

Common Themes (and Gaps) in Existing Research

Collective Action Problem

- Existing work links social movements' recruiting to the Collective Action Problem.
- This can include terrorism.
 - Example:** Anthony Oberschall, 2004
 - Rational choices are not involved when terrorism is at the forefront.
 - Irrational thought cultivates terrorist activities.
 - Perpetrators of terrorism do not see it as high-risk, low-reward.
 - The benefit of brotherhood and community extremist groups offer outweigh the implied cost of jailtime or death.

Importance of Belonging

- Terrorism and belonging
 - Assumption that terrorists are "loners"
 - Cases show the desire to belong and a desire for community as an essential part for terrorists seeking to join different groups with their shared values
 - Example:** "The continuous search for a sense of community and belonging makes online platforms appealing. They can offer support for the ideologies and broader beliefs with which individuals identify, providing a space that fosters the imagined extremist community to which the individual is attracted"(Sandboe and Milan, 2023:28).

Symbols and Mobilization

- Recruiters mobilize individuals by offering recognition to the seemingly "forgotten".
- Extremist groups will attempt to appeal to the oppressed and marginalized groups around the world
 - Example:** "ISIS deliberately appeals to disenfranchised Muslims, as well as potential converts around the world, to those – as ISIS puts it -- 'Drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people'(Stern, 2016: 107)
 - When extremist groups recognize the marginalized, give them a voice, and something to fight for with a community behind them, potential recruits connect with fighting for the cause.
 - Example:** "Struggles to belong are particularly evident in minorities and other groups that have been historically excluded from mainstream culture"(Allen, 2021).

Gaps in Existing Research

- Differences in symbols used
- How platforms interact with the users
- How rhetoric is different in different ideologies
- Focus on terrorist groups besides ISIS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Do ideologically different extremist movements use similar online recruitment tactics?
How do these tactics call on symbols and belonging?



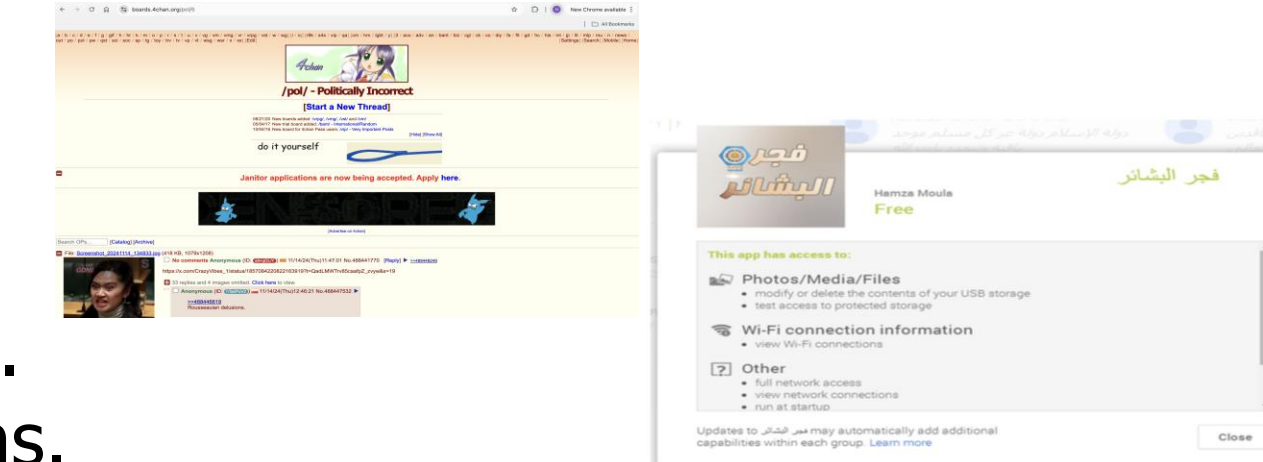
Methods

Observational Research

- By directly observing 4Chan propaganda, I was able to capture real-world interactions and dynamics as they unfolded naturally, without manipulating the setting.
- This approach allowed me to gather detailed, context-rich data that provided valuable insights into the community within 4Chan
- Especially effective in uncovering subtle patterns or behaviors that might have been overlooked in more controlled experimental settings.
- Non-participant observer:** 4Chan, being an anonymous site, allows for anyone to participate and observe without being known.

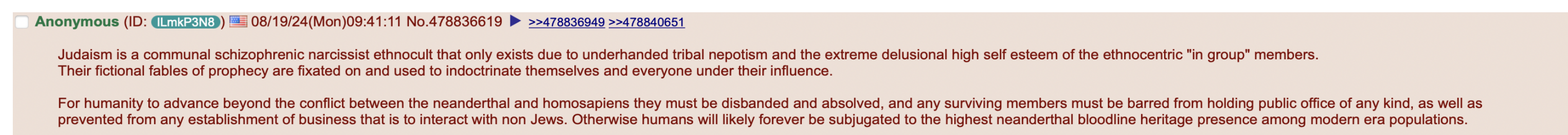
Data Collection

- All 4Chan screenshots are from the sub forum /pol/.
- Decided to go on site after important political events.
 - Visited site multiple times through the past months.
 - Specific times stood out the most.
 - August 19th: the first day of the DNC; during that day there were multiple propaganda pieces circulating
 - November 5th and 6th: my findings from that night were more about left vs. right but some concerning pieces and speech were circulated
- Data on ISIS
 - During my research regarding ISIS propaganda, I used secondary sources.
 - "Dawn of Glad Tidings", an ISIS Twitter-like propaganda machine, has been shut down.
 - Due to ISIS's popularity during the height of other researchers' interest in online radicalization, there was no need to collect primary source material.



Results

- During polarizing political events, an increase in extremist propaganda was found
- Mainly propaganda about Jewish population and Neo-Nazism.



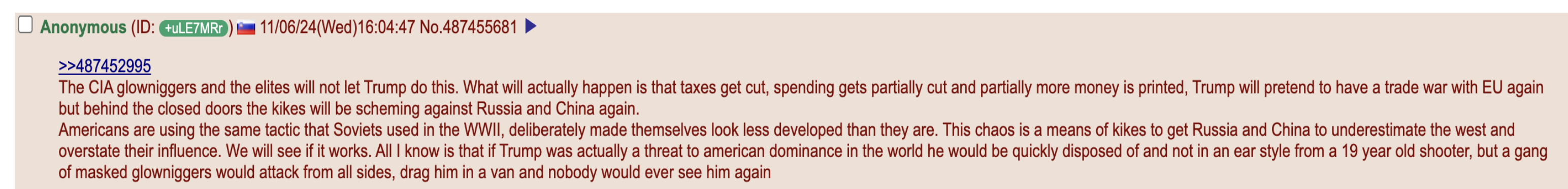
8/19: Post condemning Judaism and the Jewish population



8/19: explicit post about "Making America White Again" through killing the Jewish population



11/6: Meme post about reading Mein Kampf



11/6: Post using derogatory meaning for Jewish people to criticize the American government.

Implications and Further Questions

- The research for this project highlights the existence and effects of online propaganda or online extremist websites.
 - The amount and range of readily available extremist platforms is great.
 - There is more work to do on this topic.
- Further questions:
 - How does a country limit access to extremist sites?
 - Further research should include how to determine lone actors from group actors.
 - What policies or educational changes can curb extremist beliefs?
 - Due to 4Chan being completely anonymous, we do not know who the users are.
 - A more a psychoanalytical question that came up during research is how one gets to a place in seeking a community full of anonymity?
 - A specific research project could focus on the "Cult of Kek".
 - I came across it multiple times when researching. The origins, from what I can understand, start with the term "kek" which is the "lol" equivalent on 4Chan.
 - This may offer a better understanding of alt-right/alt-light extremism

Conclusions

Existing Views of 4Chan

- 4Chan users are considered "lone actors" due to the anonymity behind posting.
- Lone actors are individuals who carry out terrorist agendas by themselves.

Extremist Movement Online Recruitment Tactics

- Similar patterns online between 4Chan and ISIS
- An increase in hateful rhetoric during polarizing political events for both 4Chan and ISIS

Use of Symbols and Sense of Belonging

- With both 4Chan and ISIS, symbols used within posts offer a unique space for potential recruits to feel the sense of belonging.
- When polarizing political events take place, more users are posting on 4Chan.

Works Cited

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Pictures:
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