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# 1 Cultural Convergence

## 2 Insights into the behavior of misinformation networks on Twitter

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Anonymous ACL Submission

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### 7 Abstract

8  
9 How can the birth and evolution of  
10 ideas and communities in a network be  
11 studied over time? We use a multimodal  
12 pipeline, consisting of network  
13 mapping, topic modeling, bridging  
14 centrality, and divergence to analyze  
15 Twitter data surrounding the COVID-19  
16 pandemic. We use network mapping to  
17 detect accounts creating content  
18 surrounding COVID-19, then Latent  
19 Dirichlet Allocation to extract topics,  
20 and bridging centrality to identify  
21 topical and non-topical bridges, before  
22 examining the distribution of each topic  
23 and bridge over time and applying  
24 Jensen-Shannon divergence of topic  
25 distributions to show communities that  
26 are converging in their topical  
27 narratives.

### 28 29 1 Introduction

30  
31 The COVID-19 pandemic fostered an  
32 information ecosystem rife with health mis-  
33 and disinformation. Much as COVID-19  
34 spreads through human interaction networks  
35 (Davis et al., 2020), disinformation about the  
36 virus travels along human communication  
37 networks. Communities prone to  
38 conspiratorial thinking (Oliver and Wood,  
39 2014; Lewandowsky et al., 2013), from  
40 QAnon to the vaccine hesitant, actively  
41 spread problematic content to fit their  
42 ideologies (Smith et al., 2020). When social  
43 influence is exerted to distort information  
44 landscapes (Centola & Macy, 2007; Barash,  
45 Cameron et al., 2012; Zubiaga et al., 2016;  
46 Lazer et al., 2018, Macy et al., 2019), large  
47 groups of people can come to ignore or even  
48 counteract public health policy and the  
49 advice of experts. Rumors and mistruths can

50 cause real world harm (Chappell, 2020;  
51 Mckee & Middleton, 2019; Crocco et al.,  
52 2002) – from tearing down 5G infrastructure  
53 based on a conspiracy theory (Chan et al.,  
54 2020) to ingesting harmful substances  
55 misrepresented as “miracle cures”  
56 (O’Laughlin, 2020). Continuous  
57 downplaying of the virus by influential  
58 people likely contributed to the climbing US  
59 mortality and morbidity rate early in the year  
60 (Bursztyn et al., 2020).

61 Disinformation researchers have noted  
62 this unprecedented ‘infodemic’ (Smith et al.,  
63 2020) and confluence of narratives.  
64 Understanding how actors shape information  
65 through networks, particularly during crises  
66 like COVID-19, may enable health experts to  
67 provide updates and fact-checking resources  
68 more effectively. Common approaches to  
69 this, like tracking the volume of indicators  
70 like hashtags, fail to assess deeper ideologies  
71 shared between communities or how those  
72 ideologies spread to culturally distant  
73 communities. In contrast, our multimodal  
74 analysis combines network science and  
75 natural language processing to analyze the  
76 evolution of semantic, user-generated,  
77 content about COVID-19 over time and how  
78 this content spreads through Twitter  
79 networks prone to mis-/disinformation.  
80 Semantic and network data are  
81 complementary in models of behavioral  
82 prediction, including rare and complex  
83 psycho-social behaviors (Ruch, 2020).  
84 Studies of coordinated information  
85 operations (Francois et al., 2017) emphasize  
86 the importance of semantic (messages’  
87 effectiveness) and network layers  
88 (messengers’ effectiveness).

89 We mapped networks of conversations  
90 around COVID-19, revealing political,  
91 health, and technological conspiratorial

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92 communities that consistently participate in  
 93 COVID-19 conversation and share  
 94 ideologically motivated content to frame the  
 95 pandemic to fit their overarching narratives.  
 96 To understand how disinformation is spread  
 97 across these communities, we invoke theory  
 98 on cultural holes and bridging. Cultural  
 99 bridges are patterns of meaning, practice, and  
 100 discourse that drive a propensity for social  
 101 closure and the formation of clusters of like-  
 102 minded individuals who share few  
 103 relationships with members of other clusters  
 104 except through bridging users who are  
 105 omnivorous in their social interests and span  
 106 multiple social roles (Pachucki & Breiger,  
 107 2010; Vilhena et al 2014). While cultural  
 108 holes/bridges extend our ability to  
 109 comprehend how mis-/disinformation flow  
 110 in networks and affect group dynamics, this  
 111 work has mostly focused on pro-social  
 112 behavior. It has remained an open question  
 113 if cultural bridges operate similarly with  
 114 nefarious content as with beneficial  
 115 information, as the costs and punishments of  
 116 sharing false and potentially harmful content  
 117 differ (Tsvetkova and Macy, 2014; 2015).  
 118 This work seeks to answer that question by  
 119 applying these theories to a network with  
 120 known conspiratorial content.

121 We turn to longitudinal topic analysis  
 122 to track narratives shared by these groups.  
 123 While some topical trends around the  
 124 COVID-19 infodemic are obvious, others are  
 125 nuanced. Detecting and tracking subtle  
 126 topical shifts and influencing factors is  
 127 important (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al.,  
 128 2013), as new language trends can indicate a  
 129 group is adopting ideas of anti-science  
 130 groups (e.g., climate deniers, the vaccine  
 131 hesitant). Differences between community  
 132 interests, breadth of focus, popularity among  
 133 topics, and evolution of conspiracy theories  
 134 can help us understand how public opinion  
 135 forms around events. These answers can

136 quantify anecdotal evidence about  
 137 converging conspiratorial groups online.

138 To capture these shifts, we analyze  
 139 evolving language trends across different  
 140 communities over the first five months of the  
 141 pandemic. In (Bail, 2016), advocacy  
 142 organizations' effectiveness in spreading  
 143 information was analyzed in the context of  
 144 how well their message 'bridged' different  
 145 social media audiences. A message that  
 146 successfully combined themes that typically  
 147 resonated with separate audiences received  
 148 substantially more engagements. We  
 149 hypothesize topical convergence among  
 150 communities discussing COVID-19 will 1)  
 151 correlate with new groups' emergence and 2)  
 152 be precursed by messages combining  
 153 previously disparate topics that receive high  
 154 engagement.

## 155 2 Methodology

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### 158 2.1 Data

159

160 We use activity<sup>1</sup> from 57,366 Twitter  
 161 accounts, recorded January-May 2020 and  
 162 acquired via the Twitter API. Non-English  
 163 Tweets<sup>2</sup> were excluded from analysis. We  
 164 applied standard preprocessing, removing  
 165 punctuation and stop words<sup>3</sup>, as well as  
 166 lemmatization of text data. In total,  
 167 81,348,475 tweets are included.

168

### 169 2.2 Overview of Analysis

170

171 We use Latent Dirichlet Allocation  
 172 (LDA) combined with divergence analysis  
 173 (Jensen-Shannon; Wong & You, 1995) to  
 174 identify topical convergence as an indication  
 175 of the breadth and depth of content spread  
 176 over a network. We expect that as  
 177 communities enter the conversation, topical  
 178 distributions will reflect their presence  
 179 earlier than using network mapping alone.

<sup>1</sup> Account activity includes tweet text, timestamps, follows and engagement based relationships over accounts.

<sup>2</sup> Language classification was done with pylcd3 (<https://github.com/bsolomon1124/pylcd3>)

<sup>3</sup> Punctuation and stopword removal was done with spaCy (<https://github.com/explosion/spaCy/blob/master/spacy/lang/punctuation.py>; [https://github.com/explosion/spaCy/blob/master/spacy/lang/en/stop\\_words.py](https://github.com/explosion/spaCy/blob/master/spacy/lang/en/stop_words.py))

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180 We first mapped a network, using COVID-  
181 19 related seeds from January-May 2020.  
182 We then applied LDA to the tweet text of all  
183 accounts that met inclusion criteria  
184 (discussed below), tracked the distribution  
185 of topics both overall and for specific  
186 communities, calculated bridging centrality  
187 measures to identify topics that connect  
188 otherwise disconnected groups.

## 190 2.3 Network Mapping

191  
192 We constructed five network maps  
193 that catalogue a collection of key social  
194 media accounts around a particular topic –  
195 in this case, COVID-19. Our maps represent  
196 cyber-social landscapes (Etling et al., 2012)  
197 of key communities sampled from  
198 representative seeds (Hindman & Barash,  
199 2018) of the topic to be analyzed. We  
200 collect all tweets containing one or more  
201 seed hashtags and remove inactive accounts  
202 (based on an activity threshold described  
203 below). We collect a network of semi-stable  
204 relationships (Twitter follows) between  
205 accounts, removing poorly connected nodes  
206 using k-core decomposition (Dorogovtsev et  
207 al., 2006). We apply a technique called  
208 “attentive clustering” that applies  
209 hierarchical agglomerative clustering to  
210 assign nodes to communities based on  
211 shared following patterns. We label each  
212 cluster using machine learning and human  
213 expert verification and organize clusters into  
214 expert identified and labeled groups.

## 216 2.4 Map Series Background

217  
218 Our maps can be seen as monthly  
219 “snapshots” of mainstream global  
220 conversations around coronavirus on  
221 Twitter. These maps were seeded on the  
222 same set of hashtags

223 (#CoronavirusOutbreak, #covid19,  
224 #coronavirus, #covid, "COVID19",  
225 "COVID-19"), to allow a comparison in  
226 network structure and activity over time. For  
227 the first three months, accounts that used  
228 seed hashtags three or more times were  
229 included; for subsequent months, COVID-  
230 19 conversations became so ubiquitous that  
231 we benefited from collecting all accounts  
232 that used seed hashtags at least once.  
233 Mapping the cyber-social landscape around  
234 hashtags of interest, rather than patterns of  
235 how content was shared, reveals the semi-  
236 stable structural communities of accounts  
237 engaged in the conversation.

## 239 2.5 Topic Modeling

240  
241 After extracting and cleaning the  
242 tweets’ text, we create an LDA model. LDA  
243 requires a corpus of documents, a matrix of  
244 those documents and their respective words,  
245 and various parameters and  
246 hyperparameters<sup>4</sup>. LDA, by design, does not  
247 explicitly model temporal relationships.  
248 Therefore, our decision to define a  
249 document as weekly collections of tweets  
250 for a given user allows for comparison of  
251 potentially time-bounded topics.

252 We use Gensim (Řehůřek & Sojka,  
253 2010) to build and train a model, with the  
254 number of topics  $K=50$ , and two  
255 hyperparameters  $\alpha = 0.253$  and  $\beta = 0.946^5$ ,  
256 all tuned using Optuna<sup>6</sup> to optimize both for  
257 coherence score and human interpretability.  
258 LDA then maps documents to topics such  
259 that each topic is identified by a multinomial  
260 distribution over words and each document  
261 is denoted by a multinomial distribution  
262 over topics. While variants of LDA include  
263 an explicit time component, such as Wang  
264 and McCallum’s (2006) Topics over Time  
265 model or Blei and Lafferty’s (2006)

<sup>4</sup> This research defines a document as *all* tweets for a given account during a single week (Monday-Sunday) concatenated, and uses a matrix of TF-IDF scores in place of raw word frequencies.

<sup>5</sup> With  $\alpha$  being a measure of document topic density (as  $\alpha$  increases so does the likelihood that a document will be associated with multiple topics), and  $\beta$  being a measure of topic word density (as  $\beta$  increases so does

the likelihood that topics use more words from the corpus). LDA is a generative, latent variable model which assumes all (observed) documents are generated by a set of (unobserved) topics, hyperparameters have a noticeable impact on the assignment of documents to topics.

<sup>6</sup> <https://optuna.readthedocs.io/en/stable/index.html>

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266 Dynamic Topic Model, these extensions are  
 267 often inflexible when the corpus of interest  
 268 has large changes in beta distributions over  
 269 time, and further impose constraints on the  
 270 time periods which would have been  
 271 unsuitable for this analysis.

272 Applying LDA with  $K = 50$  yielded  
 273 topics (see Appendix A) that can be  
 274 distinguished by subject matter expert  
 275 analysis. A substantial portion of topics  
 276 related to COVID-19, politics at national  
 277 and international levels, international  
 278 relations, and conspiracy theories. We also  
 279 identified a small subset of social media  
 280 marketing and/or peripheral topics, which  
 281 covered animal rights, inspirational quotes  
 282 (topic 10), and follow trains (topics 23 and  
 283 32).

284  
 285 **2.6 Cultural Bridge Analysis**

286  
 287 In addition to topics derived from LDA, we  
 288 extracted hashtags, screen names, and URLs  
 289 from tweets as possible cultural content that  
 290 bridges communities. For each week, we  
 291 construct an undirected multimodal graph  
 292 where each node represents a cluster, topic,  
 293 or content. Clusters have edges to topics  
 294 with a weight representing average topic  
 295 representativeness among cluster members,  
 296 and edges to cultural content with a weight  
 297 according to the number of unique cluster  
 298 members using said content divided by  
 299 maximum usage of an artifact of that type.  
 300 After constructing the graph, we calculate  
 301 nodes' bridging centrality,

309 which adjusts betweenness centrality with  
 310 respect to neighbors' degrees to better  
 311 identify nodes spanning otherwise  
 312 disconnected clusters (Hwang et. al, 2006).  
 313 We select the top 20 bridges by node type  
 314 for further investigation.

315  
 316 **3 Results**

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 318 **3.1 Five Months of Maps**

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 320 All five maps are visibly multipolar,  
 321 with densely clustered poles and sparsely  
 322 populated centers<sup>7</sup>. This indicates that  
 323 strongly intra- connected communities are  
 324 involved in the conversation despite its  
 325 global scope and each geographic and  
 326 ideological cluster has its own insular  
 327 sources of information - there is a dearth of  
 328 shared, global sources of information.

329 This lack of cohesion or “center” to  
 330 the network is not unusual for a global  
 331 conversation map, as dense clusters often  
 332 denote national sub-communities. However,  
 333 the first coronavirus map covers a time  
 334 period in which the outbreak was largely  
 335 contained to China, with the exception of  
 336 cases reported in Thailand toward the end of  
 337 January.<sup>8</sup> During this time, the Chinese  
 338 government and its various media outlets  
 339 would be expected to form that core  
 340 informational source. As noted in previous  
 341 studies and reporting of health crises,

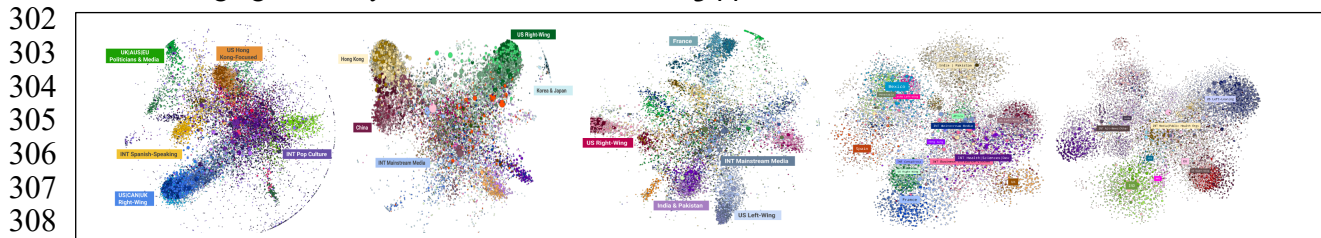


Figure 1. January-May 2020 Network Maps

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<sup>7</sup> We visualize the map network using a force-directed layout algorithm similar to Fruchterman-Rheingold (1991) – individual Twitter accounts in the map are represented by spheres, pushed apart by centrifugal force and pulled together by spring force based on their social proximity (accounts with more neighbors

in common end up closer together). We assign a color to each account based on its parent cluster.

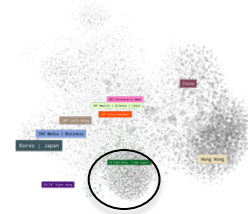
<sup>8</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200114084712/https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html>

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353 historical distrust in governing bodies makes  
 354 consensus from the medical and science  
 355 community challenging, particularly in  
 356 online spaces.<sup>9</sup> This in turn creates voids of  
 357 both information and data for bad actors to  
 358 capitalize up.

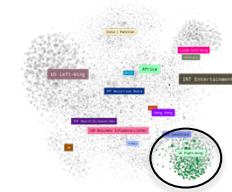
360 **3.2 Cultural Convergence Case Study:**  
 361 **QAnon**

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362 Our pipeline yielded a large set of  
 363 results detailing the cultural convergence of  
 364 clusters over time in the Covid-19 network  
 365 maps and the topical bridges that aided this  
 366 convergence. The QAnon community is a  
 367 particularly apt example since researchers  
 368 studying this topic have qualitatively noted  
 369 the recent acceleration of QAnon  
 370 membership since the beginning of the  
 371 pandemic and its convergence with other  
 372 online communities. The aim of the QAnon  
 373 case study is to illustrate the power of this  
 374 cultural convergence method and reflect  
 375 similar results we see in numerous groups  
 376 across our collection of Covid-19 map  
 377 clusters.

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378 **3.3 QAnon and Covid-19**

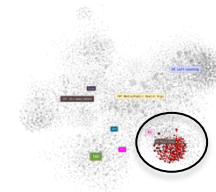
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382 *Fig.2 QAnon in February, April, and May.*

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384 QAnon is a political conspiracy  
 385 theory formed in 2017 (LaFrance, 2020).  
 386 The community maintains that there is a  
 387 secret cabal of elite billionaires and  
 388 democratic politicians that rule the world,  
 389 also known as the “deep state.” As the  
 390 theory goes, Donald Trump is secretly  
 391 working to dismantle this powerful group of  
 392 people. Given Trump’s central role and the  
 393 vilification of democratic politicians, this  
 394 far-right theory is most commonly adopted  
 395 by Trump supporters.

396 Researchers that study the QAnon  
 397 community have hypothesized an  
 398 accelerated QAnon membership since the  
 399 beginning of the pandemic (Breland &  
 400 Rangarajan, 2020). Conspiratorial threads,  
 401 like the “plandemic” that asserts COVID-19  
 402 was created by Bill Gates and other elites  
 403 for population control, are closely tied to  
 404 QAnon’s worldview. Our results support the



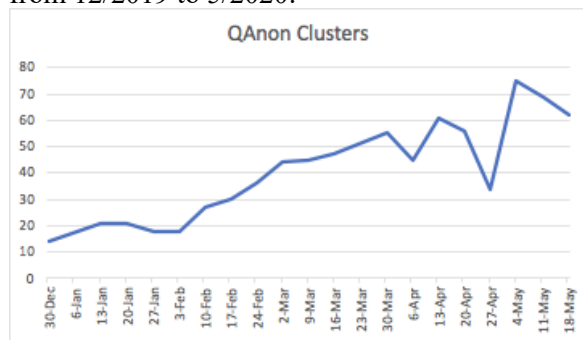
<sup>9</sup>  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2019/04/>

[23/vaccine-measles-big-pharma-distrust-conspiracy/3473144002/](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2019/04/23/vaccine-measles-big-pharma-distrust-conspiracy/3473144002/)

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405 hypothesis that over the course of the  
 406 pandemic, the QAnon community has not  
 407 only grown in size, but the QAnon content  
 408 and concepts have taken hold in other  
 409 communities. Further, our results show that  
 410 this fringe ideology has spread to broader,  
 411 more mainstream groups.

412 The QAnon community started as a  
 413 fringe group that has notably gained  
 414 momentum both in our COVID-19 networks  
 415 and in real life. The first “Q” congressional  
 416 candidate was elected in Georgia and is  
 417 favored to win the House seat (Itkowitz,  
 418 2020). QAnon has attracted mainstream  
 419 coverage as well (Strauss, 2020; CBS News,  
 420 2020; LaFrance, 2020). In accordance with  
 421 these real-world impacts, our time series of  
 422 maps illustrate a similar process of QAnon  
 423 spreading to the mainstream online, both in  
 424 network and in narrative space. Prior to the  
 425 pandemic, QAnon was a fringe conspiracy  
 426 concentrated on the network periphery of  
 427 Trump support groups. As Figure 3  
 428 illustrates, the QAnon community was less  
 429 than 3% of the conversation around COVID-  
 430 19 in February 2020. By April 2020, this  
 431 community comprised almost 5% of the  
 432 network, and was composed of increasingly  
 433 dense clusters (in February the QAnon group  
 434 had a heterophily score of .09 whereas in  
 435 May scores for QAnon clusters ranged from  
 436 5.57-20.77). At the same time, there is  
 437 consistent growth in the number of  
 438 documents assigned to the QAnon topic (28)  
 439 from 12/2019 to 5/2020:



440 Fig 3. Growth of QAnon Clusters Over Time

441 Our cultural convergence method  
 442 depicted the topics that supported this shift  
 443 and the groups that adopted QAnon  
 444 concepts and content over time. That

447 process within a few groups is outlined  
 448 below.

### 449 3.4 QAnon and Right-Wing Groups

450 All of the network maps in Figure 2  
 451 feature a large US Right-Wing group,  
 452 indicating that this group was prominently  
 453 involved in the coronavirus conversation.  
 454 Both these maps demonstrate what we refer  
 455 to as mega clusters, loud online communities  
 456 with a high rate of interconnection. This  
 457 interpretation is supported by both topical  
 458 and non-topical bridging centrality measures.  
 459 For example, after the assassination of  
 460 Iranian major General Qasem Soleimani in  
 461 early January, we see US/Iran Relations  
 462 (Topic 28) narratives acting as a bridge  
 463 between several US Right-Wing  
 464 communities (US|CAN|UK Right-Wing in  
 465 blue above) who use this topic to connect  
 466 with each other as well as with accounts who,  
 467 in later months, we will see come together to  
 468 form distinct QAnon and conspiracy theory  
 469 communities. While documents from these  
 470 groups make up a relatively small proportion  
 471 of all documents within the topic at first, they  
 472 become more prevalent over time: the  
 473 US/Iran relations topic (Topic 28) becomes  
 474 the dominant bridge in numerous and  
 475 geographically diverse clusters by mid-  
 476 March and continues to hold that spot  
 477 through mid-April.

480 We also find that US Right-Wing  
 481 clusters converge topically at the same time  
 482 as US/Iran becomes more of a bridge: at the  
 483 start of our analysis the similarity between  
 484 the topical distribution of these clusters is  
 485 relatively low (for example, the US  
 486 Trump|MAGA Support I and US Trump  
 487 Black Support|Pro-Trump Alt-media  
 488 clusters have a divergence score of 0.3312  
 489 during the week of 12/30/2019 indicating  
 490 minor overlap). By 3/30/2020, the same  
 491 clusters have a divergence score of 0.5697  
 492 and by 5/18/2020 their divergence score  
 493 reaches 0.6986, over double compared to  
 494 three months earlier.

495 Beginning the week of March 16th,  
 496 we see QAnon making significant gains in  
 497 narrative control of the network, with

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498 QAnon related narratives (i.e. Topic 11)  
 499 acting as one of the strongest bridges  
 500 (maximum bridging centrality for Topic 11  
 501 is 0.4794) between communities including  
 502 conspiracy theorists on both the Right and  
 503 Left, and the US Right Wing. This persists  
 504 throughout the remainder of March and into  
 505 mid-late April, with April being the first  
 506 month we see more than one distinct QAnon  
 507 community detected in our network maps.  
 508 Again, this engagement is supported by the  
 509 convergence of Topic 49 over the analysis  
 510 period. In January these groups have  
 511 relatively minor similarities in their topic  
 512 distributions (0.3835), though these  
 513 similarities become much larger by mid-  
 514 March (0.6619) and continue to increase  
 515 through the end of the analysis period in  
 516 mid-May (0.7150).

517 It is notable that before we are able to  
 518 detect distinct QAnon communities through  
 519 network mapping, they are already making  
 520 connections to more established  
 521 communities within the COVID network  
 522 through this content area. In terms of overall  
 523 map volume, the Right-Wing group was the  
 524 third largest in the January map, with 15.9%,  
 525 and the largest in the February map, with  
 526 22.6%. Overall, since March, Left-leaning  
 527 and public health clusters gained a foothold  
 528 in the conversation. Our results show the  
 529 Right-wing groups were pushed to the  
 530 periphery of the maps since March and at the  
 531 same time subsumed by the fringe QAnon  
 532 conspiracy.

533 By the end of April, Hong Kong  
 534 protest related narratives (Topic 8) replaced  
 535 QAnon as the strongest bridge. However,  
 536 given that April and May each have several  
 537 distinct QAnon communities, it is possible  
 538 that QAnon topical content is being  
 539 contained within those newly coalesced  
 540 communities rather than bridging formerly  
 541 distinct communities while Hong Kong  
 542 protest related narratives are more culturally  
 543 agnostic. This is supported by the lack of  
 544 MAGA/US Right Wing clusters in later  
 545 months and relational increase in QAnon  
 546 clusters.

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 548 **3.5 QAnon and the Alt-News Networks**

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In the beginning of the pandemic, the volume of clickbait “news” sites, which tend to spread unreliable and sensational COVID-19 updates, appeared between January to February (the group made-up of these accounts and their followers increased from none in January to close to 6% of the map in February). During this time many accounts from the alt-media and conspiratorial clusters exclusively and constantly tweeted about coronavirus, some including the topic in their profile identity markers. This is mirrored on other platforms, for instance on Facebook where we saw groups changing their names to rebrand into COVID-19 centric groups, while they were previously groups focused on other political issues. These alternative “news” accounts are preferred news sources for clusters that reject “mainstream news.” This sentiment is reflected in both alt-right and alt-left clusters that carry anti-establishment and conspiratorial views. Notably, these two groups also engage with and share Russian state media, like RT.com, regularly. In the February map the dedicated Coronavirus News group (5.8%), which is composed of accounts that follow these alternative and often poorly fact-checked media sources, was almost equivalent in size to the group of those following official health information sources (7.4%).

By March, conspiratorial accounts and alt-right news sources like Zero Hedge and Breitbart were missing from the top mentions across this map and were replaced by influential Democrats such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and left-leaning journalists such as Jake Tapper and Chris Hayes. In line with the trajectory of more mainstream voices becoming engaged in the conversation as the outbreak progressed, fringe voices became less influential in our maps over time. These changes could represent a mainstreaming of coronavirus conversation, which in turn makes the center of the map more highly concentrated, or the reduced share of a consolidated US Right-Wing community discussing coronavirus online.

599 Our results show that preference for  
 600 QAnon concepts converge on both ends of  
 601 the political ideological spectrum. This  
 602 supports the “horseshoe theory,” frequently  
 603 postulated by political scientists and  
 604 sociologists, that the extremes of the political  
 605 spectrum resemble one another rather than  
 606 being polar opposites on a linear political  
 607 continuum. In March-May, the QAnon topic  
 608 was an important bridge between alt-left and  
 609 alt-right clusters (the lowest divergence  
 610 being 0.73 on 3/30/20 and 0.50 on 5/18/2020  
 611 in the same cluster). The topic remained a  
 612 dominating bridge each week across our  
 613 maps, suggesting that this bridge is a strong  
 614 tie between the alt-left and alt-right groups  
 615 independent of the pandemic. The alt-left is  
 616 often vocal on anti-government, social  
 617 justice, and climate justice topics. From our  
 618 results we can also see that QAnon is also a  
 619 topical bridge between accounts following  
 620 alt-left journalists and environmental and  
 621 climate science organizations (0 .77 on  
 622 3/30/20 and 0.75 on 5/18/2020). This  
 623 suggests that while the far-right is easily  
 624 drawn to QAnon content because of the anti-

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625 liberal bend, there are other channels, such  
 626 climate activism, that act as channels for the  
 627 QAnon conspiracy to spread.

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 629 **4 Conclusion**

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 631 The multi-modal approach to cultural  
 632 convergence helps us better understand the  
 633 highly dynamic nature of overlapping  
 634 conspiratorial strands. Our findings  
 635 highlight that conspiratorial groups are not  
 636 mutually exclusive and this approach  
 637 models some of the driving forces behind  
 638 these convergences. The QAnon case study  
 639 is a fraction of the results yielded by this  
 640 approach and highlights important insights  
 641 into cultural and topical interconnections  
 642 between online groups. Further work will  
 643 explore the glut of results generated by  
 644 applying this approach to the ongoing time  
 645 series mapping of COVID-19. Other topics,  
 646 such as a time series of maps around the  
 647 recent Black Lives Matter protests will also  
 648 be explored

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922 **A Appendix**

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924 **A.1 Topics**

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Topic	Expert Assigned Label	Words
0	Right-Wing, Anti-CCP, Steve Bannon	warroompandemic, bannon, jasonmillerindc, warroom2020, raheemkassam, realdonaldtrump, ccp, jackmaxey1, robertspalding, steve, chinese, pandemic, ccpvirus, war, vog2020
1	Christian, Hindu	god, saint, ji, 🙏, TRUE, lord, spiritual, holy, jesus, rampal, maharaj, bible, knowledge, kabir, sant
2	Food, Trump, Covid	tasty, recipe, recipes, food, foodie, cookies, chicken, delicious, realdonaldtrump, homemade, pandemic, ios, chocolate, salad, insiderfood
3	Tech Industry, ML Interest	ai, data, cybersecurity, read, business, security, iot, tech, technology, bigdata, digital, machinelearning, 5, free, –
4	Covid, Health, Human Rights	climate, women, global, change, pandemic, children, vaccine, study, youtube, crisis, human, –, read, un, research
5	Nazi Germany, Holocaust	auschwitzmuseum, born, auschwitz, jewish, february, 1942, polish, incarcerated, deported, march, 1944, jew, 1943, raynman123, breakingnews
6	US-Iran relations	iran, iranian, soleimani, iraq, regime, heshmatalavi, irans, tehran, war, iraqi, iranians, killing, killed, irgc, realdonaldtrump
7	Trump Support Accounts, Qanon	tippytopshapeu, mevans5219, dedona51, philadper2014, donnacastel, f5de, jamesmgoss, fait, thepaleorider, iam, 🇪🇺, ecuador, newspaper, realdonaldtrump, unionswe
8	Hong Kong Protests	hong, kong, chinese, police, ccp, hongkong, wuhan, hk, communist, taiwan, beijing, solomonyue, chinas, party, human
9	Pro-Russia, Russia news	syria, iran, war, military, turkey, russia, israel, russian, turkish, forces, iraq, syrian, idlib, rtcom, killed
10	Inspirational Quotes, SMM	love, thinkbigundaywithmarsha, quote, 4uwell, joytrain, joy, peace, kindness, motivation, mindfulness, things, quotes, success, mentalhealth, happy

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11	Democrat-focused Qanon	□, realdonaldtrump, fl fafl f8, patriots, ❤️, potus, america, democrats, god, biden, follow, ⭐, obama, joe, dems
12	Trump Support Accounts, Conservative Influencers, Christians	realdonaldtrump, biden, joe, realjameswoods, chinese, democrats, americans, american, america, flu, national, charliekirk11, god, bernie, house
13	India/Pakistan Covid, Muslim	pakistan, sindh, india, minister, khan, pm, imrankhanpti, govt, indian, kashmir, allah, imran, corona, karachi, pakistani
14	Christian Qanon, Qanon influencer	realdonaldtrump, q, inevitableet, cjtruth, prayingmedic, qanon, stormisuponus, lisamei62, potus, eyesonq, god, juliansrum, karluskap, thread,
15	Covid News	deaths, total, reports, county, confirmed, positive, death, update, pandemic, york, reported, police, number, bringing, city
16	K-pop	thread, unroll, hi, read, find, hello, asked, follow, be, kenya, sorry, dm, thanks, bts, retweet
17	Democratic Primaries, Candidates	bernie, biden, sanders, berniesanders, joe, vote, warren, joe Biden, campaign, democratic, bloomberg, be, candidate, voters, primary
18	Covid General	pandemic, lockdown, workers, stay, social, positive, amid, food, care, minister, dr, spread, crisis, emergency, testing
19	Malaysia News	malaysia, nstnation, fmtnews, staronline, minister, pm, malaymail, malaysian, nstonline, mahathir, nstworld, muhyiddin, dr, malaysians, kkmputrajaya
20	South Africa News	africa, south, lockdown, african, sa, news24, minister, africans, cyrilramaphosa, zimbabwe, black, cape, ramaphosa, anc, police
21	Missouri Reps, Libertarians, Bitcoin	washtimesoped, tron, realdonaldtrump, truthraiderhq, trx, govparsonmo, chinese, hawleymo, democrats, hong, kong, czbinance, repartzler, biden,
22	Political Interest, News Platforms	smartnews, googlenews, yahooonews, franksowa1, realdonaldtrump, trimet, biden, obama, americans, aol, tac, tic, house, white, pandemic
23	Trump Train	§, 18, code, warnuse, 2384, seditious, , conspiracy, viccervantes3, 🦠, realdonaldtrump, 1962, rico, f9a0, f680vicsspaceflightf680

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24	Canada General Interest	canada, trudeau, canadians, justintrudeau, canadian, ontario, alberta, pandemic, minister, jkenney, cdnpoli, ford, care, pm, fordnation
25	Trump Support, Jewelry	fernandoamandi, necklace, sariellaherself, earrings, realdonaldtrump, police, kong, jewelry, hong, catheri77148739, bracelet, handmade, turquoise, america, pendant
26	Wikileaks, Isreal-Palestine Relations	israel, palestinian, israeli, assange, gaza, palestinians, julian, palestine, swilkinsonbc, occupation, children, prison, rights, war, wikileaks
27	Alt-Right News	nicaragua, zyrofoxtrot, banneddotvideo, allidoisowen, dewnewsz, iscresearch, realdonaldtrump, f4e2, offlimitsnews, libertytarian, flfaf1f8, ortega, infowars, f53b,
28	US-Iran relations, US politicians	iran, realdonaldtrump, iranian, soleimani, democrats, impeachment, american, america, pelosi, obama, terrorist, war, killed, house, iraq
29	India Celebs, Entertainment	❤️, master, , rameshlaus, tn, chennai, birthday, happy, fans, actorvijay, f60e, tweets, film, tamilnadu, thala
30	US coronavirus, Politics	pandemic, realdonaldtrump, biden, americans, states, joe Biden, house, white, donald, testing, trumps, gop, america, administration, vote
31	Impeachment	impeachment, senate, house, trial, gop, witnesses, trumps, bolton, ukraine, republicans, white, senators, barr, vote, parnas
32	Trump Train, Trump Support Accounts	kbusmc2, jcpexpress, nobodybutme17, swilleford2, davidf4444, realdonaldtrump, tee2019k, amateurmmo, theycallmedoc1, rebarbill, sam232343433, kimber82604467, pawleybaby1999, thegrayrider, unyielding5
33	US 2020 Politics	realdonaldtrump, democrats, bernie, america, democrat, bloomberg, pelosi, biden, impeachment, obama, house, american, vote, potus, dems
34	India Politics, Covid	india, delhi, narendramodi, pm, ani, govt, indian, police, lockdown, modi, minister, bjp, ji, positive, corona
35	Covid News, Covid Trackers, Itals	wuhan, chinese, outbreak, confirmed, case, italy, bnodesk, death, reuters, deaths, infected, reports, hospital, patients, spread

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36	Nigeria Politics, Covid	nigeria, lagos, buhari, –, nigerian, lockdown, god, nigerians, mbuhari, govt, governor, ncdcgov, africa, police, money
37	Lifestyle, Art	☐, love, ❤️, happy, be, morning, got, beautiful, night, birthday, week, music, friends, art, little
38	Australian Climate Change, Wildfires	australia, morrison, australian, climate, auspol, scottmorrisonmp, change, fire, nsw, scott, minister, pm, fires, bushfires, bushfire
39	Conservative Canadian Politics	trudeau, canada, canadians, canadian, ezrlevant, justintrudeau, justin, liberal, liberals, police, un, minister, climate, cbc, alberta
40	UK Covid, Politics	uk, nhs, johnson, boris, care, labour, eu, £, brexit, lockdown, bbc, borisjohnson, deaths, staff, workers
41	Pro-Trump, Anti-Trump Accounts, QAnon	cspanwj, ngirrard, nevertrump, realdonaldtrump, govmlg, freelion7, tgradous, wearethensnow, nm, missyjo79, durango96380362, epitwitter, newmexico, potus, jubilee7double
42	Fox News, HCQ	zevdr, realdonaldtrump, niro60487270, foxnewspolitics, biden, hotairblog, , sierraamv, pandemic, america, be, dr, joe, obama, democrats
43	Hong Kong Protests, China Covid	hong, kong, chinese, strike, medical, hongkong, workers, border, huawei, police, hk, outbreak, hospital, wuhan, communist
44	Cuba and Venezuela Politics, Yang Support	cuba, venezuela, ●, andrewyang,  , diazcanelb, —, cuban, maduroen, ▴, telesurenglish, yang, maduro, yanggang, pandemic
45	Animal Rescue	❤️, , dog, dogs, animals, maryjoe38642126, animal, pls, ⚠️, cat, shelter, rescue, cats, needs, keitholbermann
46	US General Politics	realdonaldtrump, obama, donald, americans, house, gop, trumps, pandemic, joe Biden, white, biden, america, dr, be, states
47	Left-Leaning, US and NYC Covid Equipment Shortages	pandemic, crisis, realdonaldtrump, americans, medical, masks, ventilators, hospital, york, workers, bill, dr, cnn, cuomo, hospitals
48	Trump Support, Bolsonaro Support	realdonaldtrump, mrfungiq, loveon70, jeffmctn1, monster4341, brazil, bolsonaro, 1technobuddy, basedpoland, followed, wickeddog3, brazilian, jairbolsonaro, 6831bryan, bonedaddy76

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49	US QAnon	realdonaldtrump, obama, biden, flynn, democrats, joe, fbi, america, obamagate, american, house, bill, fauci, realjameswoods, dr
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