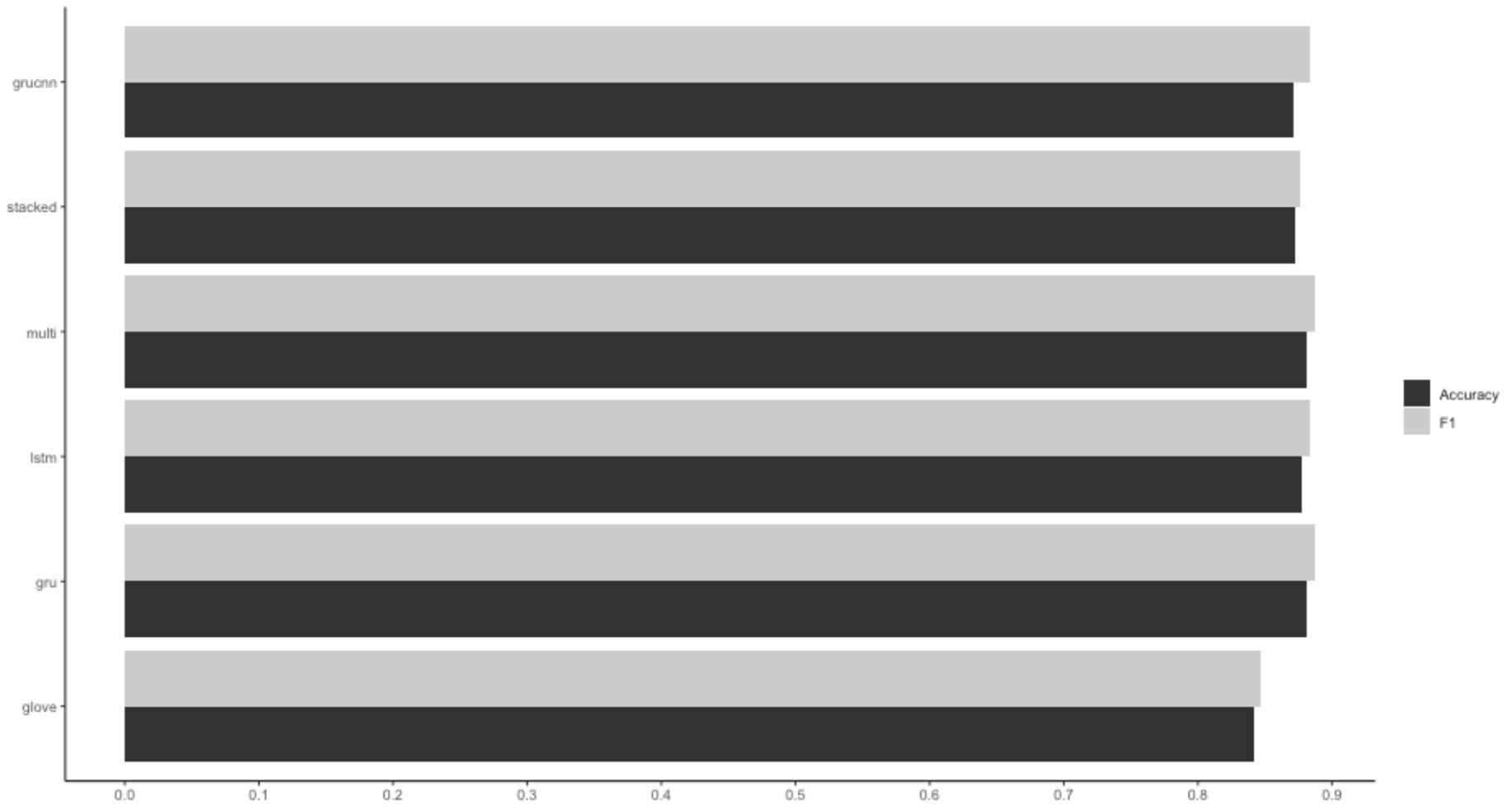
*Using the loosest definition, we could say the Alt-Right includes anyone with right-wing sensibilities that **rejects the mainstream conservative movement**. But there are certain common, perhaps universal attitudes within the Alt-Right. The Alt-Right is **fundamentally concerned with race**. At its core, the Alt-Right is a white-nationalist movement, even if many (perhaps most) of the people who identify with the Alt-Right do not care for that term. The most energetic and significant figures of the movement want to see the creation of a **white ethnostate** in North America.*

¹Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos, “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right,” Breitbart, March 29, 2016, <http://www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/03/29/an-establishment-conservatives-guide-to-the-alt-right/>.

Appendix: Total Number of Posts and Comments: Alt-Right



Appendix: Text Predictions



Appendix: Explainability I

Communist control freak engineered scam situation this attack proves it's all organized ahead of time

Shoot dat nigga amp his shorty bitch shorty bitch

VICESports it past your bed time No wonder no one reads that garbage on vice because faggots like you write shit fuck off

Get the fuck outta here talking bout the response will be better You fucking ignorant stupid asshole

Appendix: Explainability II

word	glove	lstm	gru	multi	stacked	grucnn	ngram
Communist	0.607	0.98	0.926	0.969	0.948	0.928	Communist control freak
control	0.584	0.89	0.925	0.911	0.912	0.633	control freak engineered
freak	0.61	0.994	0.98	0.999	0.989	0.995	freak engineered scum
engineered	0.554	0.955	0.978	0.997	0.974	0.973	engineered scum situation
scum	0.537	0.945	0.973	0.995	0.974	0.972	scum situation this
situation	0.519	0.159	0.066	0.311	0.253	0.27	situation this attack
this	0.536	0.107	0.071	0.179	0.339	0.267	this attack proves
attack	0.557	0.144	0.073	0.113	0.348	0.294	attack proves it's
proves	0.572	0.38	0.111	0.067	0.33	0.707	proves it's all
it's	0.546	0.309	0.068	0.126	0.204	0.07	it's all organized
all	0.558	0.142	0.07	0.105	0.187	0.027	all organized ahead
organized	0.512	0.039	0.062	0.031	0.169	0.009	organized ahead of
ahead	0.54	0.055	0.068	0.036	0.264	0.14	ahead of time
of	0.524	0.189	0.068	0.094	0.35	0.193	of
time	0.528	0.17	0.073	0.03	0.314	0.159	time

Appendix: Nullmodel

