

## Effects of local events on group cohesion in online far-right communities (#12821)

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### 1) Have any data been collected for this study already?

It's complicated. We have already collected some data but explain in Question 8 why readers may consider this a valid pre-registration nevertheless.

### 2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?

We expect to replicate the effect we found in an initial study (a natural experiment) where a specific external socio-political event (i.e., local race riots in Sydney, Australia) was reflected in an increase in indicators of group cohesion in a white supremacist online community (Stormfront Downunder, the Australian branch of Stormfront.org). This effect was maintained in the online community for a long period of time.

To test whether this effect can be replicated in a different context, we plan to examine data from other branches of Stormfront.org in relation to similar events. As this is not a laboratory study where all variables can be closely controlled, we expect some variation in our results (i.e., we do not expect a perfect replication of the initial effect). However, we expect to find similar trends as in our first study.

One difficulty encountered in conducting a replication of a natural experiment is to find an external event which is as similar as possible to the event in our first study (we acknowledge that both an identical context and event to our initial study will not be possible to reproduce). In our first study, we analysed over 14 years of data (online interactions on Stormfront Downunder) in light of race riots known as the 'Cronulla riots' which occurred in Sydney in December, 2005. This specific external event has several distinct characteristics which we think are essential in order for the effect to be replicated in a different context:

- Type: the event involves some type of collective action or political group behaviour from a group which is ideologically aligned to the online community on a background of intergroup conflict.
- Action goal: The action is about achieving something on behalf of the group (in the Cronulla riots the action was about 'reclaiming the beach' from a cultural outgroup; similar events can be about claiming of reclaiming power, rights, status, etc.)
- Action outcome: the outcome is perceived as an ingroup achievement by the ingroup.

We expect to find a significant and long-term increase in indicators of group cohesion after an external event meeting at least some of the conditions outlined above. We will test this hypothesis in relation to a two events that we judge as meeting those conditions to various degrees:

- The far-right gaining political representation in the UK Parliament in May 2008 - Stormfront UK (claiming political power);
- Protests against changing the name of Pretoria to Tshwane in May 2005 – Stormfront South Africa (re-claiming status).

### 3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.

We quantified group cohesion as attraction to the group and group interaction as captured by the following indicators:

1. levels of interaction between members as shown by the number of connections between members posting to the same forum (attraction to the group).
2. bonding, as connections between the most committed members of the group - the most active members in the online community (group integration)
3. unification, as the number of members that interact directly under a common thread or discussion topic (group integration)
4. engagement, as increased levels of social interaction by members; that is, less active members becoming more active (group integration).

### 4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?

This is a natural experiment where our IV is a particular socio-political event. Our DVs are indicators of group cohesion of the online community (as reflected by intragroup online interactions over time). Members of the online community in the context where the event occurs (Stormfront national branch) constitute our experimental group - where the intervention or treatment is naturally introduced by the external event. Members of the online communities in other contexts (where the event is absent) constitute our control group (as control a group in the context of UK we will use data extracted from Stormfront South Africa where no local event occurred at the time; for Stormfront Africa we will use the UK context as control).

### 5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.

Longitudinal social network analysis

Simple t-tests (to identify differences in group cohesion before and after the external event and to examine differences between group cohesion in different forums at the same point in time).

### 6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.

All observations (posts to the relevant forum) will be included in the analysis. For count-based summaries, all posts will be used. For social network analysis anonymous posts will be excluded since these cannot be associated with individuals for the purpose of forming social networks. Outliers will be treated the same as all other observations (no exclusion).

**7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.**

We are extracting all data available on 2 Stormfront branches, that is, Stormfront UK and Stormfront South Africa (from the start of these forums).

**8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)**

We also use the data from Stormfront South Africa as 'control' for our first study with Australian data. In this study, we found that group cohesion increased in the aftermath of Cronulla riots in 2005, an effect that was maintained for a long time. We will compare the levels of group cohesion in the Stormfront Downunder and the Stormfront South Africa during the same timeframe to investigate whether the increases found in group cohesion in the Stormfront Downunder are unique to this forum.

Note: We are in the process of data collection (we automatically extract years worth of data from online forums). As these are very large datasets, the process of data extraction can take a long time.