Abstract

Prior to 2012 there were no evidence-based community initiatives in Australia that focussed on reducing the presence of white supremacy in Australia. The national racism prevention charity – All Together Now – decided to tackle the problem head-on.

With funding from the Australian Attorney General’s Department, the organisation trialled a nine-month program to monitor the content of white supremacist discussions online and respond by writing and publishing evidence-based counter-arguments that debunked myths and conspiracy theories.

Even after working in this area for a relatively short period, All Together Now has learned immensely from its work in this area. Key points include:

1. Writing counter-arguments and ridiculing narratives, ideology and conspiracy theories of white supremacists can help to dissuade young people from becoming involved. However this activity needs to be:
   - combined with an opportunity for young people to have two-way conversation with the experts otherwise those at risk of radicalisation may become more entrenched; and
   - promoted directly to front-line workers so they can use the counter-arguments as a resource for conversations with young people at risk of radicalisation.

2. Trojan advertising coupled with Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and discussion on white supremacy forums have so far been the most successful tactics for attracting attention to evidence-based counter-arguments.

3. Providing advice to front-line workers on how to work with young people at risk of radicalisation is vital, as they are likely to be the first to encounter these issues.

Due to safety concerns the author remains anonymous. [Link](http://www.alltogethernow.org.au)
The organisation is about to begin applying what they learned – both from their Phase One evaluation and international Countering Violent Extremism research and practice – by embarking on Phase Two of the project.

This paper outlines All Together Now’s implementation and evaluation and outlines its planned future action in countering white supremacist extremism.

Background
All Together Now is Australia’s first national racism prevention charity. Most of the organisation’s work is directed at a mainstream audience whose views range from embracing cultural diversity to believing that immigrants and Aboriginal people do not conform to “Australian values” (whatever those values are perceived to be).

In 2012, All Together Now identified an important unmet social need: there was no evidence-based community initiative that focussed on reducing the presence of far-right violent extremism and radicalisation in Australia.

All Together Now decided that launching a project on this issue was in line with their vision of an Australia free from racism. Thanks to a grant from the federal Attorney General’s Department, All Together Now was able to establish a nine-month pilot project aimed at reducing online recruitment of young men by white supremacists.

The organisation started out by reviewing research and successful practice from Europe and North America where countering violent extremism research and practice is advanced.

During its initial investigation, All Together Now learned that white supremacists are particularly active online, openly discussing their ideologies on their own websites (e.g. www.stormfront.org has an Australian and international forum) and on mainstream websites like YouTube and Topix. White supremacists use the Internet to increase
membership and spread ideas.² They attract new members by concealing their racist and violent beliefs and by giving them a sense of belonging.³

The paper *The Far Right Online*⁴ states white supremacists use the Internet to

- spread dehumanising images, videos and comments;
- enhance racial narcissism;
- merchandise supremacist goods (thereby marketing/earning income);
- archive extremist information in one location; and
- allow others to experience racialist culture while remaining emotionally and geographically distant.

The Australian Human Rights Commission advises that over 30% of racial complaints in 2009-10 were concerned with racism online, and this is set to increase. There is a marketplace of young men at risk who may become involved simply because they are searching for an identity.⁵

This is consistent with data from the Challenging Racism research project based at the University of Western Sydney, which found that around 12% of people living in Australia have strongly racist attitudes – which equates to more than 2 million people. While many people in this category would not be classed as white supremacists, and it is likely that a portion are not of an Anglo-Celtic background, it still leaves extremists a sizeable group of people from which to recruit.

Local qualitative research uncovered that in Australia, extremism based on white supremacist ideology has the potential to grow and result in violence unless preventative action is taken. A number of white supremacy groups boldly operate and advertise in Australia and freely hold public events.

---

Recent publicly-reported activity around the country includes:

- Nazi graffiti was spray-painted on the front of the Victorian Parliament building, October 2012 (http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-10-01/nazi-graffiti-on-victorian-parliament/4288772)
- Young men were jailed for race hate bashing in Melbourne, December 2012 (http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/young-men-jailed-for-deplorable-racehate-bashing-20121212-2b97i.html)
- The Hammered Festival was held on Gold Coast for the fourth year running, May 2013
- Skinhead recruitment campaign in South-East Perth, June 2013 (http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/17720569/skinheads-recruiting-racists/)
- Far-right music festival to be held in Melbourne during October 2013

As a Harm Prevention organisation, All Together Now decided to focus initial activity in this area on preventing recruitment by white supremacist groups. Therefore the purpose of the pilot would be to plant a seed of doubt in the minds of young men at risk of becoming more involved in far-right extremism.

With this preventative focus, All Together Now’s activity was designed to:

- Offer an alternative to young men at risk of becoming enmeshed in white supremacy;
- Discredit white supremacist groups among young men at risk;
• Reduce the likelihood of young men being recruited into white supremacist groups, thereby starving white supremacist groups of new recruits;

• Provide information on the destructive nature of white supremacist ideologies to friends, family and community leaders of young men at risk so they can confidently intervene in the lives of those young men; and

• Foster opportunities for people to constructively discuss how to reduce white supremacy, especially among young men at risk.

As part of its initial research, All Together Now also investigated best-practice deradicalisation programs in Europe and America including the Southern Poverty Law Center, EXIT-Deutschland, EXIT Sweden, and FORUM and examined what strategies would be most likely to work in an Australian context. The organisation was particularly inspired by the work of the two EXIT organisations in Germany and Sweden, and named the project EXIT White Power as a tribute to the work that had gone before.

All Together Now developed a website containing evidence-based counter-arguments to address the ideology. This is located at www.exitwhitepower.com.

The organisation did this by using the following tactics:

• seeking out white supremacist conspiracy theories including those relating directly to Australian current affairs;

• monitoring the content on mainstream websites used by those with white supremacist views as well as Australian white supremacist online forums (e.g., Stormfront);

• debunking the myths and conspiracy theories perpetuated by white supremacists by drafting counter-arguments validated by experts;

• publishing the counter-arguments on the project website and ensuring good SEO techniques within each article and the website as a whole;

• advertising the website using Trojan advertising via Google Adwords; and
• building a relationship with a former white supremacist to learn from him about his experience and effective exit strategies.

Many of these tactics were based on a paper by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue based in London, specifically an online one-stop repository for counter-arguments, ensuring the repository is listed at the top of search engine results, and countering of extremist comments on mainstream websites.

**Owning the project**

Given that All Together Now was openly discrediting white supremacists online and potentially starving them of new recruits, the organisation decided not to promote the project as their own. All Together Now wanted to spend some time fully understanding the nature and scale of the problem in Australia and manage the risks before being publicly associated with the project. For this reason, it is only now in September 2013 that the organisation has begun to promote its activity in this area.

**Implementation and evaluation – Phase One**

To maintain the project’s relevance during the life of the project, the project team was very adaptive to white supremacist discussions as they occurred and responded to them in a timely manner on the project website. The website content was written and validated by two experts to ensure all the counter-arguments would be evidence-based.

During the course of this project, All Together Now expected to demonstrate that the target audience (young men) accessed the website and used it to question white supremacist ideology. It was successful in this endeavour, thanks to the project website being discussed among white supremacists on the Stormfront Australia forum.

---

Secondary success indicators included monitoring results of various online statistics over the period of the project. The team expected to see the trend of unique and repeat visitors growing month-on-month reaching 1,000 unique visitors over the nine-month pilot project.

The secondary success indicators came out much higher than anticipated. Over 3,000 unique visitors used the website with 60% of those originating from only two states in Australia.

About 44% of first-time visitors found the site via Google, indicating that a combination of sound SEO and effective Google Adwords advertising was successful in driving traffic to the site. Facebook and Twitter were some of the other highly-ranked referrers.

The Google Adwords campaign comprised of four ads that were only seen by people browsing the internet in Australia. The most successful Trojan campaign (measured by number of click-throughs) was titled “What is white power?” and had the subtitle “The real facts about white power groups in Australia.” The organisation also trialled a Trojan campaign in the lead-up to a white supremacy concert held in Queensland and learned that event-specific campaigns need a longer lead time before the event (e.g. one month) to make best use of this tactic.

All Together Now located several discussions about Exit White Power online, with the most prominent one occurring on Stormfront, a global white supremacy forum with a section for Australian members. Although only 12 people left comments attempting to discredit both the content and the authors, the post attracted 78 unique visitors to the Exit White Power website, thereby demonstrating that the primary target audience was curious about the project and was reading the counter-arguments – even if they dismissed them initially. Now this group knows where to go if and when they start questioning white supremacy ideology.

Aside from quantitative analysis, All Together Now hosted a survey on the site to encourage users to anonymously leave feedback. Unfortunately all of the responses were straight-lined (i.e. the survey was not populated with useable data) so the project has not successfully gathered qualitative data from the primary target audience at this stage.

When the organisation realised this was the case, the project team decided to interview a number of Australian-based people working in the field of CVE to collect their feedback...
about the project to improve the organisation’s understanding of the project’s likely social impact.

It emerged that there were some key improvements required:

- better website navigation and home page so that first-time visitors understood what information is available on the site;
- proactively promote the website as a resource to front-line workers;
- include direct online contact with the target audience as part of the project; and
- make visible All Together Now as the project owner.

All Together Now has since reviewed more recent literature on countering white supremacy, and the research validates these suggested improvements.

In December 2012, the European Union Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) proposed many high level policies to address radicalisation in Europe. Having reviewed a number of European counter-radicalisation programs, they suggested that ridiculing narratives, ideology and conspiracy theories of the extreme right in order to make them less attractive among young people are among the best long-term practices to prevent violent radicalism.\(^7\)

However, the RAN also noted that a “counter-narrative only” approach - and more broadly those that do not allow difficult conversations - can further entrench individuals at risk of radicalisation. Counter-narrative is most effective when individuals are also supported to make appropriate life decisions.

As All Together Now is not a service provider, the way the organisation can use its expertise most effectively is to provide advice and support to front-line workers who work with young people at risk of radicalisation.

Finally, All Together Now has had some unexpected positive outcomes from the project, namely that the organisation’s understanding of the white supremacy movement in Australia has increased vastly, as has its links with national and international networks of CVE experts and practitioners. The

\(^7\) Proposed policy recommendations for the High Level Conference, Radicalisation Awareness Network, December 2012.
organisation now have a clearer understanding of what is needed to communicate about and with white supremacy groups.

**The next phase**

With additional funding from the Attorney General’s Department, All Together Now will extend on the pilot program using two key strategies:

- supporting critical thinking among young adults by openly answering their questions and providing counter arguments to white supremacy ideologies; and
- providing resources directly to front-line workers so they can support young people at risk of becoming involved in white supremacy.

All Together Now will underpin this work by:

- continuing to provide credible counter-arguments in response to online discussions by white supremacists, which will be written by a youth counsellor and validated by a CVE expert;
- continuing to advertise on Google Adwords; and
- seeking collaboration with other projects in Australia supporting young people in order to reach front-line workers.

In summary, given the evaluation findings from Phase One, literature reviews and many discussions All Together Now has had over the past 12 months about countering white supremacy, the organisation plans to take a two-pronged approach that addresses both the ideology of white supremacy and also the social or psychological reasons behind why people may decide to join a radical group.

All Together Now will commence Phase Two work from October 2013 until June 2014 at which time it will evaluate the activities and social impact, and again share the results.