

# A Data-driven Understanding of Left-Wing Extremists on Social Media

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Social media's role in the spread and evolution of extremism is a focus of intense study. Online extremists have been involved in the spread of online hate, mis/disinformation, and real-world violence. However, the overwhelming majority of existing work has focused on *right-wing* extremism. In this paper, we perform a first of its kind large-scale, data-driven study exploring *left-wing* extremism. We focus on "tankies," a left-wing community that first arose in the 1950s in support of hardline actions of the USSR and has evolved to support what they call "actually existing socialist countries," e.g., CCP run China, the USSR, former soviet countries, and North Korea. We collect 1.3M posts from 53K authors from tankies subreddits, and explore the position of tankies within the broader far-left community on Reddit. Among other things, we find that tankies are clearly on the periphery of the larger far-left community. When examining the contents of posts, we find misalignments and conceptual homomorphisms that confirm the description of tankies in the theoretical work. We also discover that tankies focus more on state-level political events rather than social issues in comparison to other far-left communities. Finally, we show that tankies exhibit some of the same worrying behaviors as right-wing extremists, e.g., relatively high toxicity and an organized response to deplatforming events.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The use of social media by extremists is well documented in the press [4, 23, 108] and has been a heavy focus of the research community [7, 46, 75]. However, almost all recent work has studied *right-wing* extremists. This concentration can be attributed to several factors. The growing popularity of research on populism, as a result of the increasing prevalence of populist parties and leaders globally [106], has led to a greater abundance of identifiable right-wing extremists online and their substantial impact on society. At the same time, there has been a steady rise in political rhetoric characterizing mainstream political parties as far-left extremists, scapegoating the far-left for violent activities (e.g., claiming Antifa orchestrated the January 6th Insurrection [15], accusing far-left extremists of planning and organizing violence during protests after George Floyd's death [31], and blaming left-wing extremists for setting forest fires in Oregon [51]).

While most of this rhetoric is easily dismissed as absurd (e.g., President Joe Biden does not fit any definition of far-left that we have found in the literature), many of the characteristics and behavior we associate with right-wing extremism online have historically applied to hardline *left-wing* extremists as well. For example, spreading mis- and disinformation from unreputable or overtly biased sources [122]. Despite the impact of right-wing online extremists, political rhetoric, and a history of violence and chaos attributed to far-left extremists, there are essentially no studies of the far-left on social media, let alone far-left extremists.

In this paper, we fill this gap by performing the first large-scale, data-driven measurements of the far-left on social media. We focus primarily on a large left-wing community known as *tankies*. Historically, tankies were supporters of hardline Soviet actions [43]; more Stalinist than Leninist. The name originates from Soviets using tanks to put down rebellions in eastern Europe [34, 50, 94, 100, 105, 107]. More recently, tankies have grown to support the actions of the CCP in China, a currently operational actually existing socialist (AES) country. Notably, their support can extend beyond just AES countries, often siding with or excusing anti-NATO, non-socialist, autocratic

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regimes, including Putin-controlled Russia’s actions [24, 35]. Regardless of their historical tactics, tankies have recently shown behavior similar to the right-wing extremists (e.g., denying the Uyghur genocide [104]).

Informed by the scant literature that exists on tankies, we first construct a set of tankie subreddits. We then measure the over 1M posts from 50K authors in our dataset across a variety of axes, giving us a unique view of how tankies are positioned within the larger left-wing community. We perform a set of quantitative analyses that reveal the relationship between tankies, other far-left communities, leftists, feminists, and capitalists. By constructing a graph where nodes are subreddits and an edge exists from one subreddit to another if the first subreddit links to the second in its sidebar, we identify 6 tankie subreddits and examined their prominence and connectivity within a reference network of over 21 K subreddits. We then compare the user overlap between our identified set of ideological subreddits. We also look at how tankies compare to the rest of the far-left with respect to their vocabulary, the topics they discuss, who they discuss, and the toxicity of their discussions. Finally, we measure user migrations between left-wing communities as well as tankies’ response to a deplatforming event.

**Contributions.** In summary, this paper makes several contributions. First, we provide the first large-scale measurements of the far-left on Reddit. To the best of our knowledge, this work also represents the largest scale study of the online far-left to date. Next, we identify and characterize the tankie community on Reddit. To the best of our knowledge, this paper provides the first such characterization of tankies in the literature across a multitude of disciplines. When looking at tankies’ positioning within our network of ideological subreddits, we find they are indeed at the periphery of the far-left, and should thus be considered left-wing extremists. We further show that tankies differ from the rest of the far-left in several striking ways. E.g., tankies show consistent vocabulary misalignments when compared to other far-left communities, exhibit more toxicity than other far-left communities, and share more links from revisionist news. We also show that user migration patterns from other far-left communities to tankies coincided with tankies becoming the most popular far-left community on Reddit prior to being banned. Finally, we show that tankies’ response to Reddit deplatforming them was similar to that of right-wing extremists: completely migrating to a new platform and relatively increasing their use of toxic language.

## 2 BACKGROUND & RELATED WORK

The rise of online social media platforms has had a substantial impact on the way individuals consume and produce political content. In particular, the ability for individuals to self-select into ideologically-homogeneous online communities has led to the proliferation of extremist groups on the Internet. While there has been a significant amount of research on right-wing extremist groups on social media, there has been relatively less focus on left-wing extremist groups. In this paper, we aim to fill this gap by examining the online behavior of a left-wing extremist community known as “tankies.”

**What is a “tankie?”** *Tankie* was originally a pejorative term referring to communists who supported the USSR’s invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 [34, 50, 94, 100, 105, 107]. Over the years, the context of the usage of tankie evolved. For example, it has been used to show derision towards pro-Soviet hardliners [43], to describe communists who support China’s policies [72] (e.g., supporters of China’s actions on Uyghurs [104] and the Hong Kong protests [10]), as well as young, online Stalinists in general [44].

Thus, tankie is now used to describe much more than the set of communists who supported specific events from the Soviet era. The term tankie now covers communists who support “actually

existing socialist countries” (AES); especially those with a Stalinist or authoritarian leaning. Although there is not really a concrete definition, recent work by Petterson [94] provides a succinct description of tankies:

“Tankies regard past and current socialist systems as legitimate attempts at creating communism, and thus have not distanced themselves from Stalin, China etc.”

**Studies on Extremist Online Communities.** Online communities have led to an increased ability for individuals to express their views and connect with others who share similar ideologies. Although the vast majority of these communities are benign, a small subset of them are extremist in nature, espousing views that are well outside the mainstream and often promoting violence [41, 110, 111]. These extremist online communities can exist across the political spectrum, including right-wing and left-wing, as well as religious and other forms of ideologies. Furthermore, it has been observed that there can be similarities and overlap in the user bases of these communities. For example, research by Mame et al. has shown that anti-feminist communities can serve as gateways to the far-right, with significant overlap between the Manosphere and the alt-right observed in their studies on Reddit and Youtube [75]. Moreover, while the psycho-political profiles of left and right-wing extremists display considerable diversity [125], these extremist communities may exhibit similarities in their responses to specific events, e.g., left-wing and right-wing extremists fighting against ISIS in Syria [70].

Studies on Islamist extremism investigated the role of social media in the spread of extremist ideologies. Research has shown that these extremists use social media platforms to disseminate propaganda, recruit new members, coordinate attacks, amplify the voices of extremist leaders, and create a sense of community among like-minded individuals [16, 18, 95]. A comparative study [64] of the use of political violence by left-wing, right-wing, and Islamist extremists found that individuals and attacks associated with left-wing causes are likely to be less violent.

**Imbalance in Research on Online Extremism.** While research on online extremist communities has been increasing, there has been a particular focus on right-wing extremist communities, e.g., those affiliated with white supremacy or far-right politics [39, 46, 118, 119, 132]. These communities can be found on various social media platforms, including forums, blogs, and social networking sites. Social media platforms like Reddit, 4chan, Gab, Parler, and others have been found to harbor far-right communities, providing a gathering place for like minded individuals, recruit and further radicalize others, and even organize violent, real world activity [8, 47, 52, 131, 133]. Previous studies have demonstrated that domestic extremist groups in the United States, particularly those on the right-wing, tend to form networked clusters of websites that share similar ideologies. These clusters often contain prominent websites that connect different clusters, providing access and control to resources for members, sympathizers, and interested organizations [101, 135]. Another study that analyzes the posting behaviors in one of these websites find that the messages are assertive in tone and contain a variety of emotionally charged language, including words such as “bomb,” “kill,” “evil,” and “threat,” that are directed towards specific adversary groups, and often advocate for violence against Jews [109].

In contrast, research about online extremist left communities is relatively limited [32]. Studies have found that far-left extremist offenses share commonalities with common criminal acts like vandalism, theft, and arson [116], and a negative correlation between the timings of their cyberattacks and physical violence [55]. While there have been studies that analyze online far-left communities, they generally involve non-extremist far-left communities (e.g., supporters of European socialist parties), and are often limited to a specific country. E.g., a study of Greek far-left and far-right tweets did not find significant differences in network structure and sentiment during three different politically intense time periods [6]. Another study found that both online Australian far-right and

Subreddit	# Posts	# Authors	Min - Max Date	In-Degree	Out-Degree	PageRank
r/GenZedong	1,273,277	50,153	07/2019 - 03/2022	7	-	0.00006
r/sendinthetanks	42,813	5,603	03/2020 - 03/2022	3	-	0.00003
r/InformedTankie	29,242	3,697	03/2020 - 03/2022	5	8	0.00009
r/GenZhou	28,606	3,620	12/2020 - 03/2022	3	10	0.00004
r/asktankies	6,678	937	01/2021 - 03/2022	2	2	0.00003
r/BunkerTube	12	5	11/2020 - 01/2022	1	-	0.00002

Table 1. General information and In-Degree, Out-Degree, and PageRank scores of the tankie subreddits from collected reference network.

far-left communities become more active in response to major global events [30]. Additionally, a prior study reported that East Germany consistently ranked slightly higher than the West in terms of various extreme left-wing attitudes over time, despite the fact that absolute numbers have recently declined [67]. Regardless, to the best of our knowledge, no large-scale data-driven studies have been conducted to understand left-wing extremists on social media. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive study focusing to understand left-wing extremism on social media to fill this gap in knowledge and gain a better understanding of all forms of extremism in order to inform effective countermeasures.

### 3 DATA

Left-wing extremism is an understudied area in comparison to right-wing extremism. One of the reasons for this is that identifying online communities associated with left-wing extremist groups is challenging in and of itself. To address this, our first step is to identify a group of subreddits that are part of the overall tankie community, which represents a segment of the broader left-wing extremist landscape. Then, to explore how tankies are positioned within the overall political discourse on Reddit, we collect a set of subreddits representing more mainstream ideologies.

**Reddit.** Reddit is one of the world’s largest social media platforms, with over 1.5 billion monthly visits as of February 2022 [121]. Reddit is made up of over 130,000 communities called “subreddits,” which are moderated by volunteer users and have their own rules. Users can participate in subreddits by submitting links, commenting, and voting on submissions and comments. Reddit also allows subreddits to display a banner, which is usually located near the list of submissions. Banners are often used to communicate the theme, purpose, rules, etc. of the subreddit. Reddit’s diverse set of political subreddits offer the opportunity to study and position tankies within the broader political spectrum. Additionally, because of its user-created and moderated communities, Reddit has been the subject of various studies on extremist online communities and the moderation actions taken against them [9, 25, 56, 75, 103], making it an ideal platform to understand the tankie community.

#### 3.1 Identifying Tankie Subreddits

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first large-scale data-driven study to examine tankies. While previous research [46, 126] *does* mention tankie subreddits r/tankie and r/tankies, they both have relatively few subscribers (42 and 213 at the time of this writing, respectively). We therefore start from scratch and create our own set of tankie subreddits.

We begin by searching for the terms “tankie” and “tankies” on Reddit, from which we discovered *r/InformedTankie*, which has 13.8K members. Via a qualitative analysis, it is quite clear that *r/InformedTankie* serves as a sort of hub for tankie users, with resources and information related to the tankie ideology. For example, *r/InformedTankie*’s banner provides a definition of tankies that aligns with Petterson’s description (Section 2):

For those who aren't aware of what "tankie" means, its context has culturally changed in the online left from meaning people who support the USSR sending tanks into Hungary to crush the fascist coup, to being an umbrella term for communists in general, especially Marxist-Leninists who defend and/or support the Actually Existing Socialist (AES) countries.

The banner also includes a list of eight "Allied Subreddits." Via manual inspection, we find that four of them (r/Genzedong, r/sendinthetanks, r/asktankies, and r/BunkerTube) express support for so called AES countries as well as describing themselves as communist (specifically, "Marxist" or "Marxist-Leninist") in their banners. The remaining four subreddits are related to the more general Marxist/Marxist-Leninist perspective rather than being specifically tankie related.

To discover additional tankie communities, we take a snowball sampling strategy. Starting from r/InformedTankie, we recursively look for additional subreddits linked to in banners that fit with Petterson's description as well as the definition from r/InformedTankie. The search stops when we no longer encounter any additional tankie subreddits within the next three hops. This network includes one additional tankie subreddit, r/GenZhou.

Next, we build a simple crawler that recursively collects the names of any subreddits listed in the banners of the subreddits we have so far collected, stopping when we discover no new subreddits. This results in a "reference network" of 21,161 subreddits.

Because our manual seeding might have missed other tankie subreddits, we make one additional attempt to identify new ones. Since tankies position themselves within the larger ideology of communism, we create a subgraph of our reference network composed of the shortest paths between our six tankie subreddits and r/communism, pinpointing the most directly connected subreddits. The resulting subgraph has 18 nodes (i.e., subreddits) and 19 edges, but does not contain any additional tankie subreddits.

In the end, our reference network contains 21,161 nodes and 114,962 edges, where an edge is created if a subreddit includes a link to another subreddit in its banner. Table 1 presents the total number of posts (submissions + comments), total number of authors, and the dates of the earliest and the latest posts for our six tankie subreddits.

To get a better understanding of the prominence and connectivity of the tankies subreddits in our reference network, we compute three different network measures, in-degree, out-degree, and PageRank. This way, we aim to get a better insight into the online behavior and interactions of tankies:

- **In-Degree:** Number of edges pointing to a node from other nodes.
- **Out-Degree:** Number of edges a node pointing to other nodes.
- **PageRank:** Quantifies the structural importance of a node by ranking it based on the relative importance of its inbound edges.

We also provide additional information about the subreddits linking to the tankie subreddits in our reference network in Tables 7 and 8 in the Appendix.

**r/GenZedong** is the most popular tankie subreddit we find, with nearly 1.3M posts created by 50K authors. With a first post date in July 2019, it is also the oldest tankie subreddit we discover. r/GenZedong itself does not link to any subreddit, and thus has zero out-degree in our reference network graph. On the other hand, it has a 0.00006 PageRank score, making it the second-highest ranked tankie subreddit. As additional evidence that tankies' are indeed supporters of AES countries like China, we note that a Taiwanese nationalist subreddit links to r/GenZedong, describing its members as "Communist Bandits." Due to spreading misinformation, r/GenZedong was quarantined by Reddit on March 23, 2022 [99]. A Previous study [86] on 2021 Cuban Protests found that r/GenZedong supports Cuban regime while condemning those who oppose it.

**r/sendinthetanks**, with 42,813 posts from 5,603 authors, and an earliest post date of March 2020, is the second most popular tankie subreddit in our dataset. Besides leftist subreddits, we find r/Enough\_VDS\_Spam (a subreddit dedicated to defending Vaush, a libertarian socialist streamer [102]) links to this subreddit under the heading “Sources of Cringe.” This is an early indication of polarization between tankies and some far-left communities. Despite its popularity, r/sendinthetanks has the second lowest PageRank score of our tankie subreddits. One possible reason for this could be the content and focus of the subreddit. While other tankie subreddits may be more centered on promoting certain ideologies or agendas, r/sendinthetanks may be more geared towards discussion and debate among its members. This could lead to a lower PageRank score, as it is not as actively linked to or referenced by other subreddits.

**r/InformedTankie**, the third most popular tankie subreddit, has 29,242 posts from 3,697 authors dating back to March 2020. It is listed by r/Sino as a subreddit that can be crossposted from, likely indicating a pro-China bias among its members. Our findings show that r/InformedTankie has the highest in-degree and PageRank scores, as well as the second highest out-degree score of tankie subreddits, which supports our previous hypothesis that it serves as a hub for the tankie community.

**r/GenZhou** is the fourth most popular tankie subreddit, with 28,606 posts from 3,620 authors since December 2020. r/GenZhou refers not only to leftist subreddits, but also subreddits that are ideologically *opposed* to tankies (r/tankiejerk, r/askaconservative, r/centrist, and r/nato) as well as debate subreddits (r/answers and r/PoliticalDiscussion). One explanation might be that r/GenZhou could be pointing these communities to their user-base to call for support in certain discussions. We also find r/GenZhou referring to r/AskARussian, which might reflect a pro-Russian leaning. Reddit banned r/GenZhou on April 4, 2022 [98] for “creating or repurposing a sub to reconstitute or serve the same objective as a previously banned or quarantined subreddit” (i.e., ban evasion).

**r/asktankies** is the fifth most popular tankie subreddit with 6,678 posts from 937 authors since January 2021. It is a Q&A subreddit in which questions are answered by tankie users.

**r/Bunkertube** is the least popular tankie subreddit, with only 12 posts from 5 authors since November 2020. It has the lowest in-degree, out-degree, and PageRank scores among tankie subreddits.

### 3.2 Identifying Ideology Subreddits

To understand the positioning of tankies within the larger ideology spectrum, we initially need to pinpoint prominent ideological subreddits, specifically those situated to the left of center. To accomplish this, we employ a list [97] previously utilized for identifying ideologically slanted subreddits [113]. Subsequently, we carry out a comparative analysis between communities from this list that demonstrate closeness to tankies and the tankies themselves.

This list is composed of 43 subreddits representing a range of ideologies, from r/Conservative to r/Anarchism, and numerous subvariants, e.g., r/AnarchoPacifism. We manually examine the list, identifying one non-English subreddit (r/piratenpartei), which we remove, along with subreddits that no longer exist or have become private. Further manual examination reveals that r/Communist, r/Anarchist, and r/feminisms are not the largest subreddits for their respective ideologies; therefore, we incorporate the largest subreddits explicitly dedicated to them (r/communism, r/Anarchism, and r/Feminism).

### 3.3 Post Collection

We first collect all posts from the six tankie subreddits we identify earlier in this section using the Pushshift API [14]. As previously noted, on March 23, 2022 r/GenZedong was quarantined due to spreading misinformation. Thus, we restrict our dataset to posts made from July 15, 2019 (the

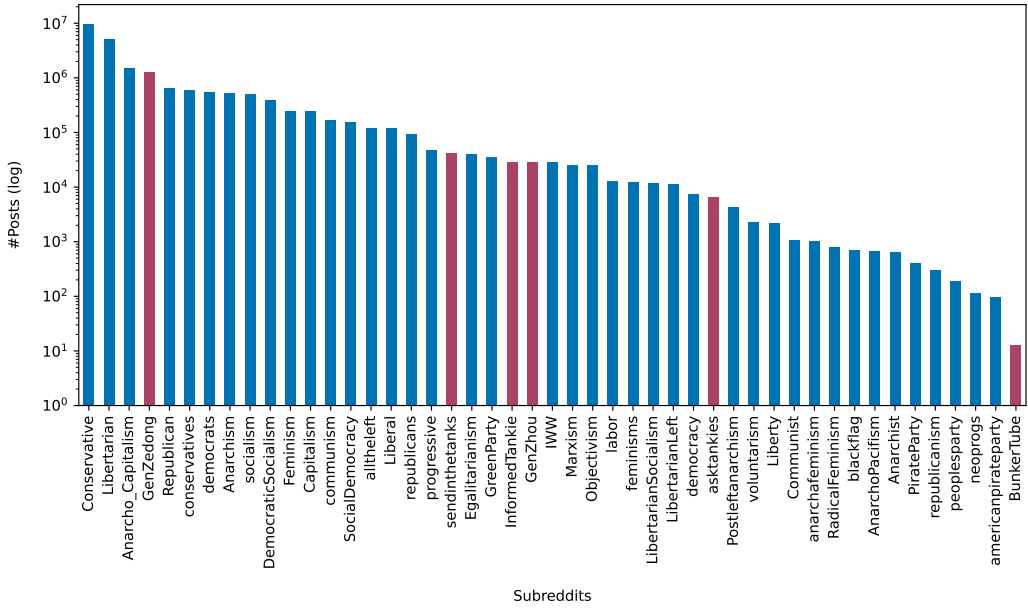


Fig. 1. Total number of post from each community between July 15, 2019 and March 23, 2022. Tankie subreddits specified with red.

earliest post in one of our tankie subreddits) to March 23, 2022. Next, we collect the posts from the additional 41 ideology subreddits we identified over the same time period. In the end, we collect 22,481,036 posts (1,380,628 from tankies, 21,100,408 from other ideologies). Figure 1 plots the total number of posts for each subreddit in our dataset.

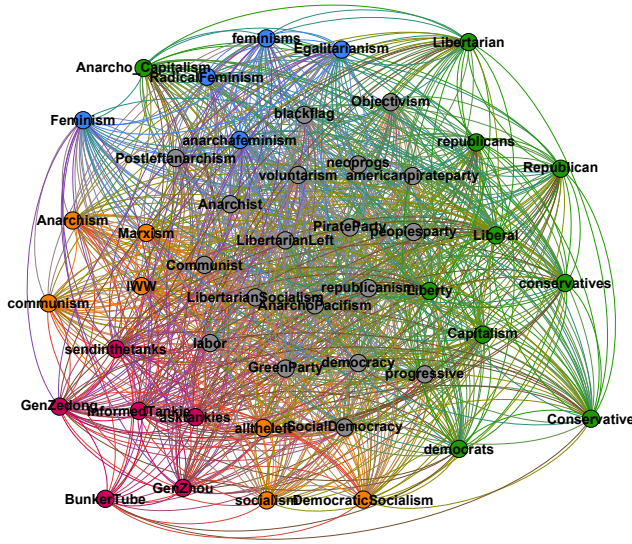
#### 4 USER-BASE ANALYSIS

In this section, our objective is to comprehensively examine the prominence of tankies within the far-left ideology spectrum and their interactions with other far-left communities. We build a graph of subreddits based on the users that post in them, perform community detection to find clusters with similar user bases as tankie subreddits, and examine user migration patterns between tankies and other communities in the cluster.

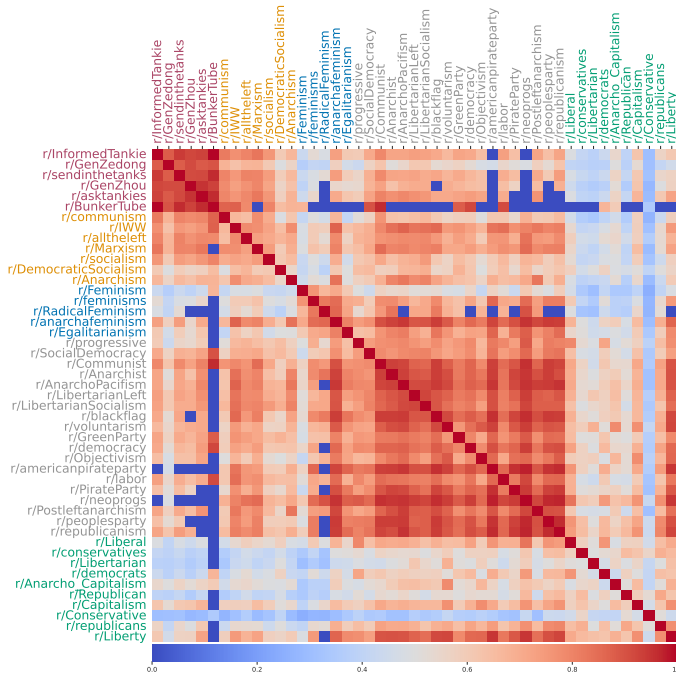
##### 4.1 Graph Construction & Community Detection

Our first step is to detect communities of similar ideological subreddits. To do this, we follow a methodology similar to that of Squire [117]. First, we construct a graph where each node represents a subreddit and the edges between the nodes represent the number of users they have in common. These edges are weighted using Bonacich’s method [20], which assigns a weight to each membership affiliation based on its relative strength within the network. This method takes into account the fact that an individual’s membership in one group may be influenced by their membership in other groups, which helps us to reveal underlying structural patterns that might not be apparent in unprocessed overlap data.

Next, we apply the Louvain community detection algorithm [19] to identify clusters of subreddits within the network. The algorithm, in a nutshell, works by optimizing a modularity measure, which quantifies the degree to which the network is divided into distinct communities. It is widely used



(a) Ideological subreddit network.



(b) Normalized user overlap of ideological subreddits.

Fig. 2. Relationship between user base ideological subreddits. Far-Left subreddits are colored red (with non-tankies colored light red in 2b), Leftists are colored gray, Capitalists are colored green, and Feminists are colored blue. A stronger red hue indicates a higher similarity between the user-bases of two subreddits.

and validated for identifying communities or groups of nodes within a network, particularly in



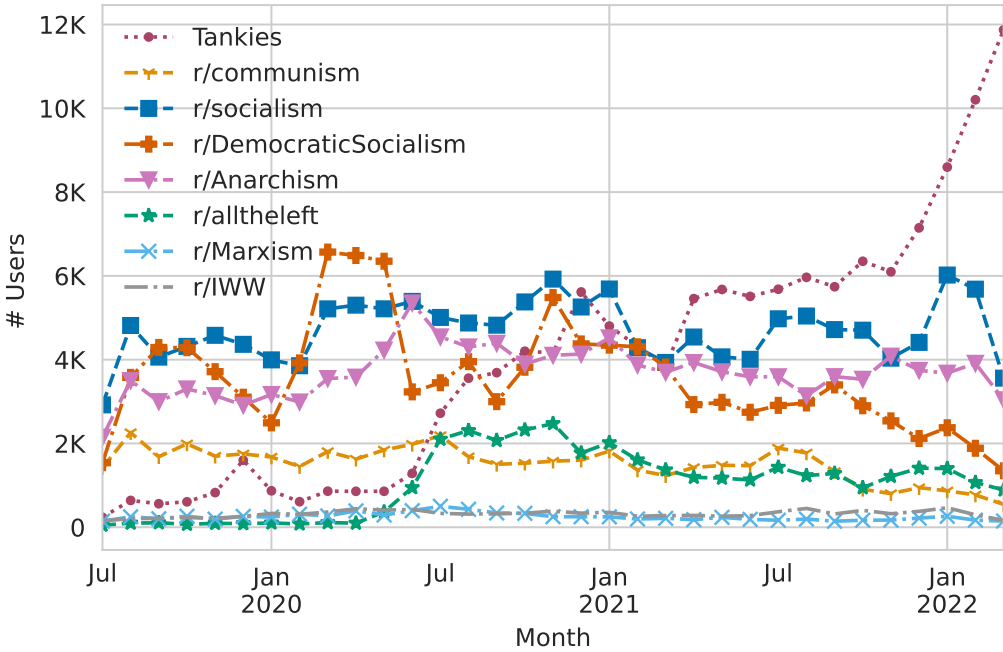


Fig. 3. Monthly active user counts of communities in the far-left community. Tankies outgrow the monthly active user counts of any other far-left community starting from April 2021.

social networks [42, 60]. We expect that if our subreddits do indeed represent different political ideologies, the structure of this graph will naturally lead to empirical clusters that align with the theoretical literature. To check if these clusters can be further divided, we recursively run the Louvain method on the identified clusters, recalculating the edges for each subcluster. This allows us to examine the spectrum of ideologies represented in our dataset.

**Results.** Figure 2a plots the resulting graph, where nodes are colored according to the community they were placed in, and the graph is laid out in space such that subreddits that share fewer common authors after normalization are farther apart from each other [63]. We next describe the clusters in more detail.

**Far-Left (Red Cluster).** March [77] defines far-left political parties as those that see themselves further left than social democracy. Tankies are indeed clustered with subreddits representing well-known far-left ideologies, e.g., r/communism, r/socialism, r/Anarchism, r/Marxism, and r/IWW (Industrial Workers of the World, a syndicalist labor union [28] representing nearly 9,000 workers across North America [62]). We also see r/alltheleft in this cluster, which has a similar extreme identity to the left similar to communist, socialist, and anarchist subreddits [78]. This cluster does not split into more clusters when we recursively apply the Louvain algorithm.

**Other Ideologies.** While the far-left communities were neatly formed in the first round of clustering, other ideologies ended up in a large cluster together. We thus apply the Louvain algorithm recursively until subclusters do not split more, as previously described. In the end, we find three coherent clusters that fit into ideologies that have been well covered in the theoretical literature:

- **Feminists (Blue Cluster):** This cluster includes feminist and feminist-leaning subreddits (r/feminism, r/feminisms, r/anarchafeminism, r/radicalfeminism, and r/egalitarianism).
- **Leftists (Gray Cluster):** This cluster includes left-leaning ideologies that are closer to moderate/center-left on the ideology spectrum (e.g., r/socialdemocracy, r/greenparty, r/progressive), as well as libertarian-left subreddits (r/libertariansocialism and r/libertarianleft) and some anarcho/anarchist-leaning communities (e.g., r/anarchopascifism, r/voluntarism, and r/republicanism).
- **Capitalists (Green Cluster):** This cluster includes liberal-leaning ideologies (e.g., r/liberal, r/democrats), anti-authoritarian capitalist ideologies (r/libertarian, r/anarchocapitalism), and conservative ideologies (e.g., r/conservative, r/republican) alongside r/capitalism.

When we look at how tankies and other ideology subreddits are laid out in Figure 2a, we see some meaningful positions. For example, we can see that r/democrats is positioned between r/Capitalism, r/progressive, r/SocialDemocracy, r/DemocraticSocialism, and r/Conservative. This may seem odd at first glance, but considering that these ideologies represent current US politics, it makes sense that they are positioned close to each other. Additionally, even though one of the closest subreddits to r/conservatives is r/liberal, they are still relatively distant. Tankie subreddits are also positioned on the periphery of the far-left cluster, highlighting their extremeness.

To get a different perspective on the relatedness of different ideological communities, we plot a heatmap in Figure 2b showing the edge values for each pair of subreddits in our ideological graph. From this heatmap, we can see that the subreddits in the far-left and leftist clusters are relatively well-connected compared to those in the capitalist community. Additionally, we observe that tankie subreddits are clearly much better connected with each other than other subreddits in their corresponding community. This is strong evidence that tankies are a *distinct* community within the far-left. With this in mind, we now move on to further understand how tankies are positioned within the far-left.

## 4.2 Community Growth

Although technically speaking, tankies are quite an old community, their tangible influence or presence within the broader context has historically been quite limited. To understand how things have changed, we first examine the growth of the tankies community on Reddit compared to other far-left communities by plotting the monthly active user counts (MAU) for each far-left community in our dataset in Figure 3. Starting in July 2020, the tankies community saw a large influx of active users, doubling in about six months and growing larger than the user base of r/communism. As of April 2021, tankies had more active users than any other far-left subreddits. MAU for tankies doubles again between November 2021 and March 2022, reaching 11,872 active users. r/socialism has the second highest MAU of far-left subreddits after tankies (3,559), which is 30% of tankies for that month. We also see a decline in monthly active users in every far-left subreddit *except* tankies starting in February 2022, which is the month Russia invaded Ukraine [65].

To understand the significance of the tankies community's growth, we run a Mann-Kendall Test [68, 76], a non-parametric test for analyzing monotonic trends in time series data, on our MAU time series. For  $\alpha = 0.01$ , we find tankies is the only community with a statistically significant increase in MAU ( $z > 0$  and  $|z| > z(1 - \alpha/2)$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). We also observe a strong positive correlation between tankies' MAU and time ( $\rho = 0.97$  and  $p < 0.01$ ) when applying Spearman's Correlation, indicating that tankies' user base has been steadily increasing over time. These results raise an important question: are these completely new users getting involved in far-left ideologies or is the user-base of existing far-left subreddits migrating to tankies over time?

### 4.3 User Migrations Over Time

Using the approach outlined by Ribeiro et al. [103], which tracks the movement of users across different Manosphere subreddits, we measure the extent of migration from a given source community to a destination community via two metrics:

**Migration Relative to Destination (MRD)**, which measures the degree to which migrations *into* a destination community can be attributed to a given source community:

$$MRD = \frac{S_{t-1} \cap D_t}{D_t}$$

**Migration Relative to Source (MRS)**, which measures the degree to which migrations *from* a source community can be attributed to a given destination community:

$$MRS = \frac{S_{t-1} \cap D_t}{S_{t-1}}$$

, where  $D_t$  is the number of authors posting in a given *destination* community in a given month  $t$  and  $S_{t-1}$  is the number of authors that posted in a given *source* community in the previous month.

In this analysis, we examine two distinct time periods: July 2019 (when r/GenZedong was founded) to June 2020 and July 2020 (when the tankies community overtook r/communism in terms of MAU) to March 2022. MRDs and MRSs from other far-left communities to tankies are presented in Figure 4.

During the first month after r/GenZedong was founded, 58.4% of the tankies user-base came from other far-left communities. On average, 34.3% of tankies MAU came from other far-left communities during the first period. However, during the second period, there was a clear decrease in migrations from other far-left communities to tankies, with a mean MRD of 17.3%. The highest migrations to tankies come from r/communism and r/socialism for most of the months in our dataset. During the first period, the mean MRDs from these communities to tankies are 15.8%. The second period also saw a decrease in MRDs from these communities, with mean MRDs of 5.7% and 8.4% respectively.

We find strong negative correlations between the monthly user counts of tankies and MRDs to tankies from r/DemocraticSocialism ( $\rho = -0.71$ ) and r/Anarchism ( $\rho = -0.71$ ). We also find moderate negative correlations for r/Marxism ( $\rho = -0.69$ ), r/communism ( $\rho = -0.68$ ), r/socialism ( $\rho = -0.64$ ), and r/IWW ( $\rho = -0.60$ ). In contrast, we find a moderate positive correlation for r/alltheleft ( $\rho = 0.49$ ). We do not observe any trend for this community's MRDs to tankies, and we find decreasing trends for MRDs from other far-left communities to tankies when applying the Mann-Kendall test.

For the MRSs of other far-left communities to tankies, a different pattern emerges. In the second time period, we find that the MRSs to tankies from these communities are higher. Instead of r/socialism, we find r/Marxism and r/communism have the highest MRSs to tankies for most of the months in our dataset's timeline. The mean MRSs for r/communism and r/Marxism are 6.4% and 7.5% in the first period, but they increase to 16% and 13.3% in the second period. This means that over 1 in 10 users from r/communism and r/Marxism continuously migrated to tankies during this period. This trend is also seen for r/alltheleft, except for three months. Our findings show that r/DemocraticSocialism and r/Anarchism have the lowest migrations to tankies, with mean migrations of 1% and 1.5% in the first period, and 2.4% and 2.6% in the second period, respectively.

In contrast to MRDs, we find positive strong correlations between the monthly user counts of tankies and MRSs from other far-left communities. r/socialism ( $\rho = 0.93$ ), r/alltheleft ( $\rho = 0.91$ ), r/DemocraticSocialism ( $\rho = 0.89$ ), and r/IWW ( $\rho = 0.72$ ) have strong correlations, while r/communism ( $\rho = 0.68$ ), r/Anarchism ( $\rho = 0.62$ ), and r/Marxism ( $\rho = 0.50$ ) have moderate positive

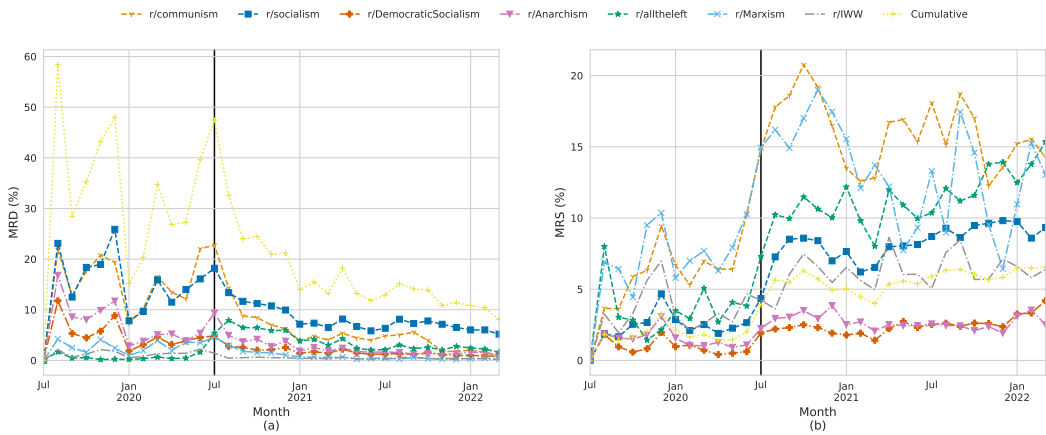


Fig. 4. Monthly migrations from far-left subreddits relative to tankie subreddits (a) and Monthly migrations to tankie subreddits relative to far-left subreddits (b). The black line shows the month tankies surpass the monthly user count of r/communism. The figure illustrates the rapid influx of members to the tankies from other far-left communities once it surpassed the user base of r/communism.

correlations. We also find increasing trends for MRSs from each far-left community to tankies, except for r/Anarchism.

We find all correlations are significant, with  $p < 0.01$  after adjustment for multiple testing using the Benjamini-Hochberg method [17].

**Takeaways.** Overall, we find that the user-base of tankies is definitively positioned on the periphery of far-left ideologies. When we examine the migratory patterns between tankies and other far-left communities, we find that the popularity of tankies increased among other far-left communities (except r/Anarchism), even though their proportional contribution to the user base of tankies decreased over time. This suggests that the initial tankies community started with a relatively small number of members from established far-left communities, and then rapidly siphoned off members from these other far-left communities once it exceeded the user base of r/communism.

## 5 CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this section, we examine the focus of tankies' discussions and compare them with other far-left communities using a variety of techniques. We first use topic analysis to understand *what* tankies are talking about. We then use named entity recognition to determine *who* tankies are talking about. Next, we compare tankies and other far-left communities with respect to language misalignment and conceptual homomorphisms.

### 5.1 What do tankies talk about?

We begin by determining *what* tankies talk about via topic modeling. We leverage BERTopic [45], a technique that uses pre-trained, transformer language models to create document embeddings, applies dimensionality reduction with UMAP [80], hierarchically clusters these embeddings with HDBSCAN [79], and finally creates topic representations with class-based TF-IDF. Unlike traditional topic modeling techniques (e.g., LDA), BERTopic derives topics based on *documents* rather than words, taking into account the context and semantics of words. Previous research [36] found that it performs better in terms of topic separation than LDA and another embedding-based topic modeling approach, Top2Vec [11]. After removing hyperlinks, and posts from "Automoderator" (a

no.	#Posts	Top 5 Words	%Posts	RTPR	no.	#Posts	Top 5 Words	%Posts	RTPR
1	15,360	genocide, xinjiang, camps, the, china	1.11	1	26	5,265	lol, wtf, real, holy, wait	0.38	1
2	12,056	communism, no, inshallah, is, the	0.87	1	27	5,256	ok, hope, wish, you, sorry	0.38	3
3	10,377	socialism, socialist, is, the, of	0.75	6	28	5,205	fucking, bot, fuck, sometimes, beep	0.37	4
4	10,320	korea, north, kim, dprk, korean	0.74	1	29	5,110	china, nukes, us, war, the	0.37	1
5	9,806	media, chen, falun, gong, news	0.71	1	30	4,861	joke, submission, guidelines, rsocialism, this	0.35	4
6	9,018	comrade, thanks, you, comrades, thank	0.65	3	31	4,595	cuba, cuban, castro, the, fidel	0.33	3
7	8,781	thank, thanks, you, nice, good	0.63	4	32	4,422	lgbt, trans, gay, the, and	0.32	1
8	8,464	fascism, fascist, fascists, the, is	0.61	1	33	4,166	vote, voting, caucus, party, green	0.30	6
9	7,834	ussr, soviet, the, art, of	0.56	2	34	4,153	source, uvredditdownloader, context, picture, where	0.30	1
10	7,777	capitalism, yes, why, capitalist, yep	0.56	5	35	4,085	cool, hell, yeah, beautiful, awesome	0.29	3
11	7,772	video, link, amp32amp32, feedback, dmca	0.56	1	36	4,040	thanks, hate, bro, remindme, sharing	0.29	2
12	7,694	lmao, mad, ah, ha, interesting	0.55	1	37	3,853	israel, jewish, jews, palestine, the	0.27	1
13	6,965	o7, translation, translate, salute, comrade	0.50	1	38	3,717	propaganda, ngl, western, is, its	0.26	3
14	6,594	fuck, what, oh, you, this	0.47	1	39	3,447	que, de, la, spanish, spain	0.24	4
15	6,542	she, her, aoc, shes, warren	0.47	3	40	3,295	biden, trump, joe, is, he	0.23	3
16	6,391	image, the, blue, transcription, red	0.46	1	41	3,120	exactly, elaborate, whats, what, happened	0.22	2
17	6,220	stalin, he, was, the, stalins	0.45	1	42	2,924	climate, change, the, nuclear, to	0.21	5
18	5,860	twitter, tweet, delete, this, account	0.42	1	43	2,850	religion, religious, christian, jesus, of	0.20	4
19	5,860	imperialism, imperialist, whataboutism, fascist, is	0.42	1	44	2,816	healthcare, insurance, insulin, the, for	0.20	4
20	5,815	police, cops, acab, the, to	0.42	5	45	2,769	landlords, rent, landlord, housing, to	0.20	6
21	5,775	flag, usavevideo, flags, the, prc	0.41	1	46	2,412	gun, guns, the, to, and	0.17	6
22	5,697	banned, sub, ban, pcm, rcommunism	0.41	2	47	2,320	vegan, animals, meat, veganism, animal	0.16	5
23	5,675	book, read, of, the, and	0.41	5	48	2,248	iww, union, organizing, the, to	0.16	5
24	5,455	ukraine, azov, russia, the, ukrainian	0.39	1	49	1,506	tax, taxes, pay, fair, the	0.10	7
25	5,362	tankies, tankie, fash, holocaust, the	0.38	2	50	1,170	amazon, bezos, stock, jeff, to	0.08	7

Table 2. Topics discussed by tankies, ordered by the number of posts tankies have in each topic. The total number of posts tankies have in each topic and their proportions, and the relative topic prevalence rank (RTPR) compared to other far-left communities is also shown. We find that tankies give more attention to state-level political events rather than social issues compared to other far-left communities.

bot which handles a variety of automated moderation tasks), we train our model using the default parameters. Due to the large number of clusters produced by the underlying technique of BERTopic, following [114], we hierarchically reduce these clusters to a range of 20-80 (incrementing by 10 at each step) and select the model with the highest coherence score; 50 in our case.

To analyze and compare the discussions of tankies' with other far-left communities, we introduce a metric called Relative Topic Prevalence Rank (RTPR), which is calculated by ranking each community within a topic relative to the percentage of posts in that fall within in that topic. A higher RTPR means that a given community focuses on a particular topic more than another community does, relatively speaking. By using RTPR, we can compare and interpret the discussions of tankies

within far-left communities, highlighting their unique focus areas and preferences. This metric allows us to better understand how tankies differ from other far-left groups in their discourse and ideological leanings.

**Results.** Table 2 presents the topics discussed by tankies ordered by the number of posts in each topic, as well as tankies' RTPR for each topic. We find that the most popular topic among tankies is the Uyghur (a Turkic ethnic group from Xinjiang) Genocide, accounting for 1.11% of all tankies posts. In addition, we see that topics related to Marxist/Leninist ideologies (socialism, communism, fascism, and capitalism) and two AES states (North Korea and USSR) in the top 10. When we look at the RTPRs, we find that they generally focus more on recent, state-level political events compared to other far-left communities. As we can see from the table, tankies have RTPR = 1 for the topics related to Uyghur Genocide (#1), North Korea (#4), Russian invasion on Ukraine (#24), China-US conflicts (#29), Israel-Palestine conflict (#37), communism (#2), fascism (#8), Stalin (#17).

On the other hand, tankies rank in the bottom-half when it comes to focusing social problems. We find tankies have RTPRs between 4-7 on topics related to police (#20), climate change (#42), healthcare (#44), housing (#45), guns (#46), unions (#48), and taxes (#49). Additionally, our analysis reveals that tankies have RTPRs 2-3 on topics related to USSR (#9), tankies (#25), and Cuba (#31). However, even though topics related to socialism and capitalism are among the top 10 most popular topics of tankies, they have RTPRs 6 and 5 for these topics, respectively. These results suggest that tankies prioritize discussions of state-level political events over core ideological issues and social problems that have long concerned the far-left community.

**Takeaways.** Our findings reveal that the predominant topic of discussion among tankies centers on the Uyghur genocide, which happens in an AES country, China. Tankies prioritize discussions of state-level political events over social issues, as indicated by their higher relative topic prevalence ranks (RTPRs) for topics, e.g., Uyghur Genocide, Russian invasion on Ukraine, and Israel-Palestine conflict. This is further supported by their lower RTPRs for social issues, e.g., police, climate change, healthcare, housing, gun control, unions, and taxes compared to other far-left communities.

## 5.2 Who are tankies talking about?

Although topic analysis provides us meaningful insights about the differences in the focus of discussion between tankies and other far-left communities, we are limited to the information we can collect from the words in the topic, and some topics contain multiple, opposing actors; e.g., we can not understand if tankies talk more about Russia or Ukraine in the related topic. Therefore, we next examine named entities used by far-left communities to gain a deeper understanding of the differences in their focus.

We extract named entities using the *en\_core\_web\_lg* model of the SpaCy library [5], which is trained on OntoNotes [59], clearNLP [1], WordNet [83], and Common Crawl [2] datasets. It has previously been used in studies on social media platforms and news articles [9, 88, 127].

**Results.** In Table 3, we present the top 20 named entities, their frequency, and the percent of posts they appear in for tankies. In the appendix, Table 9 shows the same information for other far-left subreddits. The most popular named entities tankies mention are related to China (China, Chinese, Mao), the United States (US, American, America, Americans, CIA, USA), the USSR (Stalin, USSR, Lenin), Russia, Ukraine, Nazis, and some numeric and date related named entities. We also observe similar entities being discussed on *r/communism*, *r/socialism*, *r/Marxism*, and *r/Anarchism*, with only small differences. Notably, Ukraine is only present in the most popular named entities of tankies. Consistent with our findings in Section 5.1, this likely indicates a focus on Russia-Ukraine relations and specifically the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Rank	Named Entity	#Posts	%	Rank	Named Entity	#Posts	%
1	China	81,115	5.87	11	Ukraine	13,606	0.98
2	US	48,809	3.53	12	Russian	12,622	0.91
3	Chinese	30,985	2.24	13	Two	11,490	0.83
4	One	25,123	1.82	14	CIA	10,801	0.78
5	Russia	23,183	1.68	15	Nazis	10,679	0.77
6	American	21,860	1.58	16	Americans	10,218	0.74
7	First	20,988	1.52	17	USA	9,650	0.69
8	America	18,943	1.37	18	Lenin	8,996	0.65
9	Stalin	14,529	1.05	19	Mao	8,780	0.63
10	USSR	13,611	0.98	20	Today	7,894	0.57

Table 3. Top 20 named entities of tankies.

When looking at the specific named entities, we see that tankies mention China at a higher rate than other far-left subreddits. Additionally, tankies mention Stalin nearly twice as often as Lenin. This is interesting because we find other far-left communities mention Lenin in similar or higher proportions compared to Stalin. As outlined in Section 5.1, tankies tend to focus more on topics related to China and Stalin compared to other far-left communities. These disparities show that the inclination of tankies towards China and Stalinism is a defining characteristic, which aligns well with Petterson’s description.

Finally, we compare the similarity of the most popular named entities of tankies and other far-left communities by using Rank Biased Overlap [128], which measures the similarity of two indefinite ranked lists by giving weight to top N ranks, where the ranked lists do not need to be conjoint. The results indicate that *r/communism* is the most similar to tankies in terms of named entity rankings, with a score of 0.74, followed by *r/socialism* (0.70), *r/Anarchism* (0.62), *r/alltheleft* (0.55), *r/Marxism* (0.53), *r/DemocraticSocialism* (0.39), and *r/IWW* (0.38), respectively.

**Takeaways.** The results of our analysis reveal that the most popular named entities mentioned by tankies are related to China, the United States, the USSR, Russia, Ukraine, and Nazis. Additionally, we find that tankies mention China at a higher rate and Stalin nearly twice as often as Lenin, compared to other far-left communities. Our findings demonstrate that the preference for China and Stalinism is a defining characteristic of tankies. Furthermore, our analysis reveals that Ukraine is among the most popular named entities of the tankies community, and not among the most popular of the other communities. This suggests that the topic of Russia-Ukraine relations is more relevant or important to tankies, or that this community’s members engage in more discussion on this topic than those of other far-left communities.

### 5.3 Misalignment Analysis

So far, we have discovered that tankies focus more on state-level political events and less on social issues and ideological principles than other far-left communities. In this section, we investigate the differences in word usage between tankies and other far-left communities.

Given the broad spectrum of beliefs represented in left-wing extremism, capturing their complexity with basic tools is a challenging task [67]. To overcome this challenge, we employ the concept of *alignment*. This involves mapping the word usage in tankies to that of other far-left communities via multidimensional word embeddings, thereby providing a deeper understanding of their unique characteristics.

**Aligning Multidimensional Word Embeddings.** Understanding the language usage in polarized communities is challenging due to their distinct vocabularies for identical concepts. E.g., Democrats and Republicans are political adversaries. Thus, a Democrat might say that “Republicans are America’s greatest threat” (and vice versa), making direct comparisons of their language less useful when it comes to polarizing topics. To address this, KhudaBuksh et al. [69] formulate the problem as a form of translation between two groups using the same natural language. While not every “translation” is as clear-cut as the previous toy example, this technique has seen refinement [82] to capture more complex, *multidimensional* aspects of ideological differences. As such, it emerges as an ideal tool for distinguishing disparities between tankies and other left-wing ideologies.

In a nutshell, we align two multidimensional word embeddings by creating a *bilingual* lexicon to anchor the alignment. We then use a translation function to project the embeddings from one community to another. If a word from a source community corresponds to a different word in a target community, we consider the words to be “misaligned.” We can further discover *conceptual homomorphisms* between communities, enabling us to identify equivalent words in the target community for unique words or slang used in the source community. This is accomplished by projecting the words from the source community’s vocabulary that are not in the vocabulary of the target community to target community’s vocabulary. This allows us to get a much deeper understanding of where tankies sit with respect to the rest of the far-left.

**Preprocessing and Training.** Following the same method as [82], we tokenize each comment for each far-left community corpus, remove formatting tokens and hyperlinks, make all characters lowercase, and common bigrams and trigrams into single tokens to catch the possible usage of organization names. To stabilize the word embeddings, we oversample sentences from non-tankie far-left subreddits until they reach the same size as tankies. We then train Word2Vec skip-gram models [81] for each far-left community using 100 dimensions and a maximum vocabulary of 30,000 words. To account for oversampling, we adjust the threshold for the number of times a word must appear - which is set to 5 for tankies - by multiplying it with the size increase factor for other far-left communities. We choose the top 5,000 words from the shared vocabulary of each community pair as “anchor words.” This is based on the findings of Milbauer et al.[82], who showed that this selection provides similar accuracy to using the entire shared vocabulary. To translate the embeddings between the communities, we employ the MultiCCA implementation from sci-kit-learn [90], as it gives the best accuracy.

**Discovering Misalignments & Conceptual Homomorphisms.** We look for misaligned and conceptually homomorphic word pairs (with tankies as the source community) that have a cosine similarity of more than 0.5, and categorize the pairs that reflect polarized meanings, informed by both the literature and our previously presented results. We exclude r/Marxism and r/IWW from our analysis due to the small number of posts and vocabulary of these communities (See Figure 1). We also exclude r/alltheleft due to lack of literature regarding this community. In the end, we find seven topics that tankies are misaligned with the at least one of r/communism, r/socialism, r/DemocraticSocialism, or r/Anarchism: 1) acceptance of CCP narratives, 2) Stalinist leaning, 3) acceptance of the Russian narrative in Ukraine, 4) anti-Zionist leaning, 5) pejorative terms to ideologies, 6) leaning towards state-sponsored media, and 7) US politics.

Below, we describe each of these in detail. In addition, just because two communities have misalignments and conceptual homomorphisms does not necessarily explain what those misalignments and homomorphisms mean, which is central to our goal of understanding tankies in relation to the far-left. To address this, we performed a small-scale qualitative analysis (see Appendix C.1) with a sample of posts containing misaligned words that inform our interpretations. We also



	r/communism		r/socialism		r/DemocraticSocialism		r/Anarchism	
Misalignment	CPC - CCP	.82	CPC - CCP	.80	Zionists - Jews	.68	Ultras - Tankies	.78
	Rioters - Protesters	.74	Rioters - Protesters	.79	Succdems - Liberals	.66	Anarkiddies - Tankies	.72
	Anarkiddies - Anarchists	.65	Trot - Trotskyists	.76	Rioters - Protesters	.62	Rioters - Protestors	.72
	Trots - Trotskyists	.65	LPR - Donetsk	.73	Zionist - Israel	.59	LPR - Donbass	.69
	Destalinization - Khrushchev	.64	Khrushchev - Stalin	.72	Bidens - Trumps	.59	Radlibs - Tankies	.69
	De-Stalinization - Khrushchev	.62	Succdems - Socdems	.72	Zionism - Israel	.56	CPC - CCP	.66
	Zionist - Israeli	.60	DPR - Donetsk	.66	RT - NYT	.53	Trotskyists - Stalinists	.64
	LPR - Donbass	.54	Anarkiddies - Anarchists	.64	Tiananmen Square - Riots	.52	Zionist - Israel	.62
	DPR - Donbass	.52	Reeducation Camps - Uyghurs	.60	Popularity Contest - Elections	.51	DPR - Donbass	.61
	Boarding Schools - Uyghurs	.52	Internment Camps - Camps	.56	Sleepy Joe - Biden	.50	Boarding Schools - Uyghur	.55
Conceptual	Reeducation Camps - Camps	.62	Isntreal - Israel	.60	Anarkiddies - Tankies	.63	Succ Dems - Socdems	.59
	Succs - Socdems	.61	De-stalinization - Khrushchev	.55	Trots - Tankies	.57	Anarchildren - Tankies	.53
	Anarkids - Anarchists	.53	Destalinization - Gorbachev	.55	Zelensky - Trump	.51	De-Stalinization - USSR	.53
Homomorphisms	Westoids - Libs	.53	Succ Dems - Socdems	.54	cgtn - cnn	.51	Libshits - Libs	.52
	Libshits - Liberals	.53	Anarchildren - Anarchists	.53	Succdems - Socdems	.50	Destalinization - Khrushchev	.52

Table 4. Discovered misalignment and conceptually homomorphic word pairs that reflect polarized meanings from tankies and r/communism, r/socialism, r/DemocraticSocialism, and r/Anarchism with their cosine similarities. We highlight pairs related to our main findings. Pink shows leaning toward accepting CCP narrative, lime shows leaning towards Stalinism, cyan shows leaning towards Russian support in Ukraine, green shows anti-Zionist leaning, gray shows leaning towards using pejorative terms to ideologies, orange shows leaning towards state-sponsored media, and unhighlighted pairs are related to differences of tankies on US politics.

performed a quantitative validation experiment (see Appendix C.2 for details) that further support our interpretations.

**Acceptance of CCP Narratives (Magenta).** Previously, we saw that the most popular topic tankies talk about is about the Uyghur Genocide and their most popular named entity is China. While it is possible that tankies may support the narrative of the CCP due to China being an AES country, as well as there being stories of r/GenZedong users attacking Uyghurs and promoting violence against them in the press [27], our previous analysis does not provide sufficient evidence to support this conclusion.

The first indication this is true from our misalignment analysis is tankies’ use of the Chinese government’s preferred nomenclature of Communist Party of China (CPC) [22, 73, 93] instead of the more commonly used western term CCP. Additional indication along these lines is how tankies are misaligned with respect to Uyghurs. There is substantial evidence that China detains Uyghur Muslims and sends them to so-called “political re-education camps,” which are rife with human rights abuses [61, 96, 134] up to and including evidence of genocide [53, 124]. This misalignment is demonstrated through boarding schools & Uyghurs (i.e., that the Uyghur detention camps are merely typical schools), internment camps & camps, and reeducation camps & camps misalignment and conceptually homomorphic pairs. Finally, our analysis reveals a marked discrepancy in the discourse of tankies when it comes to the classification of individuals engaging in acts of civil disobedience. This disjuncture is further complicated by the historical precedent of the CCP’s characterization of peaceful protesters as “rioters” [38], which may serve as an indication of tankies’ alignment with the CCP’s narrative. As we check the top 10 most similar words by cosine similarity to “rioters” in the embedding of tankies, we find Hong Kong and hk words. We also find a Tiananmen Square & riots misalignment pair.

**Stalinist Leaning (Lime).** Tankies, as defined, have a tendency towards Stalinism (see Section 2). However, according to the definition provided by the subreddit r/InformedTankie, they primarily identify as Marxist-Leninists. So far, our previous analysis shows that tankies tend to focus more on topics related to Stalin and mention Stalin more frequently than Lenin in comparison to other

far-left communities. Here, we identify several misaligning and conceptually homomorphic pairs that suggest a greater level of support for Stalinism among tankies. For example, we see misalignment in de-Stalinization & Khrushchev, destalinization & Khrushchev, Khrushchev & Stalin, and destalinization & Gorbachev pairs. Nikita Khrushchev was General Secretary of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) after Stalin and is known for his de-Stalinization efforts [40, 66]. On the other hand, Mikhail Gorbachev is considered a successor of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization efforts [66]. For r/Anarchism, de-Stalinization & USSR is a conceptually homomorphic pair, which is meaningful when we consider the history of Anarchists in Soviet Gulag Camps [29, 84].

We also find trot & Trotskyists, trots & Trotskyists, trots & tankies, and Trotskyists & Stalinists misalignment pairs. Interestingly, leading additional credence to tankies' Stalinist leaning, "trot" is a pejorative term used for Trotskyists, which was originally used by USSR-supporting elements during Stalin's reign [3, 120].

**Acceptance of the Russian Narrative in Ukraine (Cyan).** The support of tankies for the hardline Soviet era extends to Russia's current authoritarian regime's actions. We find that tankies are more accepting of the chosen nomenclature from the self-proclaimed republics in Ukraine's Donbass region, Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), which were explicitly recognized by the Russian government and used as *casus belli* for the 2022 invasion of Ukraine [129]. This pattern is not unusual among the far-left; a previous study [49] found that over 22% of comments on r/socialism between January 1, 2022, and March 15, 2022, were associated with topics presented by Russian state media, with more than 100 comments explicitly discussing Ukrainian Neo-Nazis. For r/communism, r/socialism, and r/Anarchism, we see this leaning from LPR & Donbass, DPR & Donbass, LPR & Donetsk, and LPR & Donetsk misalignment pairs. We find that LPR and DPR are not in the vocabulary of r/DemocraticSocialism (and conceptually homomorphic pairs regarding LPR and DPR were off-topic). This might be because the focus of r/DemocraticSocialism is more on US politics than AES and Russia - Ukraine war (see Figure 9). However, we see anti-Ukraine leaning of tankies from Zelensky & Trump conceptually homomorphic pair between tankies and r/DemocraticSocialism.

**Anti-Zionist Leaning (Green).** USSR had anti-Zionism efforts since its establishment [112], and today's far-left anti-Zionism is showing similarity with USSR's anti-Zionist campaigns [123]. We can see tankies have more leaning towards anti-Zionism from Zionist & Israeli, Zionists & Jews, Zionist & Israel, Zionism & Israel, and isntreal & Israel pairs. These pairs show that tankies simplify the complexity and diversity of Jewish identity and also the establishment and development of the State of Israel. Furthermore, this usage of Zionism disregards the historical and ongoing discrimination that non-European Jews have faced within Israel [115]. It also ignores the fact that not all Jews or Israelis support the Zionist movement and the state of Israel [71, 115]. As we find later in Section 5.4, tankies have the most proportion of posts with high identity attack against Jews in the far-left community.

**Pejorative Terms to Ideologies (Gray).** We find tankies tend to refer to other ideologies with pejoratives. E.g., anarkiddies, anarchildrem, and anarkids instead of anarchists, succdems, succ dems, and succs instead of socdems, and westoids and libshits when referring to liberals. We also find ultras & tankies and radlibs & tankies pairs. Considering tankies is a pejorative term used by other ideologies, this finding means that tankies use ultras and radlibs in a pejorative way, similar to the Democrats v. Republicans example.

**Leaning Towards State-Sponsored Media (Orange).** We find RT & NYT and CGTN & CNN pairs between tankies and r/DemocraticSocialism. CGTN and RT are media organizations that receive direct support from their respective governments; CGTN is controlled by the Chinese government, while RT receives funding and backing from the Russian government [37, 85]. A previous study [48]

Community	Toxicity	Severe Toxicity	Identity Attack	Profanity	Threat	Insult
Tankies	8.02	1.90	2.00	9.03	2.10	4.90
r/communism	2.53	0.57	0.60	3.15	0.65	1.74
r/socialism	4.41	1.00	0.93	5.59	1.26	2.51
r/DemocraticSocialism	2.64	0.34	0.22	2.45	0.26	1.42
r/Anarchism	6.63	1.65	1.38	8.48	1.81	3.73
r/alltheleft	9.63	3.81	1.42	10.74	1.69	6.92
r/Marxism	1.98	0.46	0.36	2.47	0.36	1.66
r/IWW	4.62	0.99	0.37	6.03	0.70	2.62
Reddit Sample	1.65	0.04	0.04	1.70	0.02	0.23
Mean (Far-Left except Tankies)	4.63	1.26	0.75	5.56	0.96	2.94

Table 5. Fractions of high perspective scores for each far-left community. We also include the high perspective score frequencies for the Reddit sample for comparison.

that involves RT and CGTN found that Russian and Chinese news outlets frequently employs “conflict” or “crisis” to refer Russian invasion of Ukraine, while Western news outlets typically use “war” and “invasion.” As we find later in Section 5.5, tankies have the highest proportion of sharing new outlets from China and Russia, and have the least proportion for news outlets from western democracies.

**US Politics (No Highlight).** We find that tankies frequently discuss Joe Biden, displaying a similar focus as r/DemocraticSocialism users have on Donald Trump. This tendency can be observed through the usage of phrases like “Bidens & Trumps” and “Sleepy Joe & Biden.” Additionally, the anti-democratic leaning of tankies is evident from their discussions on topics such as “popularity contest & elections.”

**Takeaways.** Analyzing the level of the usage of words between tankies and r/communism, r/socialism, r/DemocraticSocialism, and r/Anarchism allowed us to quantify and expand the literature on the attributes of tankies. We find that tankies are more accepting of CCP narratives and lean more towards Stalinism compared to these subreddits. They are also more likely to accept Russia’s narrative on Ukraine and show a stronger inclination towards Anti-Zionism. In addition to these ideological preferences, tankies tend to use pejorative terms when discussing ideologies and have a higher preference for state-sponsored media, particularly when compared to users in the r/DemocraticSocialism subreddit. Furthermore, tankies demonstrate less support for Joe Biden than those in the r/DemocraticSocialism community.

By understanding these distinct tendencies, our findings contribute to the existing literature on tankies and offer a deeper understanding of their communication styles and ideological leanings within online communities.

## 5.4 Toxicity Analysis

In this section, we use Perspective API models to compare the online behavior of tankies and other far-left communities.

**Perspective API.** The Perspective API [92] is a widely used [9, 12, 26] tool for measuring toxicity. Although it has limitations, e.g., there are issues of bias and questions of performance when encountering conversation patterns that it was not trained on, at scale it provides a decent measure for comparison between online communities. The API provides six production models: 1) TOXICITY, 2) SEVERE\_TOXICITY, 3) INSULT, 4) IDENTITY\_ATTACK, 5) THREAT, and 6) PROFANITY (See [91] for full details on the models). We consider a threshold of 0.8, defined as “high” for the

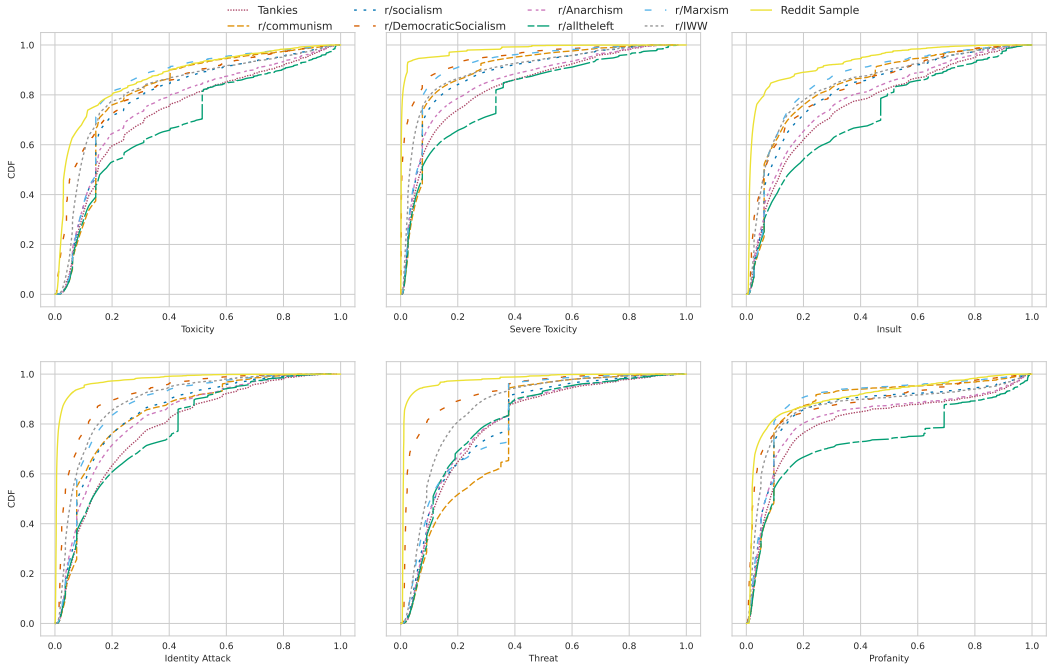


Fig. 5. CDF of Perspective API attributes of the far-left cluster. Tankies have the highest proportion of high scores for identity attack and threat among far-left communities and the second-highest for toxicity, severe toxicity, insult, and insult behind r/alltheleft.

SEVERE\_TOXICITY scores by Hoseini et al. [57]. To have a baseline for the comparisons, we sample 0.5% of the Reddit posts during the dataset’s timeline, which accounts to more than 36 M posts.

**Results.** Figure 5 shows the cumulative distribution functions (CDFs) for each model within the far-left cluster. Our analysis reveals that tankies tend to have higher scores than other far-left communities (excluding r/alltheleft) for all Perspective API models. Additionally, all far-left communities have higher Perspective API scores than the baseline Reddit sample.

Specifically, tankies have the highest proportion for both scores  $\geq 0.5$  and high scores (i.e., scores  $\geq 0.8$ ) for IDENTITY\_ATTACK and THREAT, and second highest for the remaining models. Table 5 shows that tankies have nearly twice as many high scores than the mean of other far-left communities.

We confirm that the score distributions for each model are significantly different between tankies and other far-left communities using a 2-sample KS test ( $p < 0.01$  for all after adjustment for multiple testing using the Benjamini-Hochberg method). These results indicate that tankies tend to make posts with higher levels of toxicity, insult and profanity compared to other far-left communities, excluding r/alltheleft. Tankies also tend to make posts with more identity attacks and threats than all other far-left communities.

Next, we examine the named entities in tankies’ posts that have high Perspective API scores by removing any named entities that appear fewer than 100 times. In Table 6, we present the top 10 named entities ranked by the fraction of posts that mention the entity and score high across all Perspective models. For all models except IDENTITY\_ATTACK, the most commonly mentioned named entities are primarily related to the US (e.g., Amerikkans, Yankee, Charlotte, Qanon),

Toxicity			Severe Toxicity			Identity Attack		
Named Entity	%High	%Posts	Named Entity	%High	%Posts	Named Entity	%High	%Posts
Stupidpol	51.93	0.017	Facist	8.06	0.008	Muslims	41.80	0.232
Mayo	23.12	0.011	Yankee	7.78	0.017	Jews	34.03	0.138
Ceausescu	23.00	0.008	Stupidpol	7.72	0.017	Muslim	28.90	0.210
Amerikkkans	18.86	0.007	Amerikkka	7.49	0.122	Asians	28.20	0.071
Jack	17.52	0.033	Mayo	7.48	0.011	Arabs	25.0	0.044
John Oliver	17.41	0.016	Blinken	6.86	0.007	Islam	24.59	0.090
Yankee	17.21	0.017	Yankees	6.45	0.011	Hindus	24.19	0.008
Elon	16.56	0.011	Erdogan	6.42	0.018	Mexicans	24.01	0.014
Kyle	16.54	0.009	Michael	6.34	0.018	Africans	23.73	0.034
ACAB	16.16	0.015	Chechens	5.82	0.013	White	23.42	0.008

Profanity			Threat			Insult		
Named Entity	%High	%Posts	Named Entity	%High	%Posts	Named Entity	%High	%Posts
Charlotte	33.33	0.009	Ceausescu	15.92	0.007	Stupidpol	66.09	0.014
Stupidpol	27.46	0.017	Minecraft	14.54	0.048	Ceausescu	22.12	0.008
Jack	26.92	0.033	6 Million	14.37	0.012	Four Years	19.00	0.008
24 hours	26.08	0.008	Chechens	13.22	0.013	Daniel Dumbrill	17.18	0.009
Mayo	23.80	0.011	24 Hours	12.17	0.008	Mayo	17.00	0.008
Qanon	21.39	0.015	Rosa	12.08	0.020	Joe Rogan	17.00	0.010
Brasil	20.51	0.015	Inshallah	10.06	0.057	Facist	16.93	0.008
Alex Jones	20.46	0.012	Iraqis	9.86	0.022	Serpentza	16.80	0.009
All day	20.35	0.032	Romanovs	9.67	0.008	Blinken	16.66	0.007
Elon	20.24	0.011	Kulaks	9.38	0.017	Amerikkkans	16.03	0.007

Table 6. Top 10 Named Entities of tankies that appeared more than 100 times with high perspective scores with their high score frequencies and proportions in total number of posts of tankies.

public figures and politicians (e.g., John Oliver, Elon Musk, Kyle Rittenhouse, Anthony Blinken, Erdogan, Alex Jones, Joe Rogan), or countries/nationalities (e.g., Chechens, Brasil, Iraqis). For the IDENTITY\_ATTACK model, the most frequently mentioned named entities are typically religious or ethnic groups. Tankies appear to primarily target Muslims and Jews, with 41.80% and 34.03% of the posts mentioning these groups having high IDENTITY\_ATTACK scores; the highest proportion of high IDENTITY\_ATTACK scores for Muslims and Jews of any far-left community we analyze. Furthermore, we observe that tankies attack the identities of Asians, Arabs, Hindus, Mexicans, Africans, and Whites in more than 20% posts mentioning these identities.

**Takeaways.** Our analysis shows that tankies have the highest proportion of high scores for IDENTITY\_ATTACK and THREAT among far-left communities, and they have the second highest proportion of high scores for TOXICITY, SEVERE\_TOXICITY, PROFANITY, and INSULT, behind r/alltheleft. Although our findings indicate that US politics are not the primary focus for tankies, they still express strong opinions about US-related events, conspiracy theories, politicians, and public figures. Finally, we observe that tankies frequently target Muslims and Jews in their posts.

## 5.5 Domain Analysis

In Section 5.3, we find that tankies tend to use Chinese and Russian news outlets in a similar way to how r/DemocraticSocialism uses US news outlets. Based on this discovery, we compare the sharing of news outlets by far-left communities according to “state types” (a more detailed analysis can

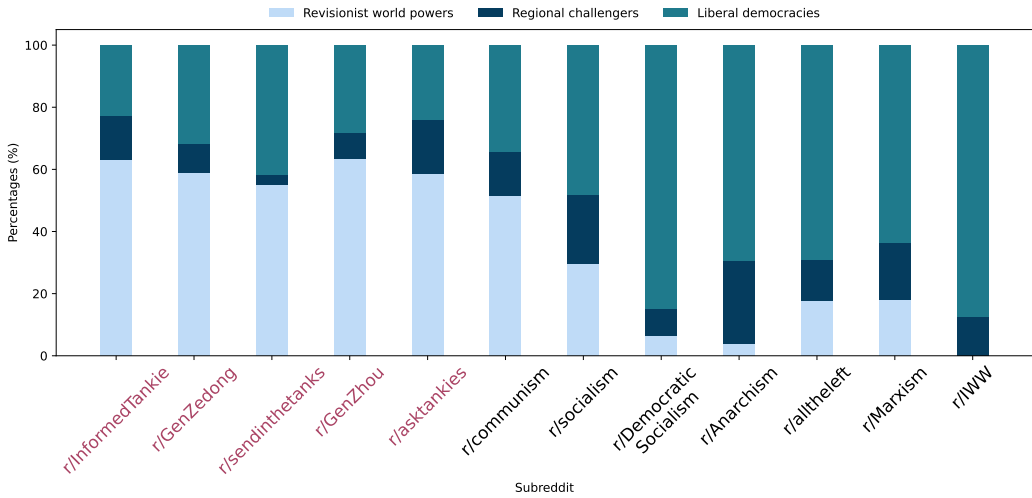


Fig. 6. Proportions of sharing amount of news outlets from Revisionist World Powers, Regional Challengers, and Liberal Democracies from each far-left community. Tankie subreddits are specified with red. We find that tankies have the highest proportion for sharing new outlets from “Revisionist Super Powers.”

be found in Appendix D). We use a set of selected outlets to represent three geopolitical groups identified by Xu et al.[130]:

- (1) *Revisionist World Powers*: 17 different state-sponsored or state-controlled news outlets from China and Russia.
- (2) *Regional Challengers*: 6 different news outlets from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Venezuela, and Turkey.
- (3) *Liberal Democracies*: 9 different news outlets from Korea, UK, USA, Germany, EU, France, Israel, and Japan.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the three geopolitical groups among tankie subreddits and other far-left communities. On average, tankies share outlets from “Revisionist World Powers” 60% of the time, while r/communism shares them 51.3% of the time. Other far-left communities, in order of decreasing sharing frequency, are r/socialism (29.7%), r/Marxism (18.1%), r/alltheleft (17.8%), r/DemocraticSocialism (6.3%), and r/Anarchism (3.7%), with r/IWW not sharing any. While tankies are the top far-left community in terms of sharing outlets from “Revisionist World Powers,” they rank last in terms of sharing outlets from “Regional Challengers” and “Liberal Democracies,” with averages of 10% and 30%, respectively.

**Takeaways.** We examine the domains that reflect the characteristics of tankies and compared their sharing of news outlets with other far-left subreddits. We find that tankies have a higher proportion of shared news outlets from “Revisionist World Powers,” which comprise state-sponsored or state-controlled outlets from China and Russia, compared to their similar ideological counterparts. In contrast, they have the lowest proportion of shared news from “Regional Challengers” and “Liberal Democracies.” Given the history of misinformation and disinformation from news outlets in Russia and China [13], these findings may suggest that tankies prefer sources of misleading information compared to other far-left communities.

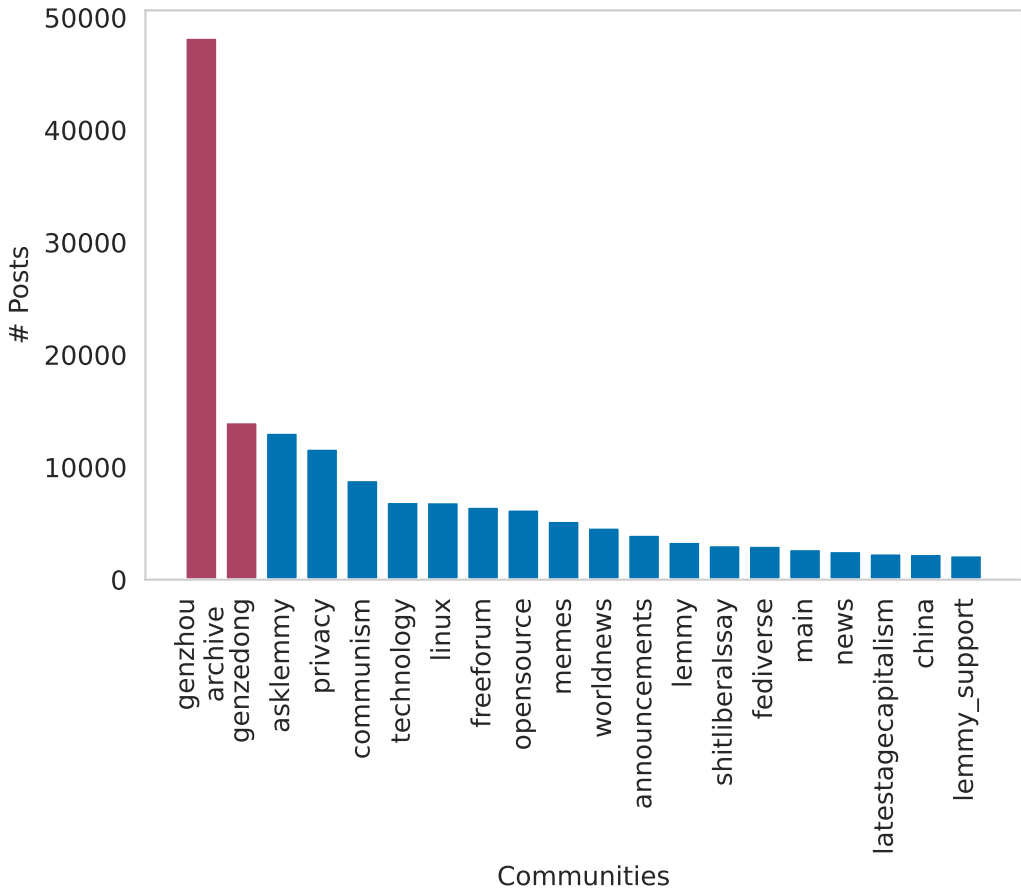


Fig. 7. Top 20 communities of lemmygrad.ml. Communities related to tankie subreddits are colored as red.

### 5.6 Lemmygrad Analysis

Lemmygrad.ml is a Marxist/Leninist platform that resembles Reddit and is made up of various leftist communities. Our domain analysis, detailed in Appendix B, identified lemmygrad.ml as a prevalent domain among tankies. This leads us to examine the platform as a potential Reddit alternative of this community, particularly in light of recent bans on other platforms. Utilizing a custom crawler specifically designed for this platform, we collect a corpus of 242,370 posts from 1,744 communities spanning the period of April 20, 2019 to April 31, 2022.

Our findings (Figure 7), demonstrate the Lemmygrad.ml’s popularity among tankie communities. The most popular community, genzhouarchive (48,231 posts), being an archive of a tankie subreddit in our dataset, r/GenZhou. Additionally, the second most popular community on the platform, GenZedong, further solidifies the platform’s utility as a Reddit alternative for tankies.

**Monthly Posting Activity.** To investigate the impact of quarantines on the popularity of r/GenZedong and r/GenZhou on lemmygrad.ml, we analyze the monthly number of posts for the communities genzhouarchive, genzedong, and the entire lemmygrad.ml. Figure 8 shows that the quarantine of r/GenZedong in February 2022 led to a drastic increase in monthly posts, reaching a peak of

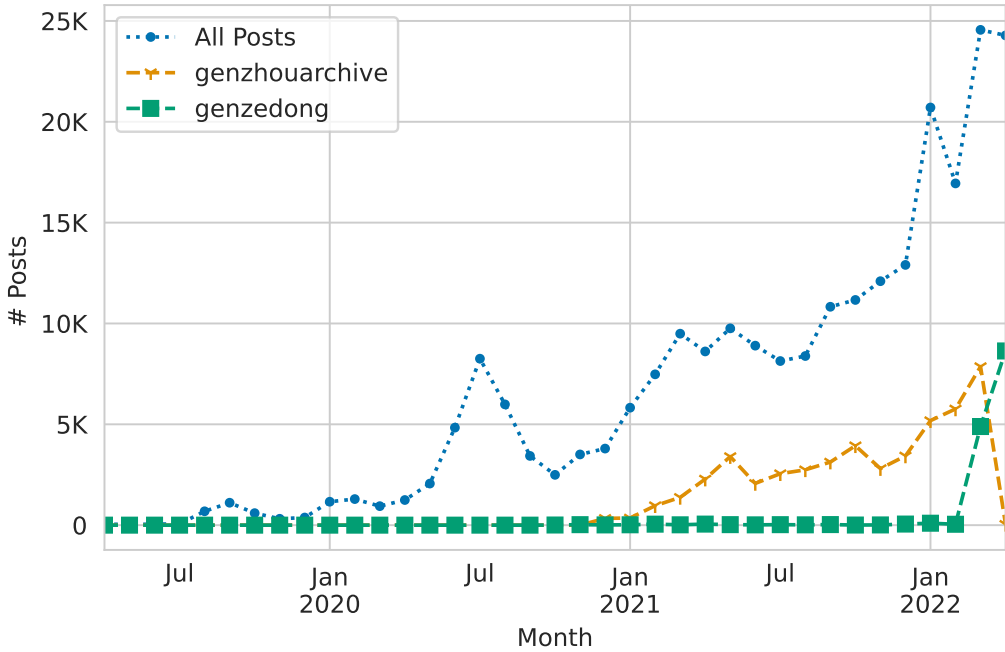


Fig. 8. Monthly total number of posts of genzhouarchive, genzedong, and all communities of lemmygrad.ml. Note that genzhou archive drop off after the ban on r/GenZhou since it is acting as an archive for this subreddit.

4,890 in March 2022. Conversely, as it is an archive community, the ban of r/GenZhou in April 2022 resulted in a significant decline in activity, with the total number of posts dropping from 7,862 to 41 in the subsequent month. Additionally, we observe a general increase in monthly posts on lemmygrad.ml, particularly in the months following the bans/quarantines. Our findings suggest that quarantines and bans have an impact on the popularity of communities on lemmygrad.ml.

**Monthly Perspective Analysis.** Ribeiro et al.[56] found an increase in toxicity after r/The\_Donald users migrated to thethedonald.win, as measured by Perspective API scores. Building on this, we perform a monthly analysis of high Perspective API scores on lemmygrad.ml.

As illustrated in Figure 9, we observe that the proportion of high scores for the TOXICITY, SEVERE\_TOXICITY, INSULT, IDENTITY\_ATTACK, THREAT, and PROFANITY models reaches its peak on lemmygrad.ml during the year of its founding, 2019. Notably, during 2019, when the platform had low monthly activity (a mean of 988 posts), we see more high Perspective API scores overall. However, in 2020 and 2021, we see the mean high scores for all perspective models more than halved. This could potentially be attributed to the presence of a more radicalized core group of users on the platform in its early months.

Interestingly, we find that in March and April 2022, despite having the highest number of monthly posts, the mean high scores for all perspective models reached their peak since 2020. This increase suggests that the platform migration of tankies led to an increase in toxicity among the tankie community on lemmygrad.ml.



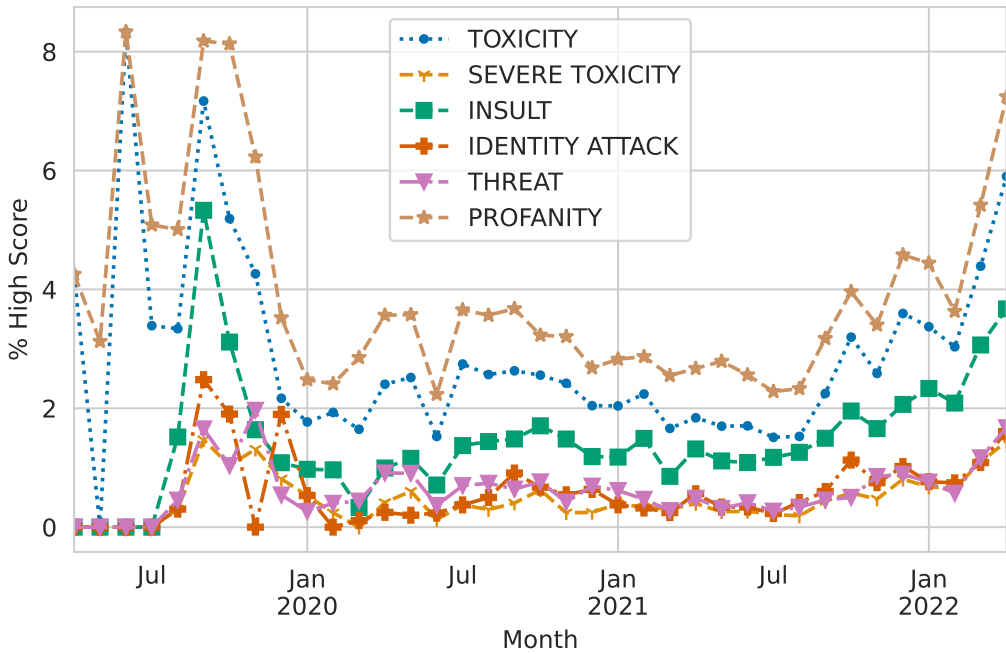


Fig. 9. Monthly proportions of high scores of lemmygrad.ml regarding Perspective API attributes.

**Takeaways.** We find that the user base of lemmygrad.ml consists largely of tankies. Our analysis shows that the top two communities on this platform are associated with tankie subreddits, r/GenZedong and r/GenZhou. Furthermore, our findings suggest that platform migration lead to an increase in toxicity of tankies, highlighting the importance of considering the potential impact of platform migration on online communities.

## 6 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this paper, we presented a data-driven analysis of the left-wing extremist community known as “tankies.” Although they have existed since the 1950s, when they supported hardline Soviet actions, more recently, tankies’ ideology has shifted to support so called “actually existing socialist countries,” including China, Russia, and North Korea. To better understand tankies, we collected over 1.3M posts from 53K authors across six subreddits. Among other things, we find that tankies are a clearly defined community positioned at the periphery of the larger far-left on Reddit. We also find that tankies show significant differences with respect to what and who they talk about. For example, tankies have consistent vocabulary misalignments and are more toxic than other far-left groups. Unlike other left-wing communities, tankies also talk much more about state-level political events as opposed to social issues. We further find that tankies responded to a deplatforming event by migrating a decentralized platform, resulting in a net increase in toxicity within the community.

### 6.1 Limitations

Tankies are almost completely unexplored in social media related work, and relatively unexplored in the broader literature when compared to more “mainstream” far-left ideologies like communism.

This raises some concerns with respect to our interpretations and our dataset itself. While our results are definitely in-line with what little literature exists on the topic, the name “tankies” has absolutely drifted from its original meaning. We rely in large part on the tankie community on Reddit’s self description of “tankie,” and although it aligns with recent use in the literature [94], it is worth recognizing that there is not a rich body of theoretical work for us to draw from when interpreting results.

Despite the robustness of our methodology, it is important to acknowledge that our analysis is dependent on the accuracy of third-party tools and resources utilized. As such, potential limitations and sources of error should be considered, particularly in light of the findings of Hoffman et al.’s evaluation of such tools [54]. Our results are ultimately bounded by limitations of the tools we employed, e.g., the Perspective API’s potential inaccuracies and biases in toxicity detection [58], Word2Vec’s lack of semantic understanding and limitations in capturing syntactic relationships [33], and BERTopic potentially generating more outliers than expected [36]. That said, considering that our analysis are inline with the theoretical literature as well as empirical results from other online extremists, we have high confidence that our main findings hold.

Our dataset also has a notable lack of far-right communities. For example, there is no representation of fascism or alt-right communities. While the major explanation for this is relatively simple (Reddit has aggressively removed far-right extremists and some right-wing oriented subreddits like *r/fascism* are private), it is definitely a caveat when we compare tankies to right-wing extremism in general.

## 6.2 Implications & future work

The major implication of our work is that the research community should (and must) broaden its focus when it comes to online extremism. While claims from the far-right (and more increasingly mainstream conservatives) characterizing leftist political movements like Antifa and Black Lives Matter as being dangerous extremists have mostly been unfounded, our results show that there is a growing movement of far-left extremists operating online. And although the overwhelming majority of extremist actors online have been right-wing, the literature is quite clear on how state-sponsored actors have played both-sides of the game, posing as leftists to foment dissent and polarization [21].

Many of our results indicate that left-wing extremists exhibit some of the same behaviors that make right-wing extremists such a danger to society. For example, the unwavering support for authoritative governments (Russia in particular), coupled with our results that show how quickly the tankies community grew by siphoning off users from other far-left communities, shapes a situation that looks a lot like the early days of the modern breed of far-right online extremists the research community has focused on so intently. With this in mind, we highly encourage future work to further explore this relationship. For example, instead of comparing tankies to other far-left communities, a fruitful path might be to directly compare tankies to right-wing extremists. In particular, understanding not just the similarities, but the differences between left-wing extremists and right-wing extremists can help us design better moderation systems and improve the overall governance of social media platforms.

Finally, from a more introspective point of view, our study exposes the need for some so called “intellectual diversity” in future research within this general problem domain. While the explosion in online extremism *has* mostly been on the right side of the political spectrum, the overall political leaning of researchers is on the left side of things [87]. It is unlikely that any conscious bias has led to the dearth in literature on left-wing extremism; that is almost certainly attributable to current world events. But, the rapid growth of the tankies community, the patterns of behavior that are similar to other extremist groups that have been involved in real-world violence, the effective use of

technology to evade moderation efforts, etc., are clear signals that researchers must pay attention to a radicalization pathway that likely includes some of our own ideological perspectives.

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## A DATA

	r/GenZedong	r/sendinthetanks	r/InformedTankie	r/GenZhou	r/asktankies	r/Bunkertube
Subreddits referred to	CommunismMemes	InformedTankie	CPUSA	asktankies	InformedTankie	InformedTankie
	Sino	ComradesInAmerica	ComradesInAmerica	ItaliaRossa	ItaliaRossa	
Subreddits referred by	GenHoChiMinh	Enough_VDS_Spam	BasedLibrary	GenHoChiMinh		
	ChunghwaMinkuo		Sino			
	WorkersStrikeBack					
	LeftieZ					
	InformedTankie					
			GenZedong	PoliticalDiscussion	InformedTankie	
			sendinthetanks	nato	GenZhou	
			52BooksForCommunists	communism101		
			CPUSA	answers		
			ComradesInAmerica	DebateCommunism		
			BunkerTube	AskARussian		
			asktankies	tankiejerk		
			BasedLibrary	askaconservative		
				socialism_101		
				centrist		

Table 7. Subreddits that are linked to Tankie subreddits in the identified reference network.

Subreddit	Definition
r/52BooksForCommunists	A book discussion page specifically for communists.
r/answers	A Q&A subreddit for the Reddit users.
r/askaconservative	A Q&A subreddit that Reddit users can ask (mostly political) questions to be aswered by conservatives.
r/AskARussian	A Q&A subreddit that Reddit users can ask questions to be aswered by Russians.
r/BasedLibrary	A discussion page specifically for books, videos, and images about communism.
r/centrist	A subreddit for the Reddit users who sees themselves at the center of the political spectrum.
r/ChunghwaMinkuo	A subreddit for anyone that supports Taiwan.
r/communism101	A subreddit dedicated for teaching communism to the Reddit users.
r/CommunismMemes	A place for sharing memes related to communism.
r/ComradesInAmerica	A subreddit for Marxist, Leninists, and Maoists in the US.
r/CPUSA	An unofficial subreddit dedicated to the Communist Party of USA.
r/DebateCommunism	A debate subreddit oriented around discussions related to communism and socialism.
r/Enough_VDS_Spam	A subreddit dedicated to defend Vaush, a libertarian socialist video streamer.
r/GenHoChiMinh	A Vietnamese Marxist/Leninist subreddit dedicated for the former president of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh.
r/ItaliaRossa	A subreddit for the Italian Marxist/Leninists.
r/LeftieZ	A communist leaning leftist subreddit centered around young Reddit users.
r/nato	A subreddit for discussing and sharing news related to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).
r/PoliticalDiscussion	A subreddit that Reddit users can discuss about politics.
r/Sino	A pro-China subreddit for any content relateed to China and Chinese.
r/socialism_101	A subreddit dedicated for teaching socialism to the Reddit users.
r/tankiejerk	A subreddit for criticizing Tankies from a leftist perspective.
r/WorkersStrikeBack	A socialist subreddit dedicated to support workers and their rights.

Table 8. Definition of the subreddits that are linked to Tankie subreddits in the identified reference network.

## B NAMED ENTITIES

Table 9 presents the top 20 named entities, their frequency, and the percentage of posts they appear in within far-left subreddits other than tankie subreddits.

## C MISALIGNMENT ANALYSIS

As mentioned in Section 5.3, we perform a small-scale qualitative analysis utilizing a sample of posts (20 from each community for each interpretation) containing misaligned/conceptually homomorphic word pairs to inform our interpretations. To further enhance the validity of our conclusions, we also implement a quantitative validation experiment using the SEVERE\_TOXICITY



r/communism			r/socialism			r/DemocraticSocialism			r/Anarchism			r/alltheleft			r/Marxism			r/IWW		
Named Entity	#Posts	%	Named Entity	#Posts	%	Named Entity	#Posts	%	Named Entity	#Posts	%	Named Entity	#Posts	%	Named Entity	#Posts	%	Named Entity	#Posts	%
China	7,157	4.15	US	17,172	3.33	Biden	13,821	3.45	One	13,263	2.56	US	2,328	1.91	Marx	3,297	12.91	IWW	2,932	10.2
US	5,635	3.27	One	12,362	2.40	Trump	11,000	2.74	First	11,879	2.29	Biden	2,188	1.79	Marxist	1,817	7.11	One	903	3.16
One	4,162	2.41	First	11,356	2.20	Bernie	10,281	2.56	US	10,038	1.93	One	2,016	1.65	One	1,203	4.71	First	678	2.37
First	3,959	2.29	China	10,491	2.03	US	8,616	2.15	Two	6,737	1.30	Trump	1,947	1.60	First	1,169	4.57	US	439	1.53
USSR	2,942	1.70	American	7,573	1.47	One	8,564	2.13	American	5,012	0.96	First	1,744	1.43	Two	754	2.95	Two	387	1.35
Marxist	2,895	1.68	Two	6,740	1.30	First	7,200	1.79	China	4,770	0.92	Democrats	1,430	1.17	Marxists	730	2.85	Solidarity	354	1.23
Chinese	2,649	1.53	America	6,578	1.27	democrats	7,116	1.77	Today	4,298	0.83	American	1,394	1.14	Lenin	670	2.62	Today	273	0.95
American	2,597	1.50	USSR	5,478	1.06	Two	5,916	1.47	America	4,164	0.80	America	1,272	1.04	US	588	2.30	1	219	0.76
Marx	2,333	1.35	Marx	5,470	1.06	America	5,881	1.46	2	3,325	0.64	Two	1,187	0.97	China	566	2.21	2	217	0.75
Two	2,331	1.35	Today	5,096	0.98	Republicans	5,758	1.43	Second	2,937	0.56	100%	1,168	0.95	Today	547	2.14	American	193	0.67
Stalin	2,295	1.33	Russia	4,675	0.90	American	5,316	1.32	1	2,864	0.55	China	994	0.81	USSR	475	1.86	GEB	161	0.56
Lenin	2,238	1.29	Cuba	4,457	0.86	Americans	3,720	0.92	Reddit	2,858	0.55	Republicans	942	0.77	Engels	474	1.85	Second	159	0.55
Today	1,956	1.13	Marxist	4,283	0.83	Republican	3,365	0.84	Trump	2,846	0.54	Second	780	0.64	Stalin	452	1.77	3	155	0.54
Cuba	1,837	1.06	Socialists	4,072	0.79	DNC	3,009	0.75	Russia	2,758	0.53	Bernie	748	0.61	1	447	1.75	Wobblies	151	0.52
America	1,761	1.02	Lenin	4,065	0.78	2	2,928	0.73	Marx	2,519	0.48	Americans	680	0.55	2	389	1.52	Amazon	145	0.50
Russia	1,653	0.95	Stalin	3,701	0.71	Democratic	2,922	0.72	Nazis	2,469	0.47	Obama	623	0.51	Second	337	1.32	DSA	131	0.45
Mao	1,592	0.92	Trump	3,666	0.71	Democrat	2,760	0.68	Anarchists	2,298	0.44	Today	621	0.51	3	284	1.11	Reddit	130	0.45
Soviet	1,532	0.88	2	3,600	0.69	Today	2,481	0.61	3	2,224	0.42	shitpisscum1312	595	0.48	American	282	1.10	America	128	0.44
Soviet Union	1,230	0.71	Chinese	3,322	0.64	1	2,331	0.58	USSR	2,007	0.38	Fucking cooldownbot	595	0.48	Russia	223	0.87	NLRB	124	0.43
Communist	1,224	0.71	Second	3,258	0.63	Obama	2,316	0.57	Biden	1,947	0.37	Russia	572	0.47	German	219	0.85	Biden	121	0.42

Table 9. Top 20 named entities of far-left communities other than Tankies.

model provided by Perspective API. These experiments aimed to validate our interpretation of the misalignment of word pairs related to: 1) acceptance of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) narratives, 2) Stalinist leaning, 3) acceptance of Russian narratives in Ukraine, and 4) anti-Zionist leaning.

In our analyses, we group the misaligning/conceptually homomorphic word pairs of each community. As an example, to validate our findings on the anti-Zionist leanings of tankies, we analyze the posts containing “Zionist,” “isntreal,” “Zionists,” and “Zionism” keywords for the tankies community, as well as the corresponding misaligning words for the other communities we analyze. Nonetheless, in cases where keywords possess polarized or disparate meanings, we partition them for specific interpretations within certain communities (e.g., when validating the Stalinist leaning of tankies, we do not put “Khrushchev” and “Stalin” in the same keyword list). Categories of our interpretations with the keywords used for each community can be seen from Table 10.

We do not validate our findings for pejorative terms to ideologies as we find tankies is the most toxic community among the communities we analyze (See Section 5.4). Similarly, we do not validate findings related to tankies’ leaning on state-sponsored media as our results reveal that tankies has the highest proportion of users sharing news outlets from “Revisionist World Powers,” which are generally known to be state-sponsored (See Section 5.5). We also do not perform further analysis regarding US politics, as the misalignment between tankies and r/DemocraticSocialism is the only substantial observation in our data.

### C.1 Qualitative Validation

Our analysis on the sampled posts (20 for each community and interpretation) suggests that tankies predominantly supports CCP, especially compared to the other far-left communities. We find many posts that show support for CCP and blames west for conducting anti-CCP propaganda – e.g.:

*The media is compelled to target the CPC, which often leads to its misrepresentation.*

During our analysis, we encounter posts that denies the Uyghur Genocide for each community with varying frequencies, while tankies primarily deny the occurrence of the genocide – e.g.:

*To me, boarding schools serve as schools for potential terrorists, and China’s approach seems more humane than the US’s.*

We also confirm that tankies mostly use “rioters” to define Hong Kong/Tiananmen Square protesters – e.g.:

*HK rioters are frikkin psychos.*

and,

*I won't dispute the Tiananmen Square massacre; rest in peace soldiers who died addressing the CIA-fueled unrest.*

We find tankies talk negatively about Trotskyists and de-Stalinization – e.g.:

*Khrushchev was a big time idiot when it came to de-Stalinization.*

Nevertheless, we observe mixed posts concerning Khrushchev. This could be attributed to the fact that, although tankies predominantly oppose de-Stalinization and criticize Khrushchev on this basis, they also exhibit sympathy for him as a former leader of the USSR who presided over the Soviet invasion of Hungary. We also find r/DemocraticSocialism use “tankie” as a pejorative term and show opposition to this community.

In our sample, we find numerous posts from tankies expressing support for the Russian invasion of Donbass – e.g.:

*Safeguarding DPR and LPR from Nazis financed by NATO is a positive action.*

In our analysis of the sampled posts from the other communities, we observe a mixture of content. Notably, r/communism and r/socialism exhibit a higher frequency of posts expressing support for Russia compared to r/Anarchism. Furthermore, our analysis reveals that the majority of the sampled posts from tankies mentioning Zelensky express opposition to him – e.g.:

*Zelensky should have an azov symbol on his head lmao.*

We also see the sampled posts of tankies are predominantly anti-Zionist – e.g.:

*Zionism equates to Fascism.*

and,

*That's Isntreal and nah, we don't endorse Israel.*

We observe numerous posts expressing opposition to Israel or Israeli policies across other communities. However, r/DemocraticSocialism exhibits the lowest frequency of such posts compared to the other communities.

## C.2 Quantative Validation

To quantitatively validate our interpretations, we first leverage the SEVERE\_TOXICITY model of the Perspective API. We then compare the high toxicity levels of various misaligning keywords for each interpretation. Table 10 shows the basic statistics and proportions of high SEVERE\_TOXICITY scores for the keywords indicative of misalignment.

**Acceptance of CCP Narrative.** Our analysis reveals that tankies exhibit the lowest proportion of high SEVERE\_TOXICITY for posts containing the keyword “CPC” when compared to the posts of other communities containing the keyword “CCP.” Conversely, tankies display a higher proportion of high scores for the keywords related to Uyghur Genocide. Based on our sampled data, we infer that tankies tend to adopt a more toxic tone when denying the Uyghur Genocide, while other communities engage in less toxic discourse when discussing Uyghur-related topics. Furthermore, we observe that r/communism and r/socialism demonstrate a reduced fraction of high toxicity when addressing “camps,” which are mostly related to concentration camps established by the CCP or Nazis. Finally, we find tankies have higher proportion of high scores when mentioning “rioters” (which are possibly towards Hong Kong protesters) compared to other communities’ posts mentioning “protesters/protestors.”

We find tankies have the second highest proportion of high SEVERE\_TOXICITY scores for their posts containing Tiananmen Square compared to the other communities posts contain “riots.”

**Stalinist Leaning.** We find that tankies display the highest proportion of high SEVERE\_TOXICITY scores for posts featuring anti-Stalinist or de-Stalinization-related keywords when compared to

r/communism, r/socialism, and r/Anarchism. Furthermore, we observe more comparable proportions when comparing the keywords used by tankies with the Stalinist or pro-USSR keywords present in r/socialism and r/Anarchism. In addition, we identify a similar proportion of high scores in r/DemocraticSocialism's usage of tankies, further corroborating the negative sentiment of tankies towards anti-Stalinism and de-Stalinization.

**Acceptance of Russian Narrative on Ukraine.** We find tankies exhibit the second highest proportion of high SEVERE\_TOXICITY scores for posts with keywords related to Ukraine's Donbass region. Nevertheless, less than 1% of tankie posts display high scores, which may be attributed to their support for the self-proclaimed republics in Donbass. Moreover, tankies have more than four times higher proportion of high scores for posts containing "Zelensky" compared to r/DemocraticSocialism's posts containing "Trump." This finding serves as an additional indicator of tankies' alignment with the Russian narrative.

**Anti-Zionist Leaning.** Our analysis reveals that over 5% of tankie posts containing Zionism-related keywords exhibit high SEVERE\_TOXICITY scores, which is the highest proportion compared to other communities. Intriguingly, tankies display an even greater proportion of elevated scores for posts featuring Zionism-related keywords than for their own usage of the term "isntreal."

## D DOMAIN ANALYSIS

We examine the differences in the popularity of domains between tankies and their similar ideologies in this section. This analysis will also help us to understand if there are any platforms specifically used by tankies. We first look for the popular domains shared by tankies to have a better understanding of the further results in this section.

**Popular Domains Shared By Tankies.** We detect 146,078 URLs from 7,049 different domains (including suffixes) tankies share. Table 11 shows top 20 domains shared by tankies after removing top 1,000 globally most visited domains by Majestic [74]. From the table, we see online Marxist/Marxist-Leninist hubs (marxist.org and workers.today), American left-wing alternative news sources (thegrayzone.com, peoplesworld.org, and foreignpolicy.com), and the web page of the Communist Party USA (cpusa.org), a Venezuelan alternative news source (telesurenglish.net), a British far-left alternative news site (newworker.org), a Reddit-like Marxist-Leninist platform (lemmygrad.ml), Chinese news outlets (cgtn.com and globaltimes.cn), and Chinese far-left platforms (redsails.org and qiaocollective.com).

**Representative Domains of Tankies Based On Sharing Amount.** To understand how representative (regarding the sharing amount of each domain) these domains are for tankies compared to other far-left communities, we take the advantage of Tf-Idf algorithm by approaching the domains as words. In a nutshell, Tf-Idf statistically measures the importance of a word for a document by normalizing the term frequencies of each word by their inverse document frequencies, which helps us to regard the most frequent words in the entire collection of documents similar to words that occur with low frequency [89]. So, when we create a list of domains by putting them into this list by the number of times they appeared for each community in the far-left, we can eliminate the commonly and frequently shared domains, which leaves us the sharing amount-wise more significantly shared domains for each community.

Table 12 and Table 13 present the top 10 domains ranked by their Tf-Idf scores for tankies and other far-left communities. Our analysis of the most representative domains shared by tankies yields several intriguing insights. Notably, we observe that newworker.org is the most representative domain for tankies in terms of sharing volume. Furthermore, lemmygrad.ml ranks as the third most representative domain in terms of sharing volume among tankies, which may suggest that this

platform functions as an alternative social media platform, predominantly utilized by tankies, in lieu of Reddit.

We see two Chinese news outlets ([globaltimes.cn](http://globaltimes.cn) and [cgtn.com](http://cgtn.com)) and a web page of a podcast related to China's engagement in Africa ([chinaafricaproject.com](http://chinaafricaproject.com)), also a Sri Lankan news outlet ([sundaytimes.lk](http://sundaytimes.lk)). Additionally, we see [trotskyistplatform.com](http://trotskyistplatform.com) on [r/communism](https://www.reddit.com/r/communism)'s representative domains, which supports our findings based on the difference in the level of leaning toward Stalinism between tankies and this community.

Community	#Posts	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	%High
CCP - CPC					
Tankies (cpc)	7,322	0.14	0.05	0.19	0.86
r/communism (cpc)	533	0.13	0.06	0.17	0.94
r/socialism (cpc)	807	0.15	0.07	0.19	1.61
r/DemocraticSocialism (cpc)	227	0.11	0.02	0.19	0.88
r/Anarchism (cpc)	774	0.23	0.13	0.23	4.01
Uyghur Genocide #1					
Tankies (boarding schools, reeducation camps, internment camps)	380	0.23	0.17	0.19	2.13
r/communism (uyghurs)	100	0.19	0.13	0.18	0.00
r/socialism (uyghurs)	171	0.20	0.14	0.18	0.58
r/DemocraticSocialism (uyghur)	44	0.08	0.02	0.12	0.00
r/Anarchism (uyghurs)	162	0.22	0.14	0.20	0.61
Uyghur Genocide #2					
Tankies (boarding schools, reeducation camps, internment camps)	380	0.23	0.17	0.19	2.13
r/communism (camps)	497	0.20	0.13	0.18	0.60
r/socialism (camps)	1,382	0.22	0.16	0.18	0.72
Rioters - Protesters					
Tankies (rioters)	490	0.26	0.19	0.22	2.65
r/communism (protesters)	314	0.17	0.09	0.18	0.96
r/socialism (protesters)	1,139	0.17	0.10	0.18	0.96
r/DemocraticSocialism (protesters)	428	0.10	0.02	0.15	0.70
r/Anarchism (protestors)	1,025	0.23	0.14	0.22	1.66
Tiananmen Square - Riots					
Tankies (tiananmen square)	880	0.19	0.09	0.20	0.87
r/communism (riots)	172	0.18	0.09	0.18	0.0
r/socialism (riots)	561	0.17	0.09	0.17	0.53
r/DemocraticSocialism (riots)	363	0.09	0.01	0.15	0.53
r/Anarchism (riots)	923	0.19	0.09	0.20	0.97
Stalinist Leaning #1					
Tankies (trots, de(-)stalinization, khrushchev, trot, trotskyists)	4,044	0.18	0.08	0.20	1.61
r/communism (trotskyist, khrushchev)	522	0.11	0.06	0.13	0.38
r/socialism (trotskyists, khrushchev, gorbachev)	708	0.13	0.07	0.16	0.28
r/Anarchism (khrushchev)	35	0.17	0.11	0.16	0.00
Stalinist Leaning #2					
Tankies (trots, de(-)stalinization, khrushchev, trot, trotskyists)	4,044	0.18	0.08	0.20	1.61
r/socialism (stalin)	3,958	0.16	0.09	0.17	0.73
r/DemocraticSocialism (tankies)	369	0.13	0.05	0.19	1.63
r/Anarchism (stalinists, ussr)	2,393	0.18	0.09	0.19	1.42
Acceptance of Russian Narrative in Ukraine #1					
Tankies (lpr, dpr)	627	0.15	0.07	0.17	0.96
r/communism (donbass)	36	0.14	0.10	0.12	0.00
r/socialism (donetsk)	65	0.14	0.07	0.15	0.00
r/Anarchism (donbass)	48	0.24	0.17	0.21	4.16
Acceptance of Russian Narrative in Ukraine #2					
Tankies (zelensky)	1,687	0.23	0.15	0.22	2.54
r/DemocraticSocialism (trump)	15,053	0.08	0.01	0.15	0.61
Anti-Zionist Leaning					
Tankies (zionist, zionists, zionism)	1,933	0.35	0.29	0.21	5.13
Tankies (isntreal)	107	0.22	0.10	0.23	2.83
r/communism (israeli)	95	0.23	0.20	0.17	1.06
r/socialism (israel)	2,501	0.26	0.20	0.22	4.61
r/DemocraticSocialism (jews)	1,278	0.12	0.04	0.17	0.62
r/Anarchism (israel)	1,229	0.27	0.22	0.20	2.35

Table 10. Total number of posts containing keywords indicative of misalignment, as well as the mean and median severe toxicity scores, their standard deviations, and proportion of posts with high severe toxicity levels for each community.

Rank	URL	Count
1	redditsave.com	3,216
2	marxists.org	2,141
3	newworker.org	1,954
4	lemmygrad.ml	1,853
5	archive.is	1,503
6	thegrayzone.com	618
7	ko-fi.com	608
8	discordapp.com	470
9	globaltimes.cn	456
10	peoplesworld.org	404
11	streamable.com	387
12	redsails.org	358
13	cgtn.com	346
14	workers.today	313
15	foreignpolicy.com	227
16	cpusa.org	214
17	telesurenglish.net	204
18	qiaocollective.com	195
19	archive.vn	193
20	kym-cdn.com	187

Table 11. Top 20 Domains of Tankies after removing top 1,000 domains worldwide listed by majestic.

Rank	URL	Score
1	newworker.org	.72
2	redditsave.com	.35
3	lemmygrad.ml	.28
4	ko-fi.com	.14
5	globaltimes.cn	.09
6	chinaafricaproject.com	.07
7	sundaytimes.lk	.07
8	twimg.com	.06
9	archive.is	.06
10	cgtn.com	.06

Table 12. Sharing amount-wise most representative domains of Tankies

r/communism	r/socialism	r/DemocraticSocialism	r/Anarchism	r/alltheleft	r/Marxism	r/IWW							
prisoncensorship.info	.18	democracyatwork.info	.22	vote.gov	.29	crimethinc.com	.25	newswall.org	.43	markhumphrys.com	.39	iww.org.uk	.38
wca-ngo.org	.16	pathfinderpress.com	.18	bernieanders.com	.16	anarchistfaq.org	.23	autismresearchcentre.com	.18	ethicalpolitics.org	.32	industrialworker.org	.23
leoplanetfuture.com	.15	themilitant.com	.14	actblue.com	.13	foodnotbombs.net	.21	blogspot.co.uk	.18	good.is	.30	iww.or.at	.20
reduno.com.bo	.14	ralphnaderradiohour.com	.14	sunrisemovement.org	.13	resonanceaudiodio.org	.18	gires.org.uk	.18	ramapo.edu	.29	iwwisland.org	.20
montclair.edu	.12	bestoftheleft.com	.14	laurenasheraft.com	.13	e4ss.org	.17	journalofpsychiatricresearch.com	.18	snewd.com	.17	iwwist.org	.20
aranews.net	.12	friendlyanarchism.org	.14	betsysweet.com	.13	rosecitycopwatch.org	.14	socialworkers.org	.18	catbull.com	.17	usi-cit.org	.20
sayyidali.com	.12	luminarypodcasts.com	.14	crow-ipc.com	.13	channelzonenetwork.com	.14	tenite	.18	struggle.net	.17	organizing.work	.17
trotkyistplatform.com	.12	majorityreportradio.com	.14	dralgrossak.com	.13	anarchistlibraries.net	.14	tgender.net	.18	cairn.info	.14	iww.org.au	.16
pathfinderpress.com	.11	nostalgiastrap.com	.14	evaforgocongress.com	.13	tangledwilderness.org	.13	wlmt.nhs.uk	.18	the-revolution-report.com	.12	uniondemocracy.org	.16
assyriatv.org	.11	simplecast.fm	.14	kimberlyforiowa.com	.13	womenandpolicing.com	.13	sciforums.com	.18	cepr.org	.11	onebigunion.ie	.15

Table 13. Sharing amount-wise most representative domains of each far-left community other than Tankies.