

# Extreme Far Right Groups' Use of Social Media: A Focus on Britain First and Reclaim Australia

Final Report  
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## About the Project

The Cyberterrorism Project is an international, interdisciplinary research network that was established by academics working across a number of fields including: Engineering, Law and Politics in 2011. The project has four primary objectives:

1. To further understanding amongst the scientific community by engaging in original research on the concept, threat and possible responses to terrorist uses of the internet.
2. To facilitate global networking activities around this research theme.
3. To engage with policymakers, opinion formers, citizens and other stakeholders at all stages of the research process, from data collection to dissemination.
4. To do the above within a multidisciplinary and pluralist context that draws on expertise from the physical and social sciences.

Recent activities of the Cyberterrorism Project include hosting an international Terrorism and Social Media conference in Swansea (UK), constructing a database of international definitions of cyberterrorism and conducting a study of media constructions of cyberterrorism. Findings from these activities have been published in top international journals including *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, and, *Journal of Terrorism Research*, and in books including *Cyberterrorism: Understanding, Assessment and Response* (Springer, 2014), *Terrorism Online: Politics, Law and Technology* (Routledge, 2015), *Violent Extremism Online: New Perspectives on Terrorism and the Internet* (Routledge, 2016) and most recently, *Terrorists' Use of the Internet: Assessment and Response* (IOS Press, 2017). Further information on the project, its members, and ongoing research activities is available via the project website: [www.cyberterrorism-project.org](http://www.cyberterrorism-project.org).

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## About the Research

This report contains findings from a study that investigated extreme far right groups' usages of social media. This was a collaborative project building on an existing partnership between the Departments of Linguistics and Criminology at Swansea University, and on the development of a new partnership with the social media analytics company 'Blurr' ([www.blurr.co.uk](http://www.blurr.co.uk)). The project was funded by the CHERISH-DE multidisciplinary research centre at Swansea University (<http://www.cherish-de.uk/>) and the School of Arts & Humanities at Edith Cowan University (<https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/arts-and-humanities>).

This report provides an overview of the aims, methodology and key findings of this project. The project was conducted between January and August 2017. It drew upon data from two social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter), collected over a 10-week period (January-April 2017), and concerned two extreme far right groups: Britain First and Reclaim Australia. Further publications will be appearing in due course and those interested in hearing more about the project should contact the report's authors (details on p.23).

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## Aims and Context

Social media play a key role in the distribution and dissemination of violent extremist materials. This report provides an overview of the key findings of a multidisciplinary project that examined a subset of such materials, namely the use of Facebook and Twitter by the extreme far right groups Britain First and Reclaim Australia. Britain First (BF) describe themselves as a “patriotic political party and street movement that opposes and fights the many injustices that are routinely inflicted on the British people” (Britain First, 2017). Britain First state that they are not a racist party, claiming that many ethnic minorities are among their supporters, but they claim that they aim to protect British and Christian morality, and to preserve the ancestral ethnic and cultural heritage of the UK while supporting the indigenous British people as the demographic majority (Brindle and Macmillan, 2017). They campaign against Islamism and the spread of militant Islam in the UK. Britain First leaders claim not to be against individual Muslims, but specifically against the ideological doctrine and religion of Islam itself (Britain First, 2017). Reclaim Australia (RA) is a grassroots organisation that was established not long after the December 2014 Lindt cafe siege in Sydney (BBC News, 2014), with a focus on holding street rallies to protest against Islam and Islamic practices in Australia. The group’s website, now shut down, listed the group’s nine motivations, including a ban of Sharia Law, the burqa and Halal certification (McCormack and McVeigh, 2016).

Further to the focus on Facebook and Twitter as well as Britain First and Reclaim Australia, this project was focused around two key research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What themes do these groups mobilise when communicating via social media?
- **Research Question 2:** Do these themes differ by group? If so, what are the principal differences?

The rationale behind these research questions addresses specific gaps in knowledge about extreme far right groups, conceptually, methodologically and regarding law enforcement needs. Conceptually, extreme far right groups are on the rise across both the US and the UK, in terms of the public’s interest and online followers (Mudde, 2007; Goodwin, 2013; Edwards, 2015). For these groups, the online realm has become increasingly important since it offers the opportunity to form virtual communities of similarly minded but geographically dispersed individuals (Simpson and Druxes, 2015). Existing research has tended to focus on extreme far right groups’ use of websites and chat forums (Bowman-Grieve, 2009). Yet, there is limited empirical analysis of their usage of social media. This research project begins to fill this important gap. Moreover, the concept of the ‘extreme far right’ is often used as an umbrella term to lump together a diversity of groups that have quite different objectives and motivations. In contrast, our project seeks to develop a greater understanding of the potential idiosyncrasies of these groups. To do so, it examines the themes mobilised via the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter by two extreme far right groups: Britain First and Reclaim Australia. These groups were thus not chosen for their similarities but to enable us to begin to tease out the complexity and variation within the extreme far right umbrella.

Methodologically, there is a lack of empirically grounded research in Terrorism Studies, which is a much-observed issue within the discipline, often being described as limited in terms of reliable data (Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013). Our project’s empirical approach addresses this limitation. It

is also methodologically innovative and interdisciplinary, bringing together expertise from industry (Social Media Analytics), Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) and Criminology.

In terms of research driven by practitioner needs, our project addresses a disconnect between academic research and the needs of law-enforcement practitioners in this area. Academic research has tended to focus on the study of violent jihadists groups' use of (social) media. Yet, significant regional variation exists within the UK and Australia, and the principal day-to-day focus of many practitioners in these countries is not militant Islamism but rather the extreme far right.

In sum, this project can be seen as a direct response to calls for furthering terrorism research, including: to widen the range of types of violent online extremism being studied; to engage in more comparative research, not just across ideologies, but also groups, countries, languages, and social media platforms; and to outreach beyond terrorism studies and engage in interdisciplinary research (see Conway, 2017).

## Methodology

Given its aims and research questions, this project focused on language use, both content and function. The data size (4,684,961 words) required using a methodological approach that could provide quantitative and qualitative analyses of language, namely Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (see Baker, 2006; Partington & Marchi, 2015). This, respectively, integrates use of Corpus Linguistics tools and software (in our case, CQPWeb - <https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/>) and of Discourse Analysis concepts and methods. The latter explicitly includes knowledge from other disciplines about a given topic in its analytic procedures (in our case, research in Criminology about extreme far right groups, specifically Britain First and Reclaim Australia). Our methodology was, therefore, language-based but interdisciplinary.

### Data

Our study utilises data gathered from Facebook and Twitter, specifically all posts and tweets posted by Britain First and Reclaim Australia, and to the Britain First and Reclaim Australia Facebook and Twitter accounts, between 31st January 2017 and 11th April 2017. This can be seen in Table 1 below:

Group	Media Platform	No. of Messages	Size in Words
Britain First	Facebook	206,764	2,539,152
	Twitter	60,994	1,127,598
Reclaim Australia	Facebook	48,890	1,002,836
	Twitter	829	15,375

*Table 1: The Data*

The above table shows that the two groups overwhelmingly chose Facebook over Twitter.

### Analytical Procedure

In order to identify idiosyncratic themes in the two corpora (Britain First and Reclaim Australia) we:

1. converted the dataset provided by our industry partner (Blurr) into a single corpus that could be linguistically examined.
2. used CQPWeb to identify Britain First and Reclaim Australia's keywords<sup>1</sup> and examined them in context. Of the keywords identified, a high proportion needed to be excluded.<sup>2</sup> The remainder (n=69) were manually grouped into ten thematic domains by manually checking all the words' key collocates and concordance lines.<sup>3</sup>

Please contact the report authors with any further enquiries on the project's methods and findings (see p.23). The next section of this report provides a summary of our findings throughout which the spelling mistakes and emphasis in original texts has not been corrected.

<sup>1</sup> Keywords are 'words that are unusually frequent in one corpus when it is compared against another corpus' (Brookes and McEnery 2017:5).

<sup>2</sup> Exclusion criteria: (i) hyperlinks; (ii) username handles; (iii) repeated occurrences in the same text (retweets / reposts); (iv) non-alphanumerical characters; (v) dialectal (i.e., specifically British or Australian) uses of words.

<sup>3</sup> Collocates are words that significantly co-occur in a corpus. Concordances are the textual fragments containing keywords and their collocates.

## Results

This section is split into two parts related to the research questions outlined above. First, a description of each thematic domain identified by the analysis is provided. This serves to answer research question one: what themes are ideologically mobilised? Second, an overview of the key differences between the two groups is provided. This serves to answer research question two: Do these themes differ by group? If so, what are the principal differences?

The analysis identified 10 thematic domains, as shown in Table 2, alongside the keywords via which they were linguistically realised in the corpora.

Number	Thematic domain	Keywords	Group <sup>4</sup>
1.	Halal certification	<i>Lindt, certification, Chocolates, certified, Cadbury, cadburys</i>	RA
2.	Grooming	<b>GROOMING</b>	BF
3.	Vaccines	<i>Vaccinated, vaccination, vaccine, vaccines</i>	RA
4.	Swearwords & derogatory terms	<i>dickhead, wtf, leftard, wanker, Dick, Pig, pricks, prick, bugger, shithole, piss, PIGS, dickheads, TURD, crap, fucktards, monkeys, SUCK, butt, shits, Muzzies, MuZZY, wankers, FUCKING, crooks, cock, mongrels, MORONS, retards, Leftards, ignorant, twat</i>	RA
5.	Violent stance towards Muslims	<b>Bullet, Penalty, hang, SHOOT, rope, bullets, eradicate, Blow</b>	RA
6.	Lawful stance towards Immigrants/Muslims	<b>Arrests, GLOBALISM, DEMONSTRATION, confront, Marches, Suspects, Militant, behaved, Gathering, starve</b>	BF
7.	Racism	<b>RACE, discrimination</b>	RA
8.	Parents & Respect	<b>Parents, disrespect, respect, disrespectful</b>	RA
9.	Positive & Negative Multiculturalism	<b>MULTICULTURAL</b>	RA
10.	Antifa	<b>Antifa</b>	BF

Table 2: Key Themes in the Corpus

<sup>4</sup> Group in which the thematic domain is comparatively salient. This is not to say that the theme is absent from the other group. RA denotes Reclaim Australia; BF denotes Britain First.

## Theme 1: Halal certification

The keywords themed within this domain are used by Reclaim Australia in messages that refer to controversy over the halal certification by the chocolate company Cadbury of some of their products (namely Easter eggs). The messages identified are not only proposing to boycott the company's products, but are also putting forward the idea that the money gained by the selling of those products is financing terrorism. See, for example:

Example	Group	Platform	Text
1.	RA	FB	Get rid of the Halal Certification, the money is only going to fund the terrorists and not to help the local refugees.
2.	RA	FB	Australians are forced to pay more for everyday food and toiletry products, because of halal certification, a Islamic tax, when only 2% are Islamics, no other religion is forced on to Australians, time for Australians to stop buying halal crap, stop the funding of terrorism.
3.	RA	FB	Cadbury, your strategy will send you broke! People of Australia are no longer stupid! Boycott all Cadbury products! I will never buy or eat halal certified foods. WHY NOT JUST CUT THEM OUT ALL TOGETHER, THESE CHOCOLATES ARE HALAL CERTIFIED. They don't believe in Easter so don't buy Easter eggs so what the?
4.	RA	FB	Boycott cadburys for a month, if they persist with halal certified.

*Table 3: Examples from the corpus for the Halal certification theme*

## Theme 2: Grooming

The term grooming appears in the Britain First keyword list as used in messages that arose from a series of events that took place in the UK towns of Rochdale, Rotherham, and Telford, where it was reported that individuals identifying themselves as Muslim were allegedly involved in “child-rape grooming gangs” who raped British children (BBC News, 2017). See, for example:

Example	Group	Platform	Text
1.	BF	TW	Because not everybody loves Muslim child-rape grooming gangs.
2.	BF	FB	Not a surprise it took many years for Politicians local Authorities Police to face the very wide spread child grooming Muslim gangs so this type of Jihad is also tucked under the carpet!
3.	BF	FB	But yes to grooming and raping children kick out the muslims, send them home to the middle east It all should be stopped them marching threw the streets hundreds of them why?
4.	BF	FB	This is not a religion it's an ideology made up by a paedophile, child grooming sicko!

*Table 4: Examples from the corpus for the grooming theme*

## Theme 3: Vaccines

Variations of the term vaccine were used by Reclaim Australia in messages that were associated with discussions about the possible health risks and side effects of vaccines being put forward by the Australian Government (ABC, 2017). However, there were a number of occurrences where the term was used to suggest further immigration control because 'immigrants spread diseases' and, as such, can be linked to the politicisation of vaccines. See, for example:

Example	Group	Platform	Text
1.	RA	FB	I agree all mine got vaccinated nothing wrong with them and it stops other kids getting sicker well i hope all the Muslum kids are vaccinated as well but they'd be allowed to do what they like If the government didn't keep importing unscreened humans from overseas maybe we wouldn't get all theses things back.
2.	RA	FB	Are refugees and assylum seekers vaccinated? --- If not then it would be a bit of a dangerous double standard to let them mix with the rest of society and not letting native unvaccinated people mix.
3.	RA	FB	Are the immigrants vaccinated before they come into our country?
4.	RA	FB	Agree, not vaccinated no place in ublic child care all kids need to be vacinated Dictators, isn't vaccinated children protected against unvaccinated children? --- Are the refugees also made to have their children vaccinated or is this another thing they get away with.

*Table 5: Examples from the corpus for the vaccines theme*

## Theme 4: Swearwords and Derogatory Terms

This theme contains a range of swearwords and derogatory terms that were key in the Reclaim Australia corpus. See, for example:

Example	Group	Platform	Text
1.	RA	FB	<p>Yep I won't watch it Stupid maggot Wanker Dickhead Waleed's a prick Foot &amp; Mouth disease only its camels!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> <p>Twat Once a Mislim Prick, always a Mislim Prick.</p>
2.	RA	FB	<p>vile cowards deport the pricks Send the cunts back home all of them problem solved Too late there here now.</p>
3.	RA	FB	<p>Why do Muslims hate woman so much?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> <p>How disgusting I'm furious Good ridance Wake up Australia before its to late.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> <p>Another tosser Take your views back home you grub Dickheads all round!</p>
4.	RA	FB	<p>Also Illegals if you have snuck into a country just don't commit crimes and people will mostly give you the benefit of the doubt No respect for junkies or muzzies.</p>

*Table 6: Examples from the corpus for the swearwords and derogatory terms theme*

## Theme 5: Violent stance towards immigrants and Muslims

This theme includes a series of keywords in the Reclaim Australia data that adopted a violent stance towards immigrants and Muslims or incited physical aggression. See, for example:

Example	Group	Platform	Text
1.	RA	FB	they are just a waste of time and resources better spent on our homeless children The only way to deradicalise these morons is with a bullet Shoot them.
2.	RA	FB	Muslim Morons & wanna be Muslim morons! NO prison only the DEATH PENALTY will do!
3.	RA	FB	Islam is a religion an ideology a cult a cancer on the planet! Eradicate it!!! These rats are mistakes of the human race, and therefore should be put down along with their ideology.
4.	RA	FB	Deportation is costly a bullet is cheap

*Table 7: Examples from the corpus for the violent stance towards immigrants and Muslims theme*

## Theme 6: Lawful stance towards immigrants and Muslims

Theme 6 contains keywords in Britain First that express a more legally-oriented stance towards immigrants and Muslims. See, for example:

Example	Group	Platform	Text
1.	BF	FB	why no arrests oh we know why They can do as they like in London the police are on their side and so is the Mayor after all he is one of them and running the joint!
2.	BF	FB	Its called scaredy cat correctness, because they are frightened at what might happen if we confront them. We are losing control of our country.
3.	BF	FB	We need to confront all this third world violence, and support our police and army they need to take control of situation before it becomes the norm, use the battons!
4.	BF	FB	Everything wrong in the world the people said this is Islam Arrests and deportations need to start.

*Table 8: Examples from the corpus for the lawful stance towards immigrants and Muslims theme*

## Theme 7: Racism

The theme of racism, which was common for both Britain First and Reclaim Australia, entails a racist stance towards immigrants and Muslims (and can also be linked to themes 5 and 6). In this theme however, two keywords are identified which show how Reclaim Australia put forward and support the position that being against immigrants and Muslims cannot be racism. They state that this is because 'neither Muslim nor Islam is a race'; and further that it is Australian's who are the victims of race-discrimination. See, for example:

<u>Example</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Text</u>
1.	RA	FB	No voting rights for Muslims refugees until they have reside for 10 yrs, maybe by then they have assimulated into a peaceful life.  - - - Why are you still referring to Muslim or Islam as race?
2.	RA	FB	Islam is not a race It should be against the law to criticise our laws and our country.
3.	RA	FB	This is why they are overtaking the world because they keep pulling the race card and everyone feels sorry for them. It's not a race, it's a religion. I don't give a toss about anyone's religion, but don't shove it down my throat, which is what the Muslims are doing.
4.	RA	FB	Shut her down! This is discrimination against AUSTRALIANS IN AUSTRALIA. If she don't like it she can bugger off to wherever they have laws that suit her  ...

*Table 9: Examples from the corpus for the racism theme*

## Theme 8: Parents and Respect

The keywords parents and respect characterise this theme, which is salient in the Reclaim Australia dataset. Parents is often used in messages where Reclaim Australia describe themselves as sons and daughters of immigrants (their parents) who, contrary to the 'new' immigrants (identified by them as being Muslims), always knew how to 'behave' and to respect the laws, society and culture of Australia. See, for example:

<b>Example</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Text</b>
1.	RA	FB	My refugee parents were extremely grateful to settle in a country and fully integrate ... get jobs and the only handout upon arrival was 20 \$. the rest was up to them.
2.	RA	FB	These were my parents. There not refugees they are parasites suckin this country dry for welfare. Times have changed since those dayz...
3.	RA	FB	Absolutely ... .this is a multicultural lucky country ... .. we are so so lucky  - - - Our mother and her parents immigrated to Australia from Ireland. They left the 'troubles' behind them. They stayed in the immigration houses at Richmond Sydney. They found their way and grandad worked hard. They didn't come her fighting.
4.	RA	FB	When is Centrelink going to ban this, you come down hard on the honest people and let these things get away with rorting the system and you think it's okay, wake up you fools. My parents never complained!

*Table 10: Examples from the corpus for the parents and respect theme*

## Theme 9: Positive and Negative Multiculturalism

Theme 9 contains the keyword multicultural, which is used in the Reclaim Australia corpus with a positive connotation as a value that is contrasted negatively against Muslims and/or Islam.

<u>Example</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Text</u>
1.	RA	FB	<p>My late Grandparents and my parents are in this group - Proud of my heritage and proud to be a First generation Australian in my family. ALL other ethnic and cultural minorities HATE Mozlems. We are diverse, multicultural and UNITED in our opposition to Islam. If these people did it why can't the Muslims or is it because they like our welfare system</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> <p>This is true multiculturalism NOT WHAT WE HAVE NOW ISLAM !</p>
2.	RA	FB	<p>If you have to remove a motor bike helmet when indoors, Burkahs should not be allowed either . This is NOT a Muslim country, we are a multicultural country &amp; our laws SHOULD APPLY TO ALL - NOT JUST MOST - EVERYONE!</p>
3.	RA	FB	<p>Multiculturalism does work &amp; works well , because WE made it work</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> <p>That's were the term 'Fair Go' originated from. We gave everyone that came here through the front door</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> <p>As I said multiculturalism DOES work but not with what they are dragging in through the back door.</p>
4.	RA	FB	<p>Muslims don't believe in multicultural society just themselves, but they will accept free housing and benefits off the Christian west seriously?</p>

*Table 11: Examples from the corpus for the positive and negative multiculturalism theme*

## Theme 10: Antifa

This theme, identified in the Britain First data, contains the keyword antifa, which is the name of an anti-fascist movement. This keyword appears mostly in messages where antifa are depicted as 'the enemies'. This is also used to support the idea that the 'real fascists' are the antifa and not Britain First.

<u>Example</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Text</u>
1.	BF	TW	Britain First were not violent. There was no violence from the marchers or organisers. All violence came from Antifa & UAF.
2.	BF	TW	What is ANTIFA? <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> Put them in jail Get this Evil out of this world. . <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> Before its too late.
3.	BF	TW	Against anything English. <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> why not do the same to the Muslims when they march Antifa is a problem. <p style="text-align: center;">- - -</p> were is the Queen?
4.	BF	TW	I am surprised antifa members were not right down there to rough up anyone that said anything mean about the attacker.

*Table 12: Examples from the corpus for the antifa theme*

## Key Differences

A total of ten themes were identified as prevalent across the Reclaim Australia and Britain First datasets. Our results show that the Reclaim Australia corpus contains a higher number of unexpected features (i.e., keywords) when compared with Britain First – 7 out of the 10 thematic domains identified in this results section were from the Reclaim Australia dataset. As such, there were seven themes in the Reclaim Australia dataset that were unusually frequent (when compared to the overall dataset) but only three themes in the Britain First dataset that were unusually frequent.

Beyond this finding, our analysis shows that each thematic domain was ascribed to either Britain First or Reclaim Australia, rather than being common to both. This begins to demonstrate the key differences between the two groups in terms of both themes discussed and attitudes. First in terms of themes, over the time period investigated, Britain First and Reclaim Australia engaged with different popular discourses. For example, halal certification and vaccines were key themes for Reclaim Australia, whereas for Britain First grooming and Antifa were most salient.

Second, regarding the two groups' attitudes, their usage of keywords directed towards immigrants and Muslims reveals specific differences in their stance towards these target communities. Three themes in particular – swearwords and derogatory terms (theme 4), violent stance towards Muslims and immigrants (theme 5) and lawful stance towards Muslims and immigrants (theme 6) – highlight the differences between the two groups in this respect. Theme 4, which is key to the Reclaim Australia dataset, showed that use of swearwords in the Britain First dataset was not unusually high when compared to Reclaim Australia's. What the keyword analysis suggested therefore is that, overall, the register used in Reclaim Australia's messages was more derogatory than that in Britain First's messages. Theme 5 contained keywords from the Reclaim Australia data and highlighted the group's extremely violent stance towards immigrants and Muslims. In contrast, theme 6 showed how the same target communities were discussed by Britain First with a more 'legally-oriented' stance. This is not to say that the Britain First data did not contain instances of extremely violent messages against immigrants and Muslims. What the keywords list and analysis showed was that legally-oriented actions were more unusually frequent in Britain First than they were in Reclaim Australia, as words expressing a 'violent' stance were more unusually frequent in Reclaim Australia than they were in Britain First.

## Conclusion

This report has provided an overview of the aims, methodology and key findings of an interdisciplinary project examining Britain First and Reclaim Australia's use of Facebook and Twitter. It has identified ten themes mobilised by either Reclaim Australia or Britain First when communicating via social media. In addition, it has highlighted differences between the two groups (often characterised under the same umbrella) which reveal the way in which popular discourses are used by each group to spread their messages on social media. As such, this research paves the way for research that better understands the idiosyncrasies of extreme far right groups' usages of social media despite their similar motivations.

The work outlined in this report will generate a number of further research outputs which will be publicised through the Cyberterrorism Project website ([www.cyberterrorism-project.org](http://www.cyberterrorism-project.org)).

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