

Stanford | Internet Observatory
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Gabufacturing Dissent An in-depth analysis of Gab

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1 Introduction

Gab is a small but growing social media ecosystem catering primarily to far-right communities who believe they are unwelcome—rightly or not—on more mainstream social media platforms. Its core product is a microblogging platform similar to Twitter, though Gab also offers a video sharing service (“Gab TV”), a used-goods marketplace (“Gab Marketplace”), and a browser extension that enables a comment system for other webpages (“Dissenter”).¹ Gab’s co-founder, Andrew Torba, also has a larger aspiration to build what he calls a “parallel internet” and indeed a parallel Christian nationalist economy,² in response to what he perceives as the cultural hegemony of Silicon Valley.

Unlike the more mainstream platforms it hopes to replace, Gab makes very few efforts to moderate the content on its platform.³ This is true even when compared to other alternative platforms that market an “uncensored” or “free-speech” approach to content moderation, such as Parler and Gettr. This laissez-faire approach to moderation—along with an explicit right-wing focus—has unsurprisingly made Gab a central component of the far-right online ecosystem.

As more mainstream platforms crack down on far-right extremism, that content has been welcomed on Gab.⁴ Many of the most popular Gab users—such as Georgia representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, 8kun administrator and QAnon promoter Ron Watkins, and 2020 election conspiracy theory promoter Mike Lindell—have been deplatformed⁵ by platforms like Twitter and Facebook.⁶ In a notable exception, the most-followed user deplatformed from Twitter and Facebook, Donald Trump, has not actively used Gab as a platform—a deal to do so having been reportedly⁷ derailed due to Gab’s refusal to remove anti-Semitic content.

In this report, we provide an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of Gab users and content. In particular, we find that:

- After years of very slow growth and increasing financial difficulties,⁸ Gab was reinvigorated with an influx of users and money as a result of both the January 6 insurrection and the subsequent downtime of fringe platform Parler in January 2021. Parler was temporarily deplatformed when its service plans were canceled by Amazon Web Services and other providers for Terms of Service violations. The influx of users to Gab resulted in a much

1. Rye, Blackburn, and Beverly, “[Reading In-Between the Lines: An Analysis of Dissenter.](#)”

2. Jenkins, “[Christian nationalists seek a ‘parallel’ digital world to skirt the power of Big Tech.](#)”

3. Jasser et al., “[‘Welcome to #GabFam’: Far-right virtual community on Gab.](#)”

4. Robertson, “[The far-right’s favorite social network is facing its own censorship controversy.](#)”

5. We use the term “deplatform” to describe either users or an entire service. When describing users, it typically refers to the suspension of a user from a platform after violating that site’s Terms of Service or content guidelines. When describing a service or app, deplatforming usually refers to termination of services critical to keep the site running or distributed to users, such as web hosting, payment systems, or ability to sell via app stores. Sites can sometimes work around this by moving to alternate service providers.

6. [Wikipedia.](#)

7. National File News, “[TORBA: Kushner Wouldn’t Allow Trump on Gab Unless He Banned Criticism of Israel.](#)”

higher level of baseline activity on Gab, as well as significantly increased revenue.

- Gab groups, where much of the most toxic content is concentrated, have seen increasing rates of post growth. Groups focused on distributing virulently racist and bigoted content have large followings and post this content to more mainstream groups in an attempt to radicalize more of the new userbase.
- For several years, content on Gab leaned toward QAnon and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories; these communities are beginning to shift toward a more broad, unified conspiracy where Jews, LGBTQ people and minorities are characterized as criminal pedophiles who must be purged. Overtly Nazi content now gets significant engagement.
- The volume and character of content on Gab can be just as toxic as sites that have previously been deplatformed even by companies such as Epik and Cloudflare,⁹ yet these companies do not refuse services to Gab. This may be due to the increased chaff of mundane or benign content obscuring its worst elements.
- New analysis is needed of the impact of deplatforming, and whether it may in fact lead to further radicalization or financial enrichment of even more extreme platforms or organizations.

1.1 History of Gab

Founded in 2016, Gab positions itself as an alternative “free speech” social media platform.¹⁰ It does not explicitly identify itself with the “Alt-Right” moniker, but rather as a platform that “champions free speech, individual liberty and the free flow of information online.”¹¹ Similar to other platforms that use “free speech” as a marketing strategy, its far-right ideological leanings are made very clear in its public posts and news articles.

While Gab lives up to its promise of having very little content moderation, this has predictably made it a haven for white supremacists, neo-Nazis, the Alt-Right, violent extremists, and conspiracists. It has also become a significant platform for the dissemination of anti-vaccine conspiracies, QAnon-related discourse, and, more recently, content supporting and organizing trucker convoy protests. These communities often commingle: for example, trucker convoy groups can become a channel for distributing white supremacist materials.

8. Gab’s last SEC filing (before it terminated filing) showed it operating at a significant loss: <https://sec.report/Document/0001104659-20-067852/>

9. While Epik and Cloudflare eventually refused service to their previous client, the neo-Nazi Daily Stormer, both have been supportive of Gab—despite the fact that Gab hosts **multiple groups** devoted to the The Daily Stormer, which syndicate its content, as well as the personal **profile** of the site operator Andrew Anglin, who uses Gab to solicit for donations.

10. Jasser et al., “**‘Welcome to #GabFam’: Far-right virtual community on Gab.**”

11. Gab, “**What is Gab.com?**”

The Shooting

In October 2018, neo-Nazi Robert Bowers shot and killed eleven people in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Bowers was an active Gab user and posted “Screw your optics, I’m going in” just before the shooting (see Figure 1). Bowers was outwardly anti-Semitic on Gab, and his posts were “replete with anti-Semitic slurs and calls for violence against Jews, who he claimed were behind plots to attack white Americans”¹²—content that was not out of the ordinary on Gab, and which continues to proliferate.

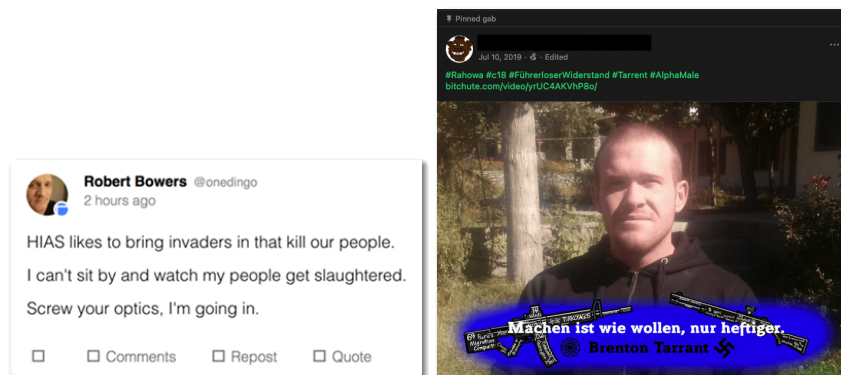


Figure 1: Left: Robert Bowers’ pre-shooting post on Gab. “HIAS” refers to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a Jewish nonprofit that helps resettle refugees in the US. Right: Gab content praising the Christchurch shooter.

Though Gab put out a statement following the attack claiming it “condemns all acts of terrorism and violence,” it also boasted about the traffic and attention it received in the aftermath of the attack.¹³ Many Gab users responded to the attack with praise, while also expressing concern that Gab’s service providers might shut down the platform.¹⁴ The month after the Tree of Life shooting, another prolific Gab user, Jeffrey Raphiel Clark Jr., was arrested on firearm and drug offenses after encouraging violence against Black and Jewish people. Clark had been linked to Bowers and openly praised his actions as well as those of the perpetrator of the 2015 mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.¹⁵

While not known to be an active user of Gab, the perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch shooting subscribed to the same “white genocide” or “great replacement” ideology¹⁶ that flourishes on Gab, referencing it in 8chan posts and in his published manifesto. He also received praise from users on Gab (an example can be seen in

12. Quinn et al., “Gunman Rants About Killing Jews, Slays 11 at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.”

13. Sommer, “Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter Spewed His Hate on Gab, the Alt-Right’s Favorite Social Network.”

14. Sommer, “Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter Spewed His Hate on Gab, the Alt-Right’s Favorite Social Network”; Anti-Defamation League, “Two Years After Synagogue Massacre, Gab Remains Extremists’ Online Destination of Choice.”

15. Anti-Defamation League, “Another White Supremacist Uses Gab to Share Violent, Racist Fantasies.”

16. Anti-Defamation League, “Gab and 8chan: Home to Terrorist Plots Hiding in Plain Sight.”

Figure 1 on the previous page). The same ideology—along with praise for Bowers as well as the Christchurch and Charleston shooters—was cited in the manifesto of the 2022 Buffalo shooter.¹⁷

The Deplatforming

In the aftermath of the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, PayPal, GoDaddy, Stripe, and Gab's hosting provider Joyent terminated their relationships with Gab.¹⁸ Epik—a company known¹⁹ to provide services to far-right platforms—soon took over as Gab's domain registrar, and Cloudflare continued to provide²⁰ anti-DDoS protections.

Gab has also had difficulty getting its mobile application approved for mainstream application distribution platforms. After several rounds of rejections from Apple's App Store and Google's Play Store (both before and after the 2018 shooting), Gab abandoned its previous codebase and migrated to the open-source Mastodon platform.²¹ This was motivated in part by the availability of Mastodon clients in the App Store ecosystem that could then be configured to use Gab, but the Mastodon community responded by blocking Gab's servers from communicating with other Mastodon servers, as well as hard-coding client software to prevent mobile clients from connecting to Gab's servers.²²

January 6

Along with right-wing platforms like TheDonald.win and Parler, Gab was one of a number of platforms used to plan, document, and execute the January 6 Capitol insurrection, as well as to disseminate instructions during the insurrection itself.²³ In the aftermath of the insurrection, Twitter and Facebook temporarily locked Donald Trump's accounts and removed several posts.²⁴ Facebook confirmed the following day that this ban would be indefinite, with Twitter following suit with an explicit permanent suspension on January 8.²⁵ Along with the temporary deplatforming of Parler,²⁶ this created a massive influx²⁷ of users to Gab—the largest in its existence, which we discuss further in Section 4.1 on page 8. It also resulted in a significant boost to Gab's revenue.

17. Collins, "The Buffalo supermarket shooting suspect posted an apparent manifesto repeatedly citing 'Great Replacement' theory."

18. Robertson, "Gab is back online after being banned by GoDaddy, PayPal, and more."

19. Allyn, "'Lex Luthor Of The Internet': Meet The Man Keeping Far-Right Websites Alive."

20. Weill, "Cloudflare and Its 'Free Speech Absolutist' CEO Haven't Quit Gab."

21. Mastodon, "Gab switches to Mastodon's code."

22. Robertson, "How the biggest decentralized social network is dealing with its Nazi problem."

23. Heilweil and Ghaffary, "How Trump's internet built and broadcast the Capitol insurrection."

24. Paul, "Twitter and Facebook lock Donald Trump's accounts after video address."

25. Twitter, Inc., "Permanent suspension ofrealDonaldTrump."

26. Brandom, "Why platforms had to cut off Trump and Parler."

27. Allyn, "Social Media Site Gab Is Surging, Even As Critics Blame It For Capitol Violence."

The Hacking

In February 2021, just over a month after Gab experienced its influx of users following the January 6 insurrection, “hactivist” group Distributed Denial of Secrets (DDoSecrets) announced that it had obtained more than 70 gigabytes of information from Gab’s database.²⁸ DDoSecrets claimed that the leak contained not only every public post and profile, but also private user data, private posts, and direct messages.²⁹ While DDoSecrets did not release the data publicly due to concerns over the large amount of private information, the group made the dataset available to a small number of journalists and researchers.³⁰

The vulnerability that exposed Gab’s database was SQL injection, a well-known vulnerability that most modern web frameworks automatically prevent. Although Gab’s infrastructure is based on Mastodon (which is itself built atop the highly audited Ruby on Rails), this vulnerability was introduced by an ad hoc addition that Gab’s CTO³¹ made to the codebase.³²

Although the DDoSecrets dataset is not widely accessible, a number of concerning findings from the breach have been publicly reported. For example, the breach revealed that a number of neo-Nazi and QAnon accounts were marked as Gab investors; that Gab is aware that many of its accounts are bots; and that Andrew Torba, Gab’s CEO, exchanged a series of direct messages with QAnon influencer Neon Revolt.³³

28. Greeberg, “Far-Right Platform Gab Has Been Hacked—Including Private Data.”

29. Greeberg.

30. The Stanford Internet Observatory (SIO) did not use or attempt to obtain the DDoSecrets dataset.

31. Makuch, “Gab’s New CTO Is a Former Facebook Software Engineer.”

32. Goodin, “Rookie coding mistake prior to Gab hack came from site’s CTO.”

33. Wilson, “Gab: hack gives unprecedented look into platform used by far right.”

CHRONOLOGY OF GAB

August 10, 2016	•	First Gab accounts created
May 8, 2017	•	Gab publicly launches
August 11, 2017	•	The “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville
October 27, 2018	•	The Pittsburgh synagogue shooting
October 29, 2018	•	Gab goes offline due to GoDaddy suspending domain services
November 4, 2018	•	Epik hosts Gab’s domain, returning them online
February 24, 2019	•	Dissenter launches
April 11, 2019	•	Google removes Dissenter from the Chrome Web Store
July 4, 2019	•	Gab switches to a fork of Mastodon
January 6, 2021	•	Capitol insurrection
February 28, 2021	•	DDoSecrets releases the contents of its Gab data breach

2 Methodology and Caveats

SIO performed an analysis of Gab’s full content as reported via their API, with a near-comprehensive corpus of user and group posts as of mid-March 2022. This data was strictly gathered through Gab’s API and did not include the contents of private messages or protected groups. As such, we consider this review to be a “clean room” analysis of Gab’s platform.

There are some caveats to this analysis:


- The data reported by the API may be incomplete or incorrect. Gab’s infrastructure is unreliable, returning spurious errors and often omitting data; while we have attempted to accommodate for this as best we can, certain content may be absent from our analysis.
- Users, posts, and groups created during the weeks when data collection was running may be omitted. We have truncated most charts to accommodate this unevenness.
- There are a large number of inactive accounts on Gab included in this analysis, which skews calculations of percentages downward.

3 Prominent Figures

The dynamics of Gab have changed significantly in the past several years—of the 20 most-followed users reported by Zannettou et al.³⁴ in 2018, only two remain in the top 20 in 2022: Andrew Torba and PrisonPlanet, a.k.a. Paul Watson (see Table 1). This illustrates a significant shift in the dynamics of far-right discourse and personalities: from GamerGate, InfoWars, and “Men’s Rights” figures to QAnon, Trumpism, and figures behind the January 6 insurrection. Some of the more prominent figures in 2018 have hardly grown in following: for example, Vox Day³⁵ (a far-right activist and early Gamergate figure) had 19,454 followers in 2018, and 26,403 followers at the time of our analysis.

This may indicate a broader shift in popularity, or it may be that some of the popular figures in 2018 have found niches in other parts of the alt-right media ecosystem (or some combination of the two).³⁶

Table 1: Most followed users from 2018 compared to 2022. “[Omitted]” display names appear as such in Zannettou et al.; “(blank)” indicates a null value returned by the API.

Zannettou et al., 2018			Stanford Internet Observatory, 2022		
Name	Username	Followers	Name	Username	Followers
Milo Yiannopoulos	m	45,060	Andrew Torba 	a	3,249,183
PrisonPlanet	PrisonPlanet	45,059	gab	gab	2,601,417
Andrew Torba	a	38,101	Gab Help	help	2,300,558
Ricky Vaughn	Ricky_Vaughn99	30,870	Donald J Trump	realdonaldtrump	2,109,076
Mike Cernovich	Cernovich	29,081	Neon Revolt	NeonRevolt	695,106
Stefan Molyneux	stefanmolyneux	26,337	PrisonPlanet	PrisonPlanet	565,980
Brittany Pettibone	BrittPettibone	24,799	The Epoch Times	TheEpochTimes	563,869
Jebs	DeadNotSleeping	22,659	Ron	codemonkey	488,958
[omitted]	TexasYankee4	20,079	Donald Trump Jr. Feed	DonaldJTrumpJrFeed	451,886
[omitted]	RightSmarts	20,042	National File	NationalFile	440,466
Vox Day	voxday	19,454	Revolver News Official	RevolverNews	435,014
[omitted]	d_seaman	18,080	David Knight	DavidKnightShow	344,911
Alex Jones	RealAlexJones	17,613	(blank)	Catturd	341,925
Jared Wyand	JaredWyand	16,975	The Babylon Bee	TheBabylonBee	327,258
Ann Coulter	AnnCoulter	16,605	Marjorie Greene	RealMarjorieGreene	325,031
Lift	lift	16,544	IPOT1776	IPOT1776	321,018
Survivor Medic	SurvivorMed	16,382	Gab Support	support	319,131
[omitted]	SalguodNos	16,124	Mike Lindell	RealMikeLindell	314,611
Proud Deplorable	luther	15,036	Jim Hoft	gatewaypundit	305,041
Lauren Southern	LaurenSouthern	14,827	Major Patriot	MajorPatriot	300,463

4 User Analysis

4.1 User Registration Growth

Gab has spent the vast majority of its existence attracting meager numbers of users, until January 2021. From its launch in 2016 until December 2020, it averaged 1,022 new users per day or 30,121 per month. Then January 2021 was far and

34. Zannettou et al., “What is Gab? A Bastion of Free Speech or an Alt-Right Echo Chamber?”

35. Wikipedia.

36. Some formerly prominent right-wing figures such as Milo Yiannopoulos and Jacob Wohl have complained that they are unable to monetize any part of their Gab presence, which has caused them to focus on other platforms; see Uberti, “Milo Yiannopoulos Says He’s Broke.”

away the biggest growth month in Gab's history: 2,065,650 new registrants, or almost 40% of the overall userbase (3,276,323 at the time), registered in January (see Figure 2), with moderate growth in February before falling back to previous levels. Over 99% of that growth was after January 6 (see Figure 3), suggesting that the new users joined as a response to the insurrection and possibly also as a response to the suspension of Donald Trump's social media accounts from Facebook and Twitter. On Twitter, mentions of Gab spiked during the same time period (see Figure 4 on the following page), peaking at 190 tweets per minute on January 10.

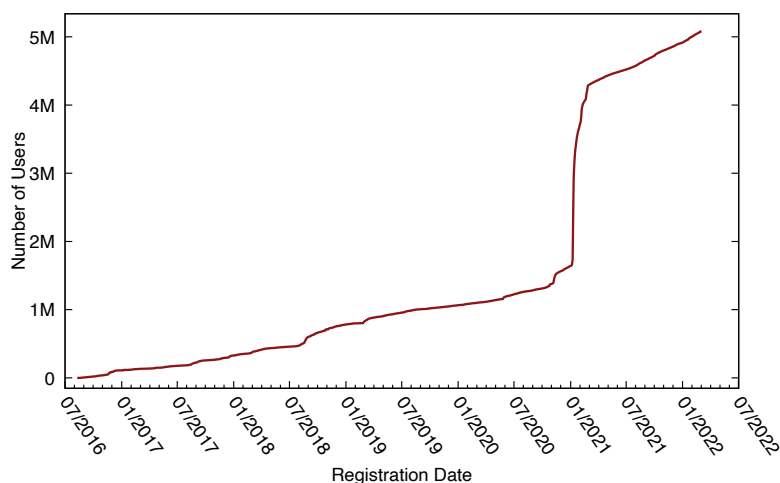


Figure 2: Cumulative Gab user registration over time.

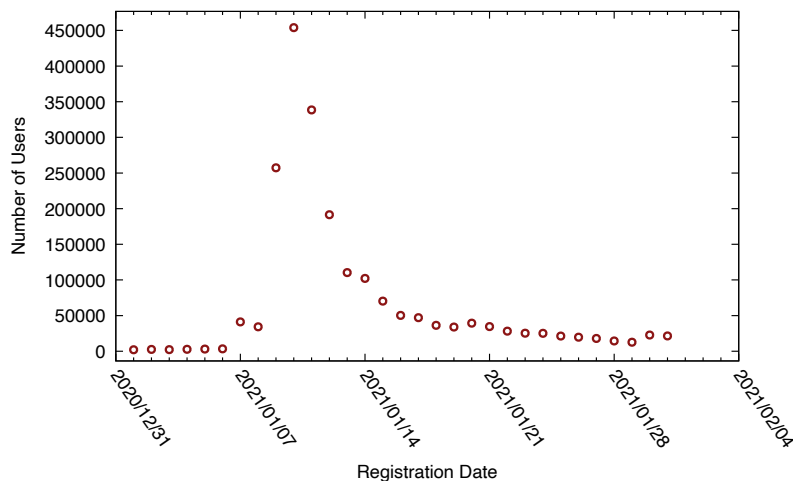


Figure 3: January 2021 Gab user registration by day, peaking on January 10th.

4.2 Pro Users, Donors, and Investors

Since 2017, Gab has offered a paid “Pro” tier for users, allowing for additional functionality: the ability to hide ads, access the Gab TV channel, apply for verification, and use additional posting features. Gab had 24,146 Pro users as of

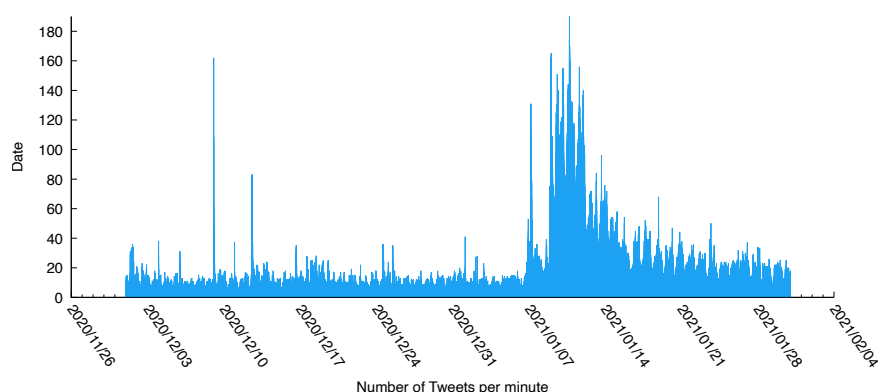


Figure 4: Number of mentions of Gab per minute on Twitter during December 2020 and January 2021. Some unrelated tweets with “gab” in a username or those detected as being in German are removed (“gab” translates as “gave” in German).

March 3, 2022.³⁷ The fee for a Pro user subscription is between \$63 and \$180 per year depending on the length of the subscription period, or \$500 for a lifetime subscription.

While Gab has not published financial numbers with the SEC since 2020,³⁸ the influx of new Pro users from the January account registration surge potentially puts their newfound annual income from Pro user subscriptions at $\approx 1.6\text{--}4.5$ million USD per year, in addition to other income from investment, crowdfunding, donations, and merchandise sales.

Gab also solicits direct donations from users—this is not tied to enhanced functionality, though it does grant the user a signifying badge on their Gab profile. Among Gab’s userbase, 5,700 users ($\approx 0.1\%$) are flagged as donors, the most prominent of which include Paul Watson, Alex Jones, The Epoch Times, Ron Watkins, Mike Lindell, Jim Hoft (Gateway Pundit), Marjorie Taylor Greene, Franklin Graham, and Lauren Boebert. Suggested donation levels range from \$25 to \$500 (see Figure 5 on the next page). Almost 30% of Gab’s overall donor base registered during January 2021 (see Figure 6 on the following page). An additional 11,230 of the January joiners became Pro users, accounting for almost half of Pro users.

Finally, Gab has 495 users badged as investors, among them QAnon conspiracy theory promoter Robert Cornero Jr. (Neon Revolt),³⁹ Andrew Torba’s parents Amy and Bob Torba, and Gab CTO Fosco Marotto. Most investors are also early users, having registered within the first year of Gab’s existence (see Figure 7 on page 12). The conditions under which one is marked as an investor are unclear: the number reported by the API appears to be significantly lower than the recorded number

37. This is $\approx 0.47\%$ of Gab’s userbase—significantly different from the 15% found by Jasser et al. (“**Welcome to #GabFam’: Far-right virtual community on Gab**”), likely because SIO’s analysis included users that may be largely inactive and follow fewer accounts.

38. Securities and Commission, “**Form C-TR.**”

39. Backovic, “**EXCLUSIVE: Failed Screenwriter from New Jersey Behind One of QAnon’s Most Influential Personas.**”

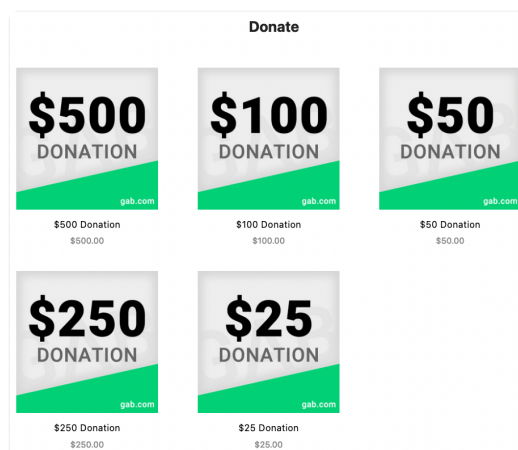


Figure 5: Currently offered donation levels in the Gab/Dissenter store.

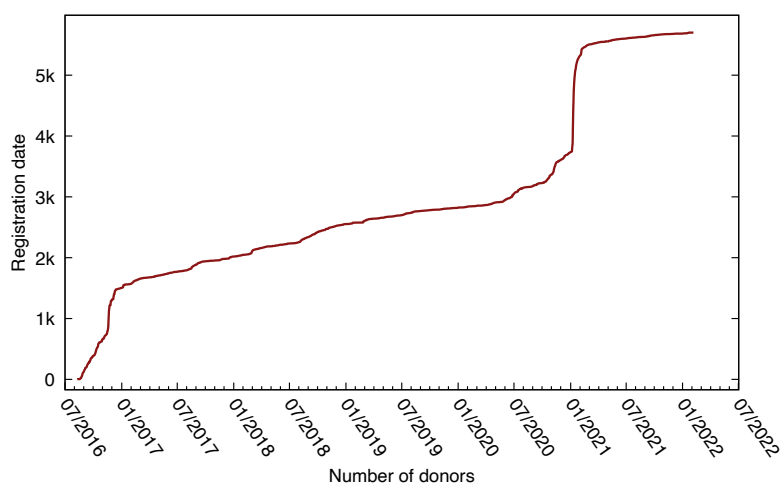


Figure 6: Donors by user join date shows spikes during Gab’s first six months and in January 2022. Note that user join dates are not necessarily the date they became donors.

of investors from previous crowdfunding campaigns.⁴⁰

4.3 Emoji Community Characterization

In similar analyses done by SIO on Parler and Gettr,⁴¹ we identified several distinct user communities through patterns in their bios, including emoji usage and language. Similar analysis on Gab did not reveal the same types of communities, but did identify a few unexpected patterns. Emoji present in user display names included the Spanish flag, the frog (a reference to Gab’s mascot), the Polish flag, and the “high voltage” symbol—the latter because of its resemblance to the sig

40. Dougherty and Hayden, “How Gab Has Raised Millions Thanks to This Crowdfunding Company.”

41. Thiel et al., “Contours and Controversies of Parler”; Thiel and McCain, “Topologies and Tribulations of Gettr.”

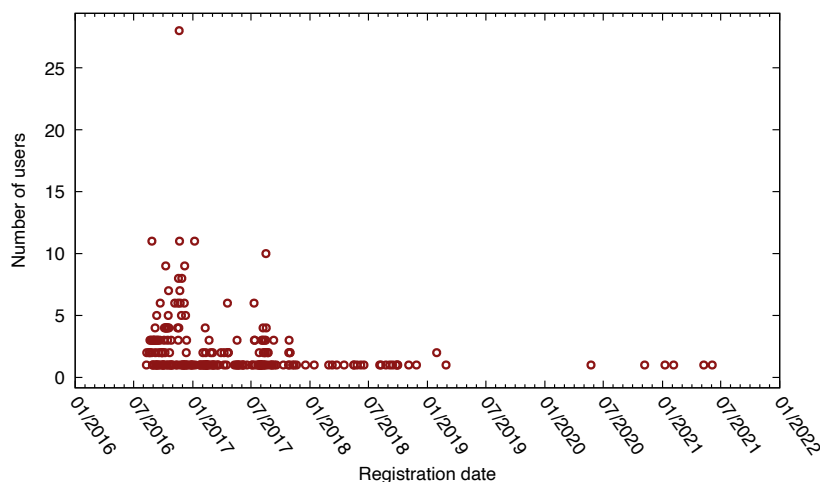


Figure 7: Investors by join date, largely concentrated in the first two years of its existence.

rune⁴² used in the Nazi Schutzstaffel insignia (see Figure 8 on the following page). Emoji in user bios display some similarity to previous SIO analyses, but with slightly more prominent religious iconography (see Figure 9 on the next page).

The earliest surge of Spain-emoji accounts began with supporters of the Spanish far-right Vox party joining the platform in 2019 after Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez failed to reach a governing deal, followed by the dissolution of parliament and scheduling of a new general election scheduled.⁴³ The remaining Spain and Poland emoji users joined at the same time as the post-January 6 surge. Vox officially joined Gab in January as well, purchasing a Pro account.⁴⁴

Beyond the emoji UTF-8 character set, display names and bios contain a significant amount of overt Nazi and white supremacist symbolism: similar to the high voltage emoji, the lowercase Greek koppa character (U+03DF)⁴⁵ is used for its resemblance to the Schutzstaffel insignia, along with hundreds of profiles using the swastika (U+5350)⁴⁶ and Maltese cross (U+2720).⁴⁷ Hundreds more contain the string "1488"⁴⁸ or other white supremacist codewords.

42. [Wikipedia](#).

43. Vox gained 28 seats in the Congress of Deputies and two in the Senate; see [Wikipedia](#).

44. VOX España, "¡Estrenamos cuenta en Gab! VOX combate el discurso único del consenso progre allí donde haga falta. Gracias a todos por ayudarnos a consolidar una alternativa patriota y social en España 🇪🇸."

45. <https://unicode-table.com/en/03DF/>

46. <https://unicode-table.com/en/5350/>

47. <https://unicode-table.com/en/2720/>

48. Anti-Defamation League, "Two Years After Synagogue Massacre, Gab Remains Extremists' Online Destination of Choice."

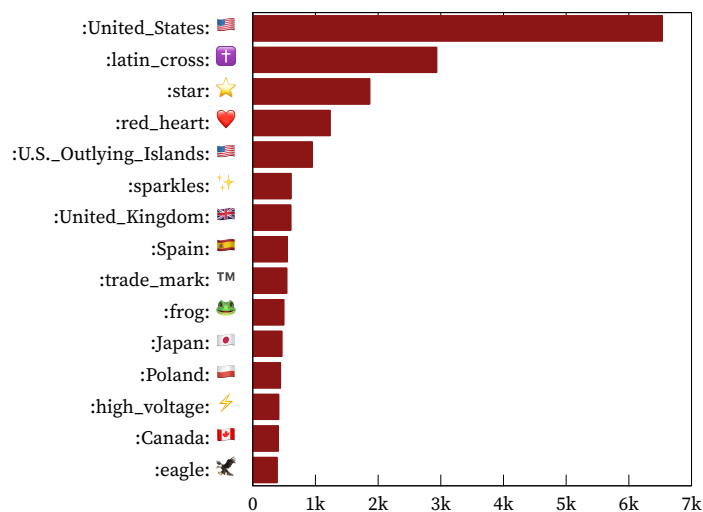


Figure 8: Top 15 emoji in display name.

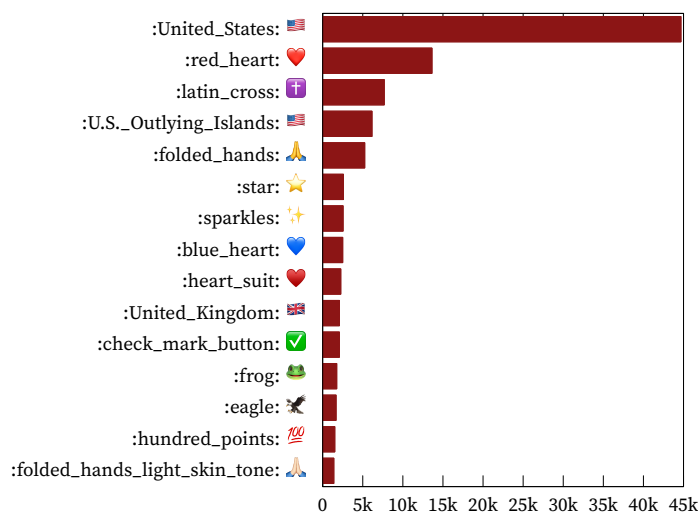


Figure 9: Top 15 emoji in user bios.

4.4 User Languages

SIO looked at the language of user bios as another indicator of potential communities on Gab. Using Google’s Compact Language Detector v3 (CLD3),⁴⁹ we analyzed the results, which were deemed by the model to have a 100% probability of correct detection. After excluding one language that was mostly misdetected (Norwegian), we obtained the results shown in Table 2 on the following page. Most languages largely follow the platform’s overall growth curve, but the Vietnamese, Thai, and Portuguese bios showed divergent patterns.

Unusually, Vietnamese is the second most popular language for bios on the site—

49. Google, “[Compact Language Detector v3 \(CLD3\)](#).”

Table 2: Top languages in user bio, out of those detected with CLD3, with a probability factor of 1.00.

Language	Number	Percent
English	875307	92.73
Vietnamese	29397	3.11
Portuguese	9070	0.96
Spanish	4826	0.51
Thai	3226	0.34
Japanese	3109	0.33
German	3012	0.32
French	2656	0.28
Polish	1543	0.16
Dutch	1036	0.11
Italian	822	0.09
Latin	802	0.08
Swedish	801	0.08
Chinese	705	0.07
Farsi	615	0.07

in fact, it appears to be the only language with a steadily increasing growth rate over time (Figure 10). This growth appears to be driven by a gradually increasing spam operation, as does the Thai language growth. It is unclear, however, whether there is any significant non-spam Vietnamese or Thai userbase for the spammers to reach on Gab.

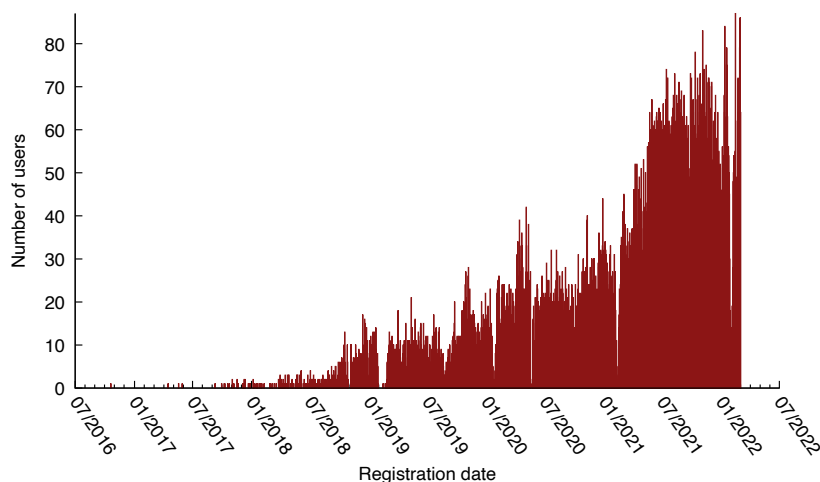


Figure 10: Vietnamese bio new user creation per day.

Portuguese-language bios spiked between August 7 and August 9, 2018, before a larger surge over a two-week period starting August 17, 2018 (see Figure 11 on the following page). These both coincided with the trending of #DireitaAmordaçada on Twitter (“direita” referring to the right wing, and “amordaçada” meaning “gagged”) after several right-wing accounts were temporarily restricted on Twit-

ter and other platforms.⁵⁰ This appears to have been a coordinated action, as posts containing this hashtag appeared simultaneously and in large numbers (see Figure 12).

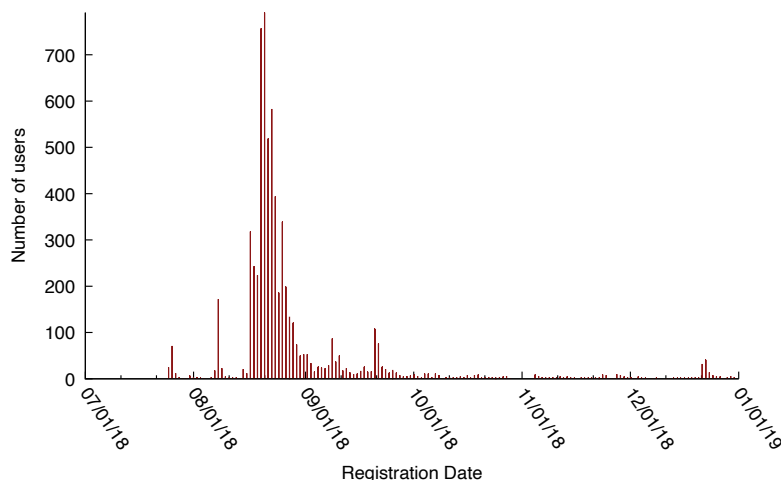


Figure 11: Accounts created with Portuguese bios during their peak registration period, the two weeks following August 17, 2018.

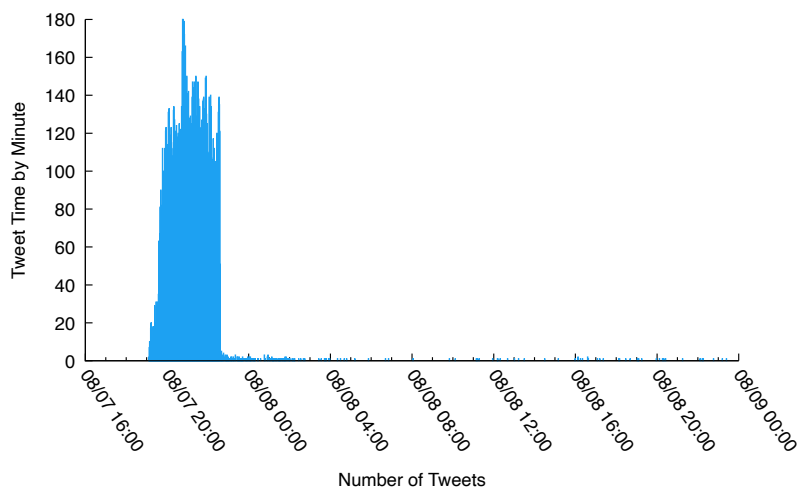


Figure 12: A sudden spike in the hashtag #DireitaAmordaçada on Twitter over a three-hour period on August 7, 2021.

50. Movimento Brasil Livre, “ATENÇÃO: O Twitter está RESTRINGINDO contas de perfis de direita. Mesmo papo de Youtube e Facebook, mas também no twitter. O @reaconaria está entre as contas.”

4.5 Active Users

Gab has been accused⁵¹ of attempting to inflate its user count by reporting registered users rather than statistics that reflect platform activity such as monthly or daily active users. Though Gab has nearly six million total registered users, we find that most of these users are largely inactive. Of the overall userbase, 63% (≈ 3.2 million) have never posted, and 63% of users have never changed their avatar. Of users who have posted, more than 50% have made 3 or fewer posts, and 90% have made fewer than 100 posts.

5 Gab Posting Dynamics

The volume of posts on Gab roughly resembles its user growth. In the months prior to January 2021, Gab averaged $\approx 5,200$ posts per day. At its peak on January 20, 2021, Gab had over 86,000 new posts in a single day. Activity then receded, averaging $\approx 30,000$ new posts per day after January 2021 before beginning to increase again. Figure 13 shows the number of posts on Gab per day from its inception.

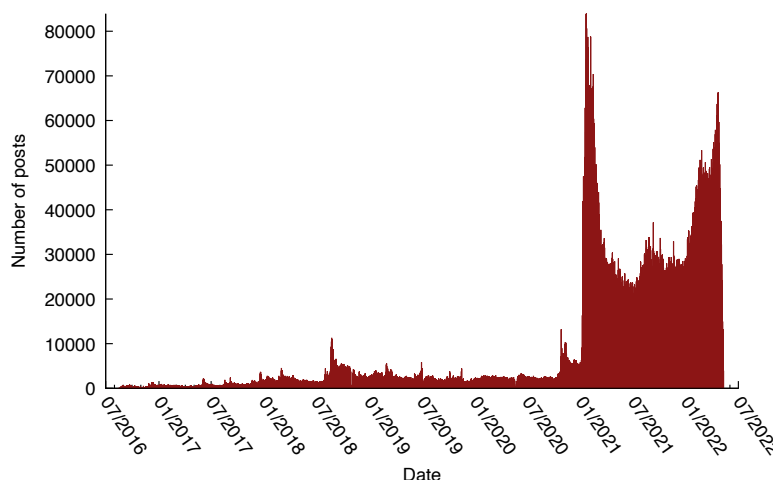


Figure 13: Number of timeline posts per day (including “reblogs” of existing content).

5.1 Highly Shared URL Domains

Links to YouTube videos are overwhelmingly the most popular thing for Gab users to share, potentially corroborating previous findings⁵² that views of fringe or extremist YouTube videos are highly driven by external referrer sites (as opposed to being primarily a product of YouTube recommendation algorithms themselves).

51. Dougherty and Hayden, “[How Gab Has Raised Millions Thanks to This Crowdfunding Company](#).”

52. Chen et al., “[Subscriptions and external links help drive resentful users to alternative and extremist YouTube videos](#).”

However, YouTube views originating from Gab may skew an individual YouTube user's content to recommend more extremist content in the future.

The more permissive video sites BitChute and Rumble are also in the top five, and gaining share among video sites. Ironically, many commonly linked domains are simply to mainstream social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Telegram group links (t.me) to known prolific sources of disinformation are common.⁵³ Of commonly shared news sites, The Gateway Pundit is highly popular, in addition to Breitbart, The Epoch Times, and Fox News (see Figure 14).

Detection of more mainstream sites' URLs posted on Gab can be a source of signal to help those sites detect content on their own platforms that may violate their trust and safety policies—for example, spikes in visits to a Facebook or Twitch video from Gab users (or from 4chan or 8kun) that are not part of a larger inbound traffic spike may be worthy of investigation.

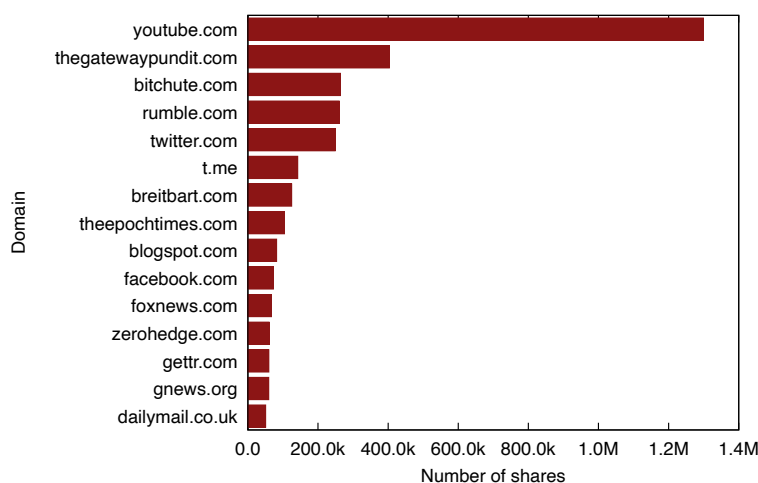


Figure 14: Top 15 most frequently posted URL domains (reblogs, comments, and links to Gab itself excluded).

53. SIO chose not to share URLs to the most shared Telegram groups, to prevent their proliferation.

6 Gab Groups

Platforms with group functionality—as opposed to Twitter clones where people are only aggregated by whom they follow—tend to have increased potential to organize offline activity, as was seen during and after the 2020 presidential election with “Stop the Steal” Facebook groups. A significant portion of discourse on Gab, including some of the most toxic, takes place in user groups, rather than on the generic Twitter-style timeline. The number of daily group posts has been increasing steadily—as seen in Figure 15, there was an initial January spike primarily consisting of introductory posts, followed by a dip and steady growth to $\approx 25,000$ posts a day. New group creation also surged in January (see Figure 16), with steady proliferation of new groups afterward.

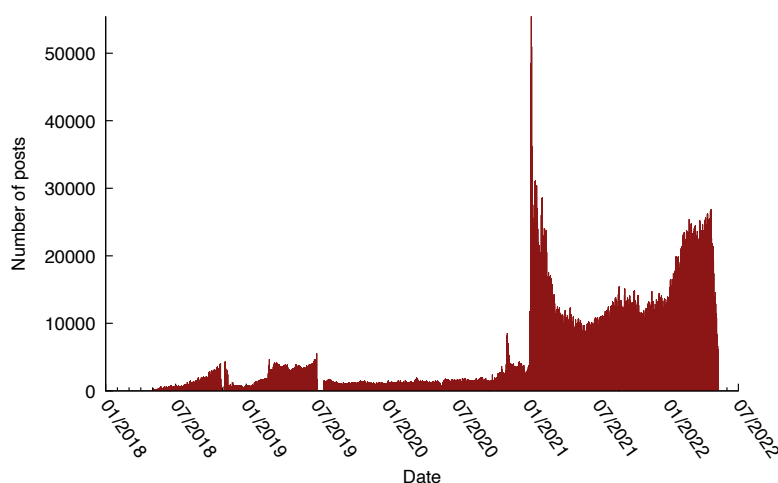


Figure 15: Number of posts to groups per day.

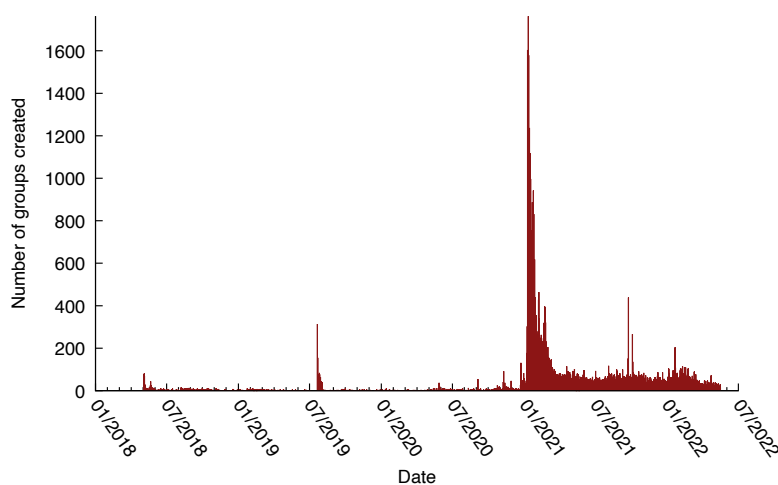


Figure 16: Group creation date over time.

The first columns of Table 3 on the following page show Gab groups with the highest membership counts, reflecting interest in Trump-related topics, the “Stop

the Steal” narrative, and several QAnon-related groups. The second set of columns shows popular groups created between January 1, 2021 and May 16 2022 (when this data collection ended), showing increased interest in anti-vaccine narratives, a significant following for conspiracy theory promoter L. Lin Wood, and three sizable trucker convoy-related groups. The latter are a significant departure from previous analyses,⁵⁴ which found Gab largely not used for coordinating offline activity.

Table 3: Groups with highest membership, overall versus those created in 2021–2022.

<i>All groups</i>			<i>Groups created 2021–2022</i>		
Group Name	Members	Creation Date	Group Name	Members	Creation Date
/g/The_Donald	416,512	2018-05-05	Joe Biden Is Not My President	199,049	2021-01-05
Trump 2024	263,886	2018-07-30	No Vax Mandate Jobs Board	86,373	2021-08-24
News	253,062	2018-05-30	Lin Wood's Truth Tellers	47,684	2021-01-09
WeLoveTrump	227,652	2020-11-21	Canadian Truckers Convoy	40,272	2022-01-26
Conservative News	226,364	2018-05-22	American Freedom Convoy 2022	31,081	2022-01-29
Christianity	212,813	2018-05-06	PatriotNews.io	26,953	2021-01-08
The Great Awakening	208,147	2019-02-06	The Patriot's Buycott Group.	26,554	2021-05-06
Election Integrity (Stop the Steal)	200,424	2020-11-05	Natural Immunity Community	25,090	2021-07-31
Joe Biden Is Not My President	199,049	2021-01-05	🔴 BREAKING 🔴 NEWS 🔴	23,082	2021-01-02
Libertarians of Gab	192,425	2018-05-05	America First	22,163	2021-01-10
QAnon	185,052	2018-05-15	Trump Supporters group#StopTheSteal	20,309	2021-01-10
Memes, memes, and more memes.	173,309	2018-05-22	Patriot Party Action Group	18,413	2021-01-19
Guns of Gab	169,517	2018-05-06	The People's Convoy (Official)	18,150	2022-02-03
Introduce Yourself	159,611	2018-05-05	Buy American Made	16,203	2021-01-10
QAnon Patriots	156,859	2018-08-09	Right Side News	14,642	2021-01-09

While some groups may have high membership numbers, not all high-membership groups are high activity; groups ordered by post volume can be seen in Table 4 on the next page. By volume, several groups with nation-state focus emerge—namely, groups for Britain, Australia, and Canada. The Canadian Truckers Convoy group quickly became one of the all-time most active groups on Gab after its creation in January 2022 (see Figure 17 on the following page). While activity dropped sharply after the arrest of the convoy leaders,⁵⁵ it continues to be a recruiting ground for convoy-related groups as well as conspiratorial and extreme racist content.

54. Jasser et al., “Welcome to #GabFam’: Far-right virtual community on Gab.”

55. Barrett, “Pepper spray, tow trucks, and Bitcoin seizures: How Canada finally ended the weeks-long Freedom Convoy protests in Ottawa.”

Table 4: Groups with the most posts, overall versus those created in 2021–2022.

All groups			Groups created 2021–2022		
Group Name	Posts	Creation Date	Group Name	Posts	Creation Date
Memes, Memes and more memes.	1,494,157	2018-05-05	Joe Biden is Not My President	623,633	2021-05-01
/g/The_Donald	1,276,524	2018-05-05	WYATT GANG Patriots Rock	408,912	2021-01-09
News	835,571	2019-02-06	Red White & Blue Twitter Family Pure Bloods 🇺🇸	408,912	2021-07-31
Introduce Yourself	818,483	2018-05-18	Red Wave Riders	150,753	2021-01-04
Joe Biden is Not My President	623,633	2021-05-01	Canadian Truckers Convoy	118,795	2021-01-26
Free Speech	580,678	2018-12-05	New Zealand Politics	112,842	2021-10-01
The Great Awakening	548,062	2019-06-02	Patriots Rising	76,569	2021-07-05
Politics	518,227	2018-05-22	Australia - 🇺🇸 Southern 🇺🇸 Land 🇺🇸 NEWS	70,786	2021-01-19
Australia	495,717	2018-06-15	(deactivated group)	67,906	2021-01-22
Conservative News	453,633	2018-05-22	True American Patriots 2022-2024	66,132	2021-12-12
Canada News	453,633	2018-05-22	Patriots Rising	60,217	2021-10-31
Trump 2024	426,952	2018-07-30	The 45h (2nd to None) ⭐⭐⭐⭐🍌	48,705	2021-11-01
WYATT GANG Patriots Rock	408,912	2021-01-09	UKRAINE	41,897	2021-01-11
#BritFam 🇬🇧	359,834	2018-05-05	Patriot Party Action Group	37,031	2021-01-19
We Love Trump!	352,298	2020-11-01	Trump Warriors	36,562	2021-01-16

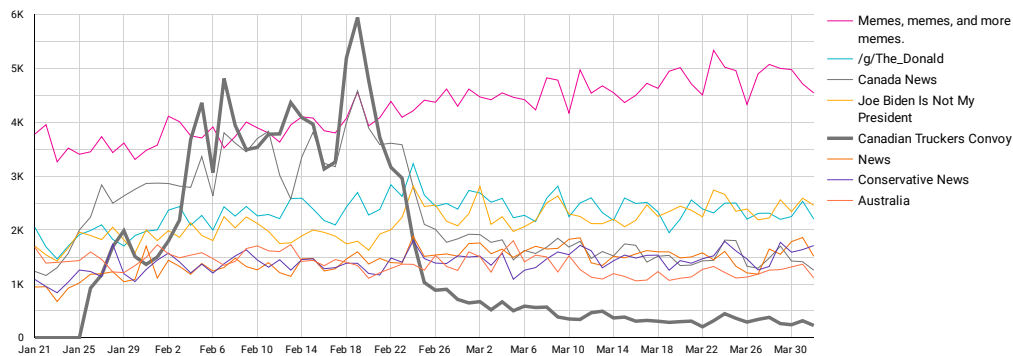


Figure 17: Group activity of the top eight groups near the end of 2021. Over a month-long period, the Canadian Truckers Convoy group was highly active on Gab, with thousands of posts per day.

7 Characteristics of Content on Gab

Note: This section contains examples of racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic and violent content. While unpleasant, the authors believe that it is important to understand the degree of toxicity present on Gab. Images have been redacted to obscure slurs, the identities of people who may not have agreed to their likeness used in offensive content, account names, and in some cases the content itself, to prevent redistribution.

While Gab has some similar content to its newer competitors like Parler, Gettr, and TRUTH Social, it differentiates itself by refusing to remove the most extreme racist, violent, and bigoted content. Gab's content enforcement only prohibits content that is explicitly illegal within the US.⁵⁶ Content that is illegal in other countries is plentiful. As an example, violently racist and misogynistic content posted by affiliates of the US-based neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division and Europe-based Sonnenkrieg Division spurred the arrest of two Gab users in the UK on the grounds that their Gab posts encouraged terrorism.⁵⁷

Depending on who a user follows, the main Gab timeline they see will show content that ranges from the relatively mundane and benign (frequently reposted by @gab to give the impression of a friendly environment) to the extreme. However, much of the worst content proliferates and spreads through Gab groups—groups being a feature that Gab's competitors do not support. Anti-vaccine content is very prevalent (though not always highly engaged with), and focuses more specifically on COVID-19 narratives than older, general anti-vaccine movements. Such anti-vaccine rhetoric frequently converges with more general conspiratorial content, as seen in Figure 18.



Figure 18: A post suggesting that Donald Trump saying “China” indicates that COVID-19 was made in a lab in Ukraine.

A very prevalent theme—and one frequently promoted by the @gab account and Andrew Torba—is that of a “traditionalist” and sometimes separatist movement. This content spans a spectrum from promoting self-sufficiency or homesteading to anti-feminism to outright white supremacy. The line is often extremely thin:

56. <https://gab.com/about/tos>

57. Robinson, “Far-right teen who branded Prince Harry ‘race traitor’ jailed for four years.”

for example, in Figure 19, both posts express similar aesthetics and sentiments (happy white families and children), but the one on the right adopts overtly white supremacist and “Great Replacement” slogans such as #14Words and #WhiteIs-Right. While “white is beautiful”—style content is often permitted on mainstream platforms due to its lack of overt white supremacist messaging (as in Figure 20), on Gab the same content can more openly lead directly to explicit white supremacist content.

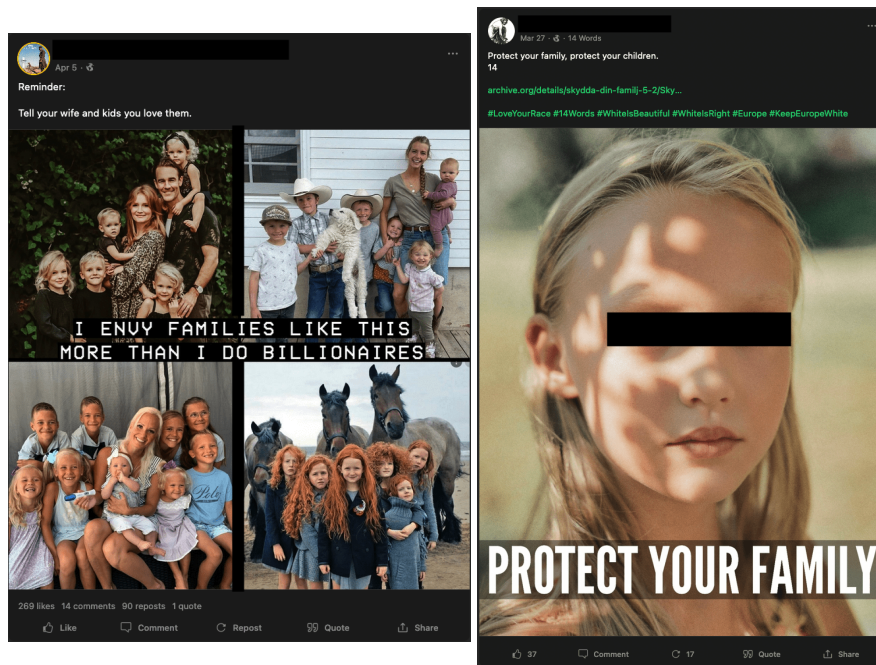


Figure 19: Left: traditionalist aesthetics with an implicit focus on white fertility, from an account reposted by @gab. Right: Similar aesthetics with explicit white supremacist hashtags.

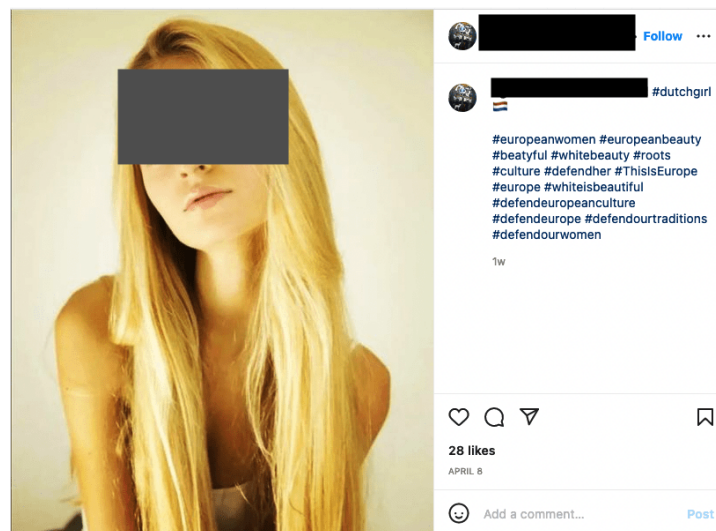


Figure 20: An example “white is beautiful” post permitted on Instagram.

While not the largest percentage of all Gab groups, many groups are devoted to explicit antisemitism, Nazism, homophobia, and racism (see Figure 21). Examples are National Socialists (4,723 members), The Anti-Jewish Meme Repository (3,000 members) and The White Protection League (7,654 members). Content circulated in these groups often finds its way to mainstream groups like the high-membership “Memes, Memes, and more Memes,” helping normalize it to the rest of the user base.



Figure 21: A high-engagement endorsement of Nazism as promoting “traditional values.” The post received over 1,200 likes and hundreds of reshares.

Common themes are the vilification and encouragement of violence toward Jews (Figure 22), as well as the narratives that LGBTQ people are pedophiles (Figure 23 on the following page) and that children are being groomed by communists, Jews, and gay people in schools (sometimes all at once). In addition, there is an abundance of “black on white crime” posts, as well as explicit racism against Black people (Figure 24 on the next page), screeds against multiculturalism, the promotion of the narrative of “white genocide” orchestrated by Jews, and incitement to begin a “racial holy war.”

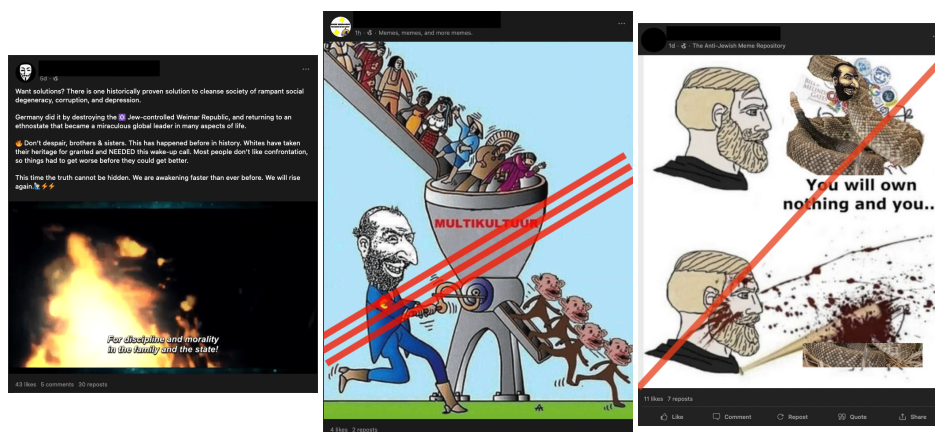


Figure 22: Various endorsements of Nazism and antisemitism. The video accompanying the “Great Awakening” post is a montage of Nazi book burning, Weimar Republic “degeneracy,” Nazi rallies, and an implied rebirth of the Nazi movement.

The volume of hateful content present on Gab is essentially analogous to sites founded with the explicit purpose of inciting hatred and violence—it differs from those sites primarily by a layer of more mainstream content on top. Unfortunately,



Figure 23: Typical examples of characterizing LGBTQ people as groomers and pedophiles (as well as Jewish and communist), along with endorsement of violence against them.

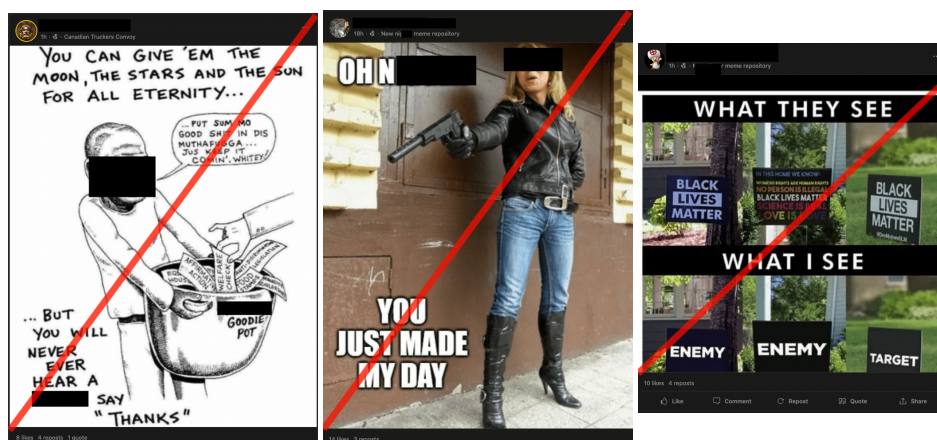


Figure 24: Typical anti-black memes on the platform.



Figure 25: Various “white genocide” narratives. While some of these may originate in groups specifically devoted to racism, they also appear in high-membership and high-activity groups such as the Canadian Truckers Convoy.

this combination makes Gab a fertile recruiting ground for extremists, as larger right-wing audiences that have migrated from more mainstream platforms are repeatedly exposed to hateful content that would not have been allowed on their prior platforms.

While Gab claims to remove content that promotes imminent lawless action, the allowable content falls well within the boundaries of what has been labeled *stochastic terrorism*⁵⁸—content promoting dehumanization to cause violence that is “statistically predictable but individually unpredictable.”⁵⁹ The constant vilification and dehumanization of Jews and other minorities on Gab makes further real-world attacks against these groups increasingly likely, even without centralized efforts to organize attacks or specific instructions to do so.

Indeed, while it is common to attribute lone-wolf attacks by white supremacists (such as the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting) to single individuals, such attacks are fed by a broader pattern of online ideological extremism.⁶⁰

8 Conclusion

A number of prior reports and studies have illustrated the prevalence of white supremacist, Christian supremacist, and general extremist content on Gab, which our findings support. The most striking finding in this analysis is the massive growth following deplatforming on mainstream platforms after January 6, 2021, and the immediate and massive influx of cash this brought to Gab. The gain in users has corresponded to increases in the reach of Gab’s overtly racist, homophobic, and violent content, along with the increasing characterization of minority groups as pedophiles, which has the potential to result in more radicalization and incidents of real-world violence.

Previous research⁶¹ has found that deplatforming toxic users tends to decrease overall reach and income for content producers.⁶² However, while deplatforming users, apps, and companies on mainstream platforms may have resulted in a less toxic ecosystem and prevented the spread of hateful messaging on those platforms, it also helped materially preserve Gab as a platform and financially enriched its owners. This allowed Gab’s owners to further fund real-world organizing; for example, Gab sponsored the openly anti-Semitic and racist AFPAC conference,⁶³ run by Holocaust denier and white supremacist Nick Fuentes.⁶⁴ In other words, while deplatforming is overall a potent tool, merely deplatforming toxic *users* (or celebrities those users follow) may generate new revenue streams

58. Keats, “How Stochastic Terrorism Lets Bullies Operate in Plain Sight.”

59. G2Geek, “Stochastic Terrorism.”

60. Weimann, “Lone Wolves in Cyberspace.”

61. Klinenberg, “Cross-Platform Financial Effects of Banning Far Right Extremists from YouTube”; Rauchfleisch and Kaiser, “Deplatforming the far-right: An analysis of YouTube and BitChute.”

62. This may be changing with the proliferation of alternative publishing platforms such as Substack; see Milmo, “Anti-vaxxers making ‘at least \$2.5m’ a year from publishing on Substack.”

63. Kaplan, “This Is the Moment the Anti-Vaccine Movement Has Been Waiting For.”

64. Gais, “Meet the White Nationalist Organizer Who Spewed Hate Against Lawmakers.”

for toxic *platforms* themselves⁶⁵ and sustain those platforms' ability to spread bigotry or disinformation, online and offline.

Our findings document several unintended real-world side effects of the deplatforming of both users and platforms, raising the possibility that other interventions on mainstream platforms such as downranking and limiting visibility might curb toxic content more effectively than shifting the problem elsewhere. If deplatforming is deemed the most desirable solution for a given scenario, it may be that this deplatforming would need to be more thorough and widespread to be effective. Hence, more study is needed in several areas:

- What dynamics and characteristics determine whether deplatforming is effective in reducing toxic message spread across the social media ecosystem as a whole?
- What is the real-world net effect of attempting to deplatform platforms or apps themselves, versus merely disabling or moderating user accounts on mainstream platforms?
- What determines whether a deplatforming will result in continued or increased revenue for its targets and associated communities?
- Beyond deplatforming toxic individuals and services, are further actions possible (or desirable) to ensure that revenue does not flow to toxic venues? For example, payment processors have already cut ties with Gab—is there more that could be done to disrupt other financial flows?

Answering these questions may prove crucial to developing more holistically effective Trust and Safety practices at the platform, infrastructure, and regulatory levels.

65. Stokel-Walker, “[Substack Is Now a Playground for the Deplatformed](#).”

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The Stanford Internet Observatory is a cross-disciplinary program of research, teaching and policy engagement for the study of abuse in current information technologies, with a focus on social media. The Stanford Internet Observatory was founded in 2019 to research the misuse of the internet to cause harm, formulate technical and policy responses, and teach the next generation how to avoid the mistakes of the past.

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