



University  
of Exeter

# MIXED, UNSTABLE, AND UNCLEAR

ANALYSING MIXED IDEOLOGIES USING MIXED METHODS

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# CONTENT WARNING

DEROGATORY AND UPSETTING  
LANGUAGE, RACISM, SEXISM,  
ANTI-SEMITISM

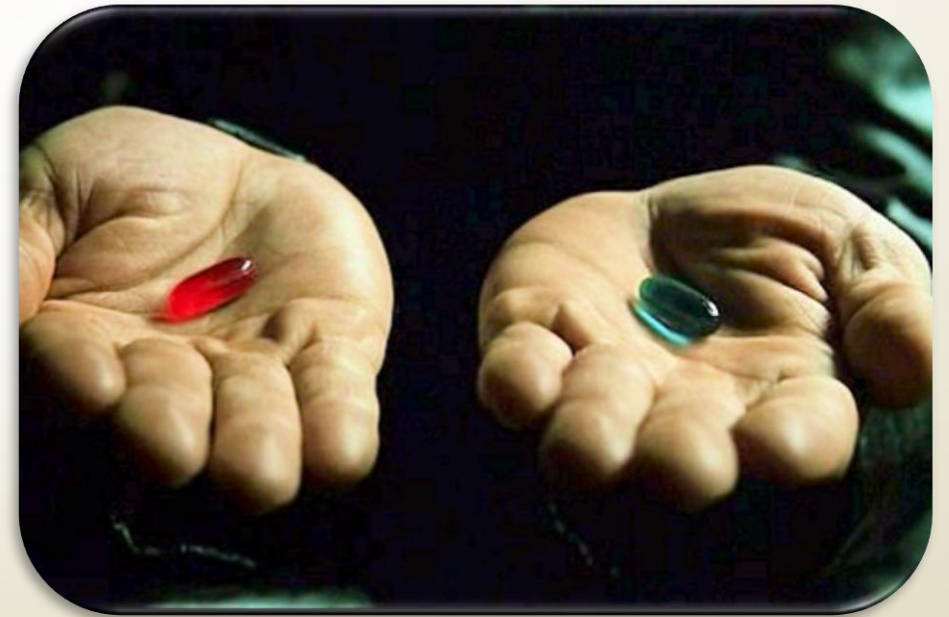
**BACKGROUND**

# MIXED, UNSTABLE, AND UNCLEAR (MUU): THE GROWING THREAT OF BLENDED IDEOLOGIES

- Online engagement has become routine
- Global connectivity and unrestricted content-sharing → rapid spread of extreme ideas → diverse radical ideologies and groups
- **MUU (“salad bar”) ideologies** (‘Threats to the Homeland’, 2020; Home Office, 2024)
- In 2023/24, **18%** of *Prevent* referrals in the UK were individuals with a generally indiscernible or “conflicted” ideology incorporating elements from multiple other extremist worldviews (Home Office, 2024)
  - ~**64%** under 21
  - ~**91%** men
- Instances of offline violence motivated by MUU ideologies borrowing from both alt-right *and* misogynistic ideas
  - E.g., 2020 Hanau shooting (Pantucci and Ong, 2021)

# THE MANOSPHERE AND THE SPREAD OF MISOGYNY ONLINE

- **The Manosphere** is an online collective of loosely connected misogynistic communities with overlapping ideologies/beliefs (Ging, 2019)
  - E.g., MGTOWs, MRAs, PUAs, Incels\*
- Feminism threatens traditional masculinity and male dominance → **'red pill'** philosophy
- Manospheric sentiments detectable everywhere on the Internet → normalisation of misogyny and targeted 'e-bile' (Jane, 2014)
  - **'Networked misogyny'** (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019)
  - E.g., #Gamergate



# DIGITAL HATE AND THE ALT-RIGHT

- **The Alt-right** is an online collective of loosely connected extreme right-wing communities with overlapping ideologies/beliefs
  - E.g., White nationalism, QAnon, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Xenophobia, etc. (Holt *et al.*, 2020)
- A **uniquely virtual phenomenon** that grew from anonymous online imageboards like *4chan*
- Known for their mastery of online antagonism (i.e., “trolling”)



# UNDERSTANDING NETWORKED SUPREMACY USING AN ECOSYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

- Manosphere and Alt-Right:
  - Highly networked and widely dispersed
  - Loosely defined, porous boundaries
  - Composed of multiple different, overlapping communities
  - Able to interact with and influence actors within and outside of their respective ideological spheres
  - *Self-sustaining, dynamic, constantly changing → ecosystems*

# UNDERSTANDING NETWORKED SUPREMACY USING AN ECOSYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

- Addresses how users online are simultaneously involved in *multiple* extremist beliefs
- Need to empirically identify the overlap between these ecosystems

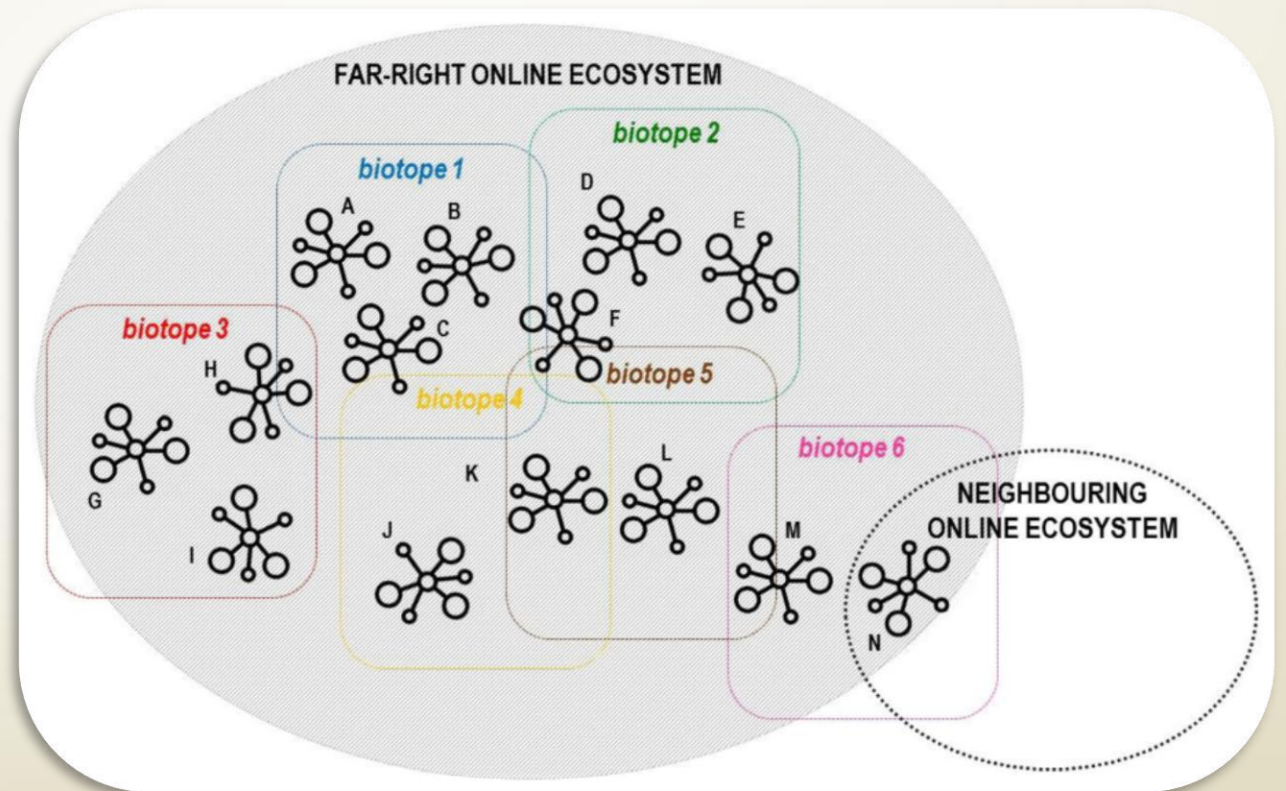


Figure 1: Generic model of the far-right online ecosystem, displaying a number of entities linked in communities (capital letters A to N), themselves grouped in a limited series of biotopes (numbered 1-6). (Baele, S.J., Brace, L. and Coan, T.G., 2020: 1603)

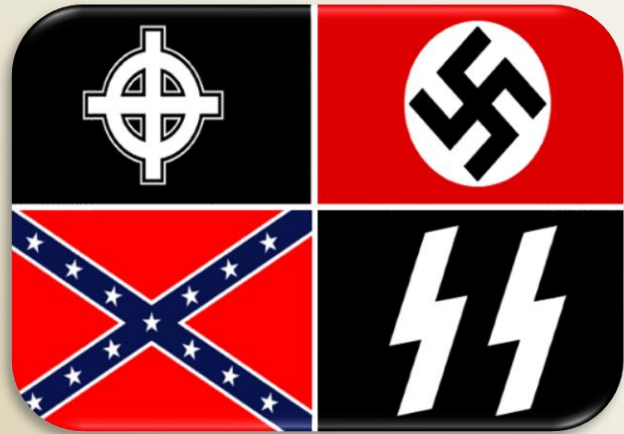
## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do extreme misogynistic and alt-right ecosystems tangibly connect, and how might this be affected by events external to them?
2. What narratives gain traction on extreme misogynistic versus alt-right platforms, and in what ways do these prejudices intersect?
3. What discursive strategies can be observed in the routine (re)production of beliefs about social supremacy, and what might these indicate about the relationships between misogynistic and alt-right ecosystems with respect to their construction of identity?

**MIXED-METHODS  
DESIGN:  
CONSIDERATIONS  
AND CHALLENGES**

- A conceptually large project like this demands an expansive methodology in order to sufficiently address the complicated questions it asks
- The sheer size of the communities under scrutiny as well as their ideological diversity requires a considered approach to sampling and analysis

- Need a diverse sample of forums from different extremist ecosystems to capture a large enough scale of discourse while keeping things manageable
- Two from each ecosystem of interest achieved through snowball sampling → 6 platforms in total
- Suitable for a snapshot of each ecosystem, especially if more thorough analysis takes place



- Alt-Right:
  - 8chan/pol
  - Stormfront (News)
- Misogynistic/Red Pill:
  - The Red Pill (TRP)
  - RooshVForum\*
- Incel/Black Pill:
  - Incels.is
  - Incels.in



- It isn't just the platforms that need to be sampled – it's their posts
- How this happens will depend entirely on the selected methods... so what should those be? How many of them do we need?

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2. Objective trends in themes and narratives → Computational Content Analysis
3. Subtle discursive strategies in conversation → Qualitative Thematic Discourse Analysis

- We've got our general methods – now we need to figure out our plan of attack re: sampling
- For quantitative analysis, all posts (>10 million in total) are of interest for their outlinks and text respectively
  - Affordances of computational methods make analysing all of them easy
- High-quality qualitative analysis, meanwhile, is more detailed, requiring a smaller sample

## Two conundrums:

1. The sampling frame is massive.
  - How much is 'enough'?
2. There are *countless* ways to approach sampling.
  - Which is the best one?
  - Where do we even *start*?

- To figure this out, it is crucial to consider the purpose of each method
- What do each of the individual parts of the research design contribute to the whole narrative?
- How do they serve *one another*?

## Outlink Analysis

- Capturing similarities and differences in subject interests within and *between* ecosystems, and considering how these might be used

## Time-Series Analysis

- Observing correlations between peaks/troughs in activity and events occurring both on and off the internet and comparing between platforms and ecosystems

## Quantitative Content Analysis

- Macro-level comparisons of the relationships between words and thematic trends in discourse using vector embedding and topic models

## Qualitative Thematic Discourse Analysis

- Micro-level examination of the language used to create/reinforce social categories and rhetorical strategies for legitimising beliefs/attitudes

- Since we're interested in how ideas *emerge*, it is more organic to look at threads/conversations for the qualitative stage, rather than singular posts
  - Captures community dynamics
  - Contextualises the findings from the quantitative stage of analysis
  - Identifies meaning in rhetoric that, without conversational context, might otherwise go unnoticed

- What should the approach be, then?
- Interested in whole threads → zeroing in on conversation starters (original posts/OPs) as a means of sampling
- Sampling shouldn't be completely random
  - Risks including threads that don't contribute much analytically (e.g., a thread that is just one word repeated, or only consists of images)

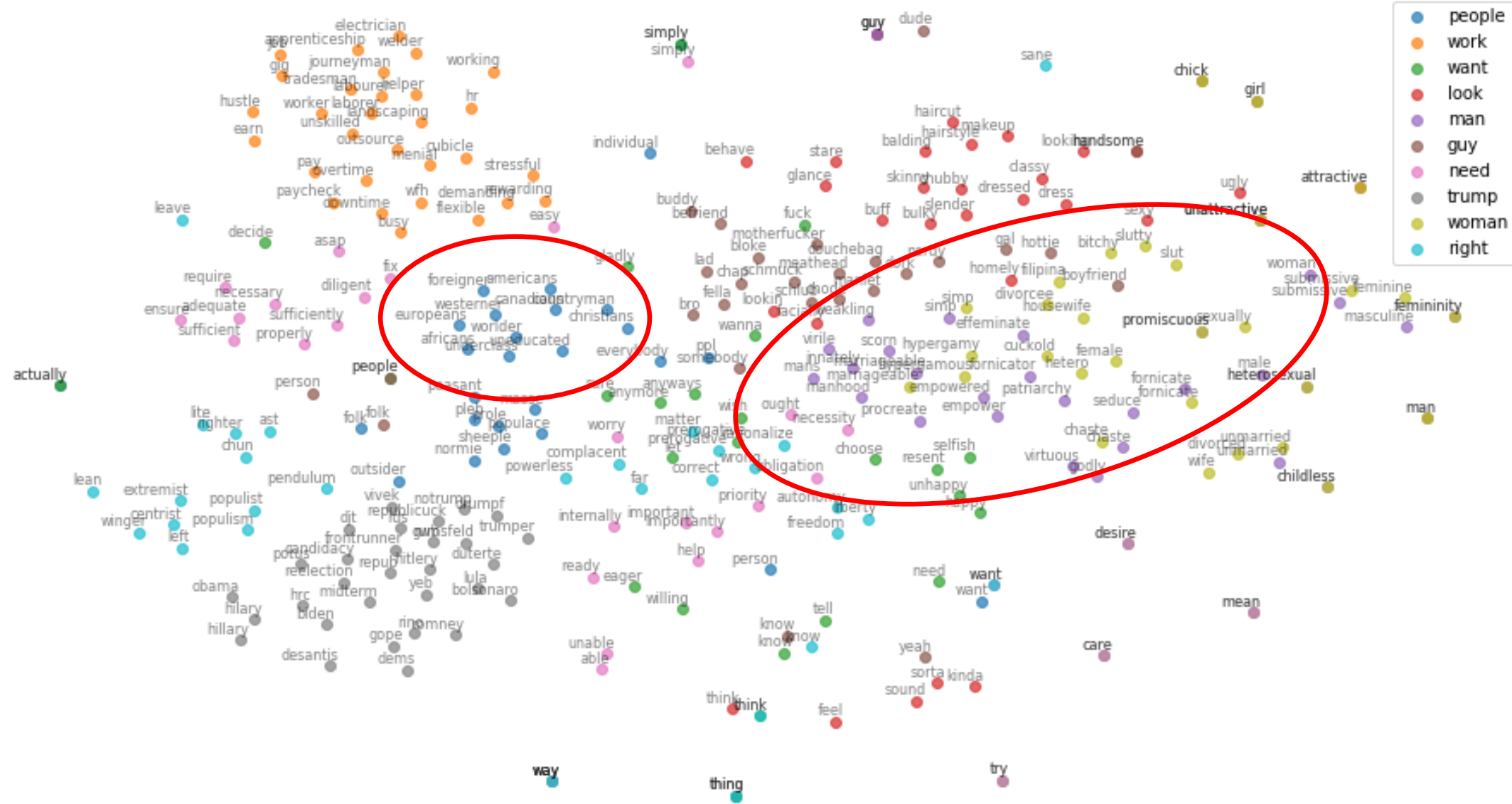
- This is where the quantitative stage can help
- Specifically, we can narrow our sampling frame down to OPs that participate in the most popular discourses, as estimated by things like topic models
  - Nine threads from each platform (three for each of the top 3 topics) with at least 15% coverage from a given topic in the OP
  - Upper and lower bounds for thread length to keep things reasonable (minimum 50, maximum 200)
  - Minimum word length for the OPs in the sampling frame to reduce the presence of 'junk'
- Additional benefit of ensuring that the methods are not only informative in their own right but speak to/build off one another.

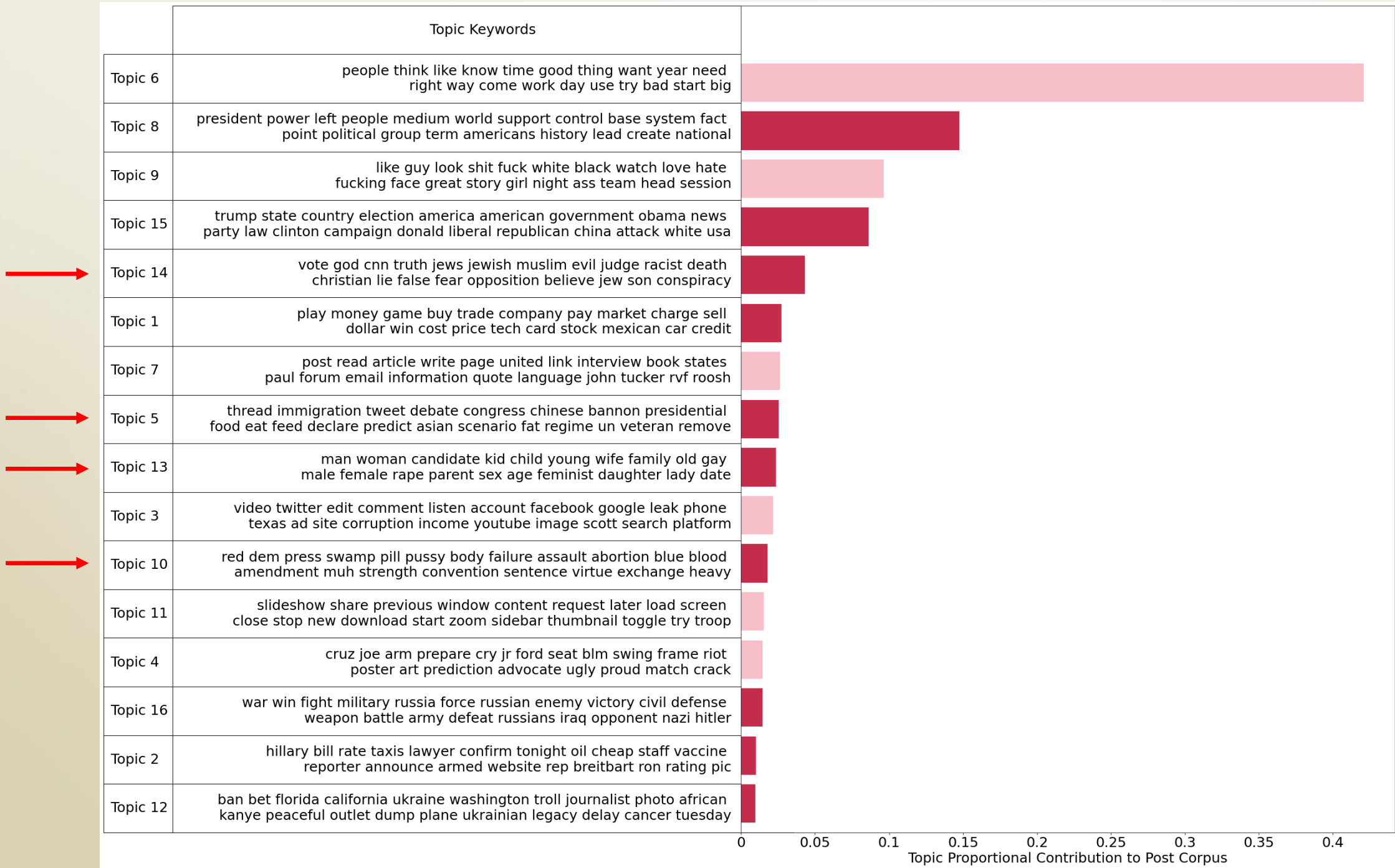
# FINDINGS (ROOSHVFORUM)

# INTERSECTIONAL GRIEVANCES

# DISCUSSION

- All ecosystems share **feelings of resentment towards minority groups**
  - Complex intersection along gender, racial, and ethnoreligious lines
    - With particularly strong ties between anti-Black, anti-woman, and anti-Semitic sentiments





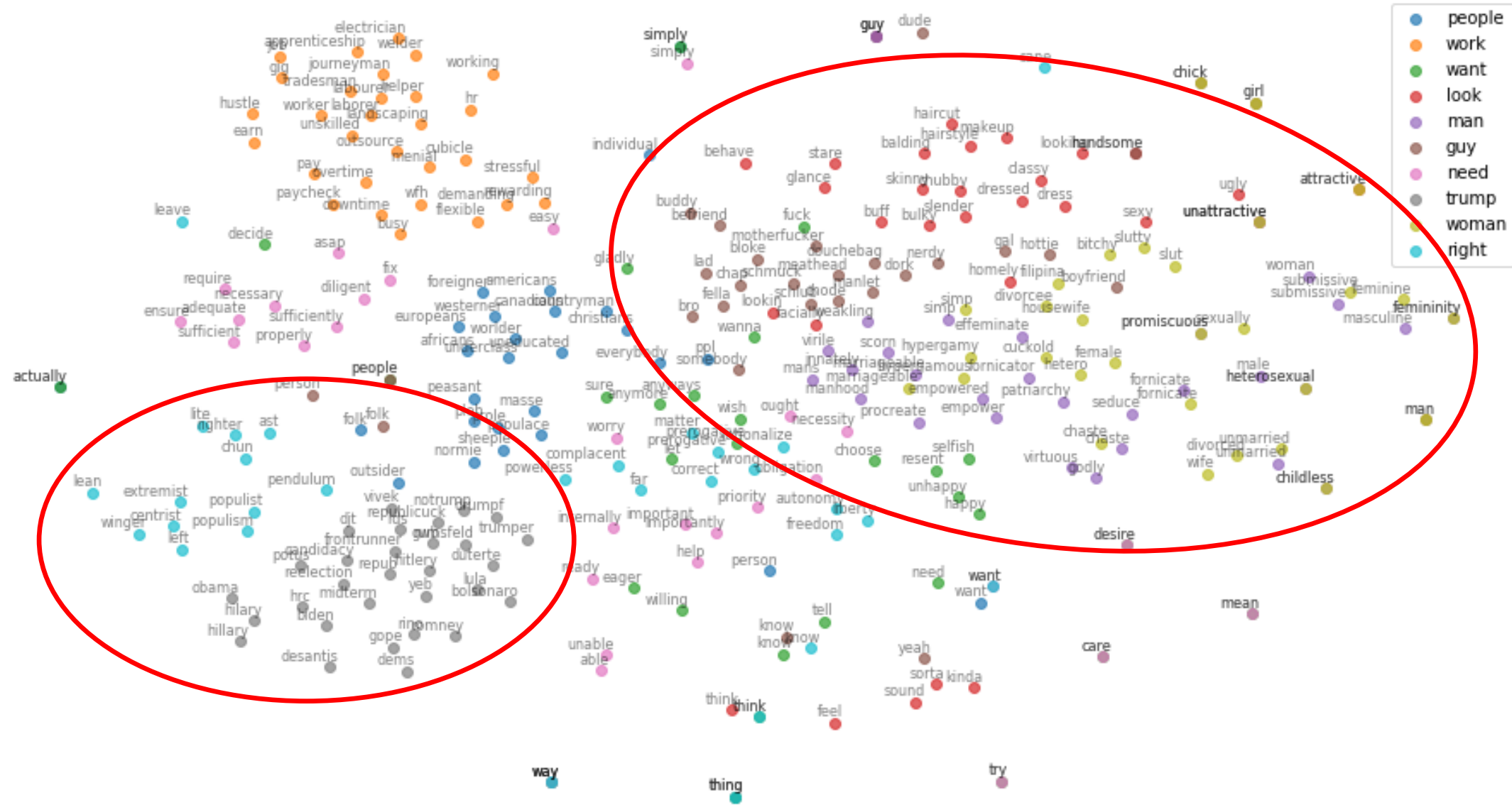
“I've been a member of a mainline protestant denomination my whole life, and only after getting red-pilled did I start to notice the more unsavory aspects of my mainstream church ie: support for abortion, gay marriage, illegal immigration etc. [...]” – Post 1, 2B

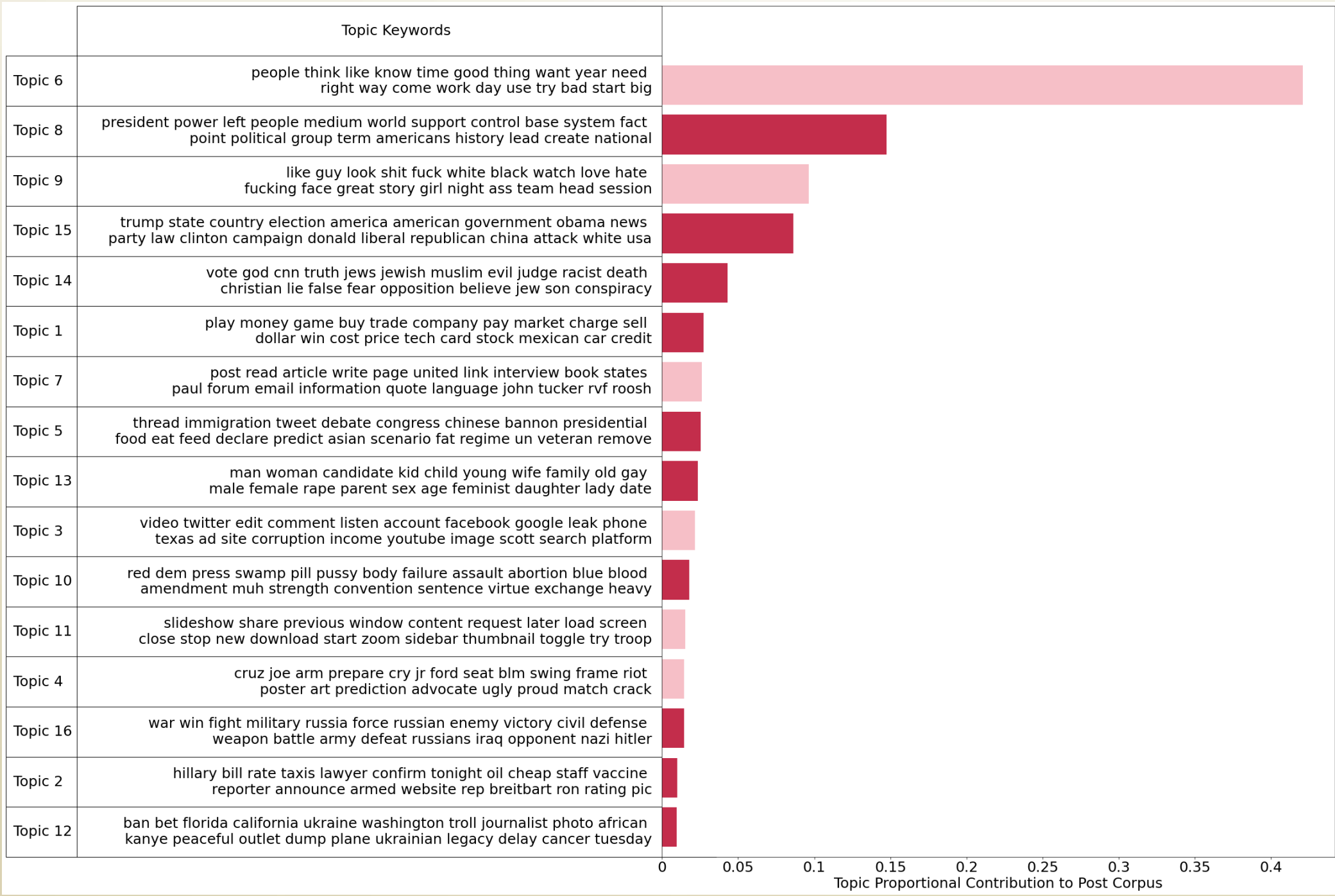
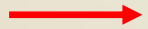
“I think the academic term for [women having sex with dogs] is zoophilia so there is potentially another oppressed group under the thrall of white, heterosexual patriarchy to be added to the LBQT-cocktail.” – Post 95, Thread 3A

# CRISIS OF IDENTITY

# DISCUSSION

- All ecosystems share **feelings of intense anger towards minority groups**
  - Complex intersection along gender, racial, and ethnoreligious lines
    - With particularly strong ties between anti-Black, anti-woman, and anti-Semitic sentiments
- Sense of **lost identity** and **waning heteropatriarchal entitlements** (i.e., society's emasculation on the part of minorities) → adherence to **supremacist narratives**





“I enjoyed society more when everyone made fun of each other. American whites had developed a culture where they bonded by making fun of everyone's county of origin (Gran Torino is a movie example).

Then, at some point in time, the Media started creating fake outrage and public shaming of white men who made fun of other races.” – Post 25, Thread 1B

“[...] A patriarchy is designed to lift everyone's consciousness, including women's, to be more benevolent and selfless in serving the society/nation.

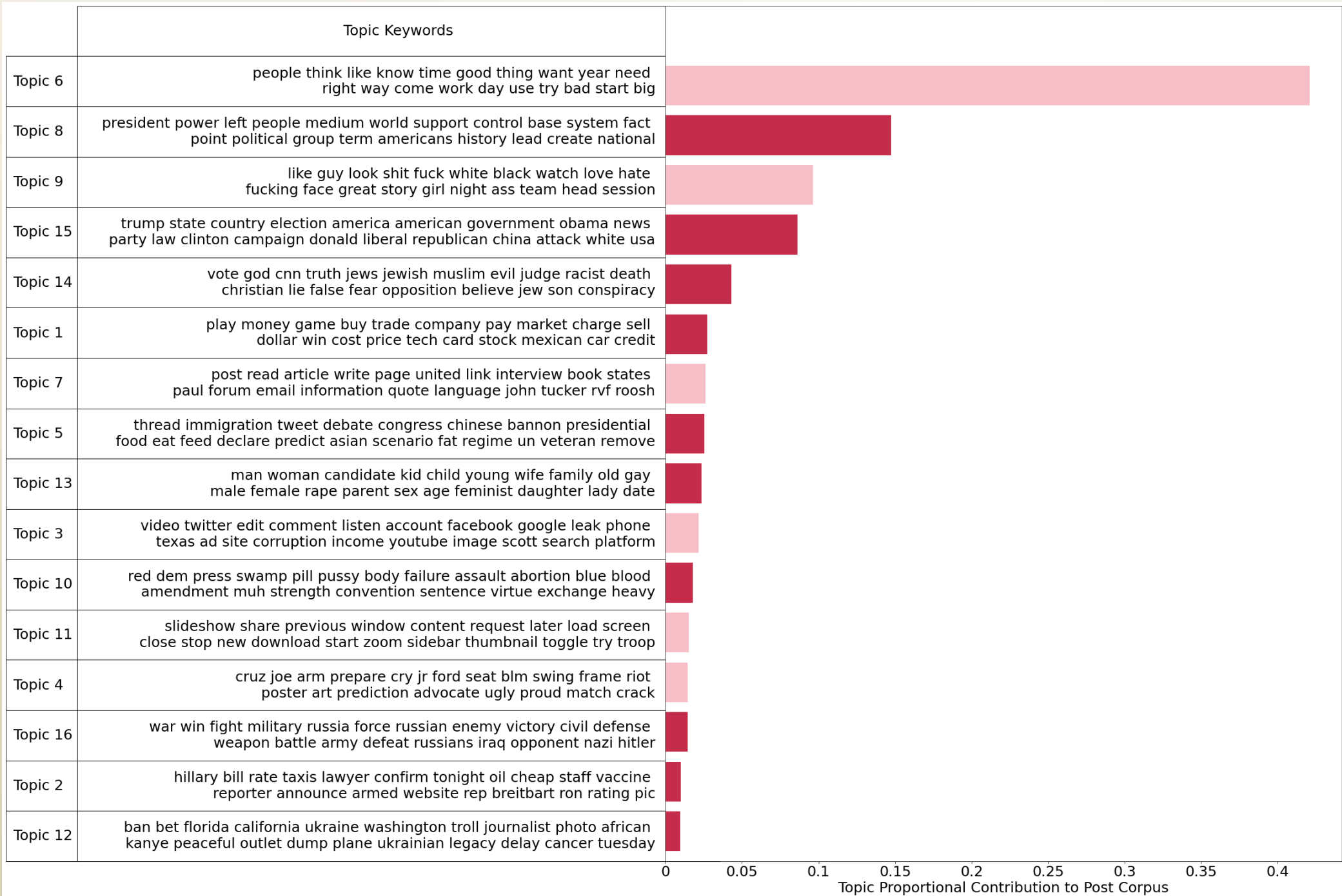
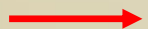
As that has declined and women have gained more power, they are very overt in punishing selfless and high trust behaviour, while sleeping with men who are degenerates to a society. [...]” – Post 19, Thread 1C

RECLAMATION OF POWER

# DISCUSSION

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- Sense of **lost identity** and **waning heteropatriarchal entitlements** (i.e., society's emasculation on the part of minorities) → adherence to **supremacist narratives**
- Desire to reclaim dignity, legitimise masculine identity, and assert social dominance → **violence and aggression**
  - E.g., Organised virtual attacks targeting women during #GamerGate, Elliot Rodger's incel act of "honour terrorism" (Witt, 2020), the attack on the U.S. Capitol in January 2020, etc.





“[...] Stop supporting this jewish anti-White propaganda you dumb cucks.

Cancel your netflix subscription.

If you have to waste thousands of hours of your own time watching stories containing lefty messages, (or are they lefty messages containing stories? :huh at least make sure you don't pay them for it.” – Post 11, Thread 1B

“[...] This limberdick bullshit from them is going to push more moderate right guys like me to the far right simply because they're not willing to settle for "last one to the guillotine" . [...]" – Post 8, Thread 3B

## WHAT THIS ANALYSIS CAN SPEAK TO

- Incels, the manosphere, and the alt-right are radical manifestations of systemic issues in society
- Necessitates long-term social reforms challenging operative processes of socialisation, particularly those affecting privileged men
- Encouraging persistent self-reflexivity and scrutiny of existing hierarchies and institutions

**THANK YOU!**

**ANY QUESTIONS?**

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