

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OVERSEAS EXTREMIST NARRATIVES AND DOMESTIC EXTREMIST NARRATIVES IN NEW ZEALAND

**A STUDY OF TWO POPULAR ONLINE PLATFORMS
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A STUDY OF TWO POPULAR ONLINE PLATFORMS

The project examines New Zealand-specific content on 4chan and Telegram to clarify how and why certain extremist ideas gain traction in New Zealand. The data gathered for this project allows for a robust explanation of the connections between grievances and aggrieved entitlement and engagement with extremist content online.

ABSTRACT

This report examines the relationship between international extremist narratives and domestic extremist discourse in New Zealand. The report is based on an analysis of content from two online platforms: 4chan and Telegram. Data was collected from three time periods between 2022 and 2024. The time periods aligned with major political events including the Parliament occupation by anti-vaccine mandate protesters, the 2023 New Zealand election, and the 2024 US Presidential election.

Through thematic content analysis, the report identifies five themes in extremist online discourse: (1) racist expressions; (2) sexist and anti-rainbow community expressions; (3) disdain for established systems and institutions; (4) white extremist narratives; and (5) imported narratives adapted to the New Zealand context.

Our findings demonstrate that New Zealand-based extremist content echoes findings observed in international research. Our findings also show that users actively adapt overseas discourses such as 'Great Replacement', anti-vaccine conspiracies, and anti-elite rhetoric, to local grievances and political contexts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the relationship between international extremist narratives and domestic extremist discourse in New Zealand. The analysis is based on content from 4chan and Telegram collected during three time periods between 2022 and 2024. The content aligned with major political events: the Parliament occupation by anti-vaccine mandate protesters, the 2023 New Zealand election, and the 2024 US Presidential election.

Data was gathered from New Zealand-based users on 4chan's /pol board and two Telegram channels (NZ Free Speech Forum and Independent Nationalist New Zealand), resulting in approximately 12,000 posts from each platform. Research assistants thematically coded the first 1,000 posts, chronologically, from each period in each dataset, which resulted in a manageable but rich final dataset.

KEY FINDINGS

Our analysis identified five major themes in extremist online discourse:

1. RACIST COMMENTARY

- Antisemitic, Anti-Muslim and anti-Māori expressions were very common
- Posts utilised dehumanising language, stereotypical tropes about Jewish “globalist” conspiracies, and celebrated Hitler
- Posts accused minoritised groups of plotting to take over western societies and New Zealand

2. SEXIST AND ANTI-RAINBOW COMMUNITY COMMENTARY

- Anti-rainbow community slurs and expressions were very common
- Posts propagate tropes linking the rainbow community to paedophilia and violence against children
- Frequent anti-women expressions, including calls for re-education of women out of feminism and into motherhood

3. DISDAIN FOR ESTABLISHED SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS

- Disparaging comments about those supporting established institutions
- Anti-leftist or anti-liberal discourse

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- Anti-media discourse
 - Anti-government discourse
 - Anti-academic and anti-researcher language
 - Class-divide discourse

4. WHITE EXTREMIST COMMENTARY

- Anti-immigrant discourse
- Pro-European white supremacist discourse
- Posts elevated whiteness above other races and claimed immigration poses a threat to white culture
- Fantasised violence against specific figures
- Retributive violence framed as justice

5. IMPORTED AND ADAPTED NARRATIVES

- Anti-COVID-19 vaccine expressions
- Factually incorrect information about the vaccine including
 - The COVID-19 vaccine as a bio-weapon causing deaths
 - The COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax or used for government control
- The ‘freedom convoy’ concept adapted from Canada
- Claims that the Christchurch mosque attacks were a ‘false flag’
- Claims that New Zealand political parties and figures are supporting a Jewish-driven global hegemony

CRITICAL CONCERNS

Of particular concern is the prevalence of violent language throughout the dataset. Posts explicitly calling for the execution of public figures, journalists and academics, and members of minoritised communities were present across all time periods analysed. Violent discourse was often framed as retributive justice, with public figures accused of crimes that called for their execution.

New Zealand-based extremist content echoes findings observed in international research. Users actively adapt overseas discourses to local grievances and political contexts, demonstrating the global reach of white nationalist ideologies and their adaptability to other contexts.

BACKGROUND

To what extent do foreign ideologies and conspiracy theories influence extremist discourses and actions in New Zealand? This is a timely and urgent research question. As the globe is grappling with domestic and international incidents of mass violence such as terrorist attacks and mass shootings, scholars have observed that people who engage in extremist violence, since at least the 2010s, engage on online platforms where extremist ideas are generated, amplified and transmitted across the globe.

Social science research on violent extremism is plentiful. However, there remain questions to be answered about the connection between online and offline extremism in the New Zealand context. The NZ Department of Internal Affairs defines violent extremism as “individuals or groups who threaten or use violence, or advocate for others to use violence, in support of their own agenda or to further their own set of beliefs. These include belief in ideologies and religions, or prejudice against certain groups, genders, or faiths. This type of violence is often targeted at groups who violent extremists perceive as threatening or undermining their world view.” The definition recognises the behaviour as abhorrent to social norms of engagement because it is oppositional to pluralism and liberal democratic social arrangements typical of modern societies. Studies on violent extremism operate using similar definitions which highlight the ideological and emotional factors underpinning such violence.

Equally important, studies highlight the role of online spaces in generating violent and extremist discourses that legitimate and even call for violence in the offline world. Indeed, online spaces provide pathways to radicalisation by offering anonymity and intense social connections which allow individuals to develop radical patterns of thinking as well as close connections with likeminded individuals. Online platforms function as hubs where individuals ascend the radicalisation ladder and, in some cases, promote and announce terrorist intent.¹

¹ Mark S. Hamm and R. F. J. Spaaij, *The age of lone wolf terrorism*, Studies in Transgression, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Thomas J Holt, Joshua D Freilich, and Steven M Chermak, "Examining the online expression of ideology among far-right extremist forum users," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/0.1080/09546553.2019.1701446>.

OBJECTIVES

The project examines New Zealand-specific content on 4chan and Telegram to contribute to understanding of the online environment and user engagement, as well as what extremist ideas gain traction in New Zealand. The data gathered for this project allows for a robust explanation of the connections between grievances and aggrieved entitlement and engagement with extremist content online.

We aim to increase academic, policy and public understanding of the flow of extremism, dis/misinformation and harmful ideologies globally to New Zealand to inform more effective interventions for disengagement of those already in the process of radicalisation.

The project has significance beyond academic understanding of the unique circumstances that facilitate online radicalisation and engagement in extremist content in New Zealand. Indeed, understanding the process of proliferation of extremist ideologies and content will allow for the development of policy prevention measures including monitoring of online extremist platforms as well as early intervention measures that inoculate people against extremist content and dis/misinformation.

We hope this report can inform the development of practical applications for understanding online engagement with extremist ideologies include early intervention tools like increasing digital literacy and ability to detect mis/disinformation. Such intervention tools would be developed by government and non-government agencies including civil society groups. Such tools would counter the appeal of such harmful content.

METHOD

DATA SAMPLE

The project examines New Zealand content, defined as content generated by New Zealand users, on two platforms, 4chan and Telegram. Data for this project comes from the following three time periods:

- 28 January – 28 February 2022
- 14 October – 14 November 2023
- 15 October – 15 November 2024

These three time periods were selected because they align with significant political events: the occupation of Parliament grounds by anti-vaccine mandate protestors, i.e., the so-called ‘freedom convoy’; the 2023 New Zealand Parliamentary election; and the one-year anniversary of the New Zealand election and the 2024 US Presidential election.

4chan was selected because it is an online forum hosting seventy-six discussion boards which is popular in New Zealand, with studies noting that New Zealand is among the top five countries per capita that created threads in the political discussion board on 4chan.² Furthermore, given the popularity of 4chan among young men, studying New Zealand posts on the forum allows for a better understanding of the relationship between gender and extremist narratives, as well as better understanding of the ideologies that capture young men on this platform.

Specifically, we gathered data from New Zealand-based users (indicated by the inclusion of a New Zealand flag on the user profile) on the /pol board, including both the thread opening post and their replies, resulting in approximately 12,000 posts and replies.

Telegram was selected because it is an easily accessible platform that promises confidentiality as well as rapid dissemination of messaging and provides customisability and an accessible interface. Telegram has also become a hub for dis/misinformation.

² See, for example, Laura Bradley, "As long as we stick together everything is going to be OK': An Examination of Aotearoa's Far-Right Subculture on 4chan" (Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, 2023); Gabriel Hine et al., "Kek, cucks, and god emperor trump: A measurement study of 4chan's politically incorrect forum and its effects on the web" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media, 2017); Cathrine Thorleifsson, "From cyberfascism to terrorism: On 4chan/pol/culture and the transnational production of memetic violence," *Nations and Nationalism* 28, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12780>.

Telegram was extensively used to organise violent protests in New Zealand and across the world and continues to be used for the purposes of sowing discord today.³

Data collection on Telegram focused on two group chats or channels: the NZ Free Speech Forum and Independent Nationalist New Zealand channels. Both original messages and message forwards were collected, also resulting in approximately 12,000 posts for analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Research assistants thematically coded the first 1,000 posts, chronologically, from each period in each dataset, which resulted in a manageable but rich final dataset of 6,000 posts (3,000 each from 4chan and Telegram). Basing analysis on this subset of data is methodologically sound since, rather than conducting a purely quantitative content analysis of the entire body of the posts, we were looking for trends and patterns in the posts, which thematic identification provides.

To identify predominant trends and themes, we undertook a content analysis of data sample. Content analysis is one of the most widely used research methods in media and communication research and involves the systematic classification and description of communicative content.⁴ This approach allows some insight into the beliefs and values of those creating and receiving the messages.⁵

These insights are gained via a coding process, which helps with the identification of common themes and topics and the frequency or prominence of those themes. These themes are identified using a systematic process which involves reading all content to be analysed to identify repeated topics, assigning each topic a code, re-reading the content to assigned codes to various segments (and potentially identify new topics), and then clustering related topics together into broad themes or categories to inform the analysis.⁶

While content analysis observes people's 'actual behaviour', this method cannot provide direct data about the nature of those creating or receiving the content in question. However, content analysis is well suited to providing a classification and description of content. In addition, when content or data is collected over time, content analysis can

³ See, for example, Chen Lou et al., "When motivations meet affordances: News consumption on Telegram," *Journalism Studies* 22, no. 7 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1906299>; Jarrod Varty, "Us vs. Them: A Subcultural Analysis of Violent Extremism within New Zealand's Telegram Conspiracy Community" (Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, 2024).

⁴ Arthur Asa Berger, *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Third ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), 232.

⁵ Debora Cristina Lopez, "Content Analysis," in *The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Mass Media and Society*, ed. Deborah L. Merskin (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2020), 384.

⁶ John Creswell, *Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), 192.

inform a historical or longitudinal analysis that demonstrates the salience or prominence of specific topics or themes over time.

The approach taken for this report leverages this strength. For example, comments that the COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax were more common during the first time period used in this analysis. A study focussed on just that time period might over-represent the importance or commonality of those comments. In contrast, comments disparaging ‘mainstream media’ as corrupt or propaganda were relatively consistent in all three time periods, indicating the longevity of that view in the posts analysed.

This longitudinal approach, plus the ability to identify and code topics that were reframed in a specific New Zealand context, provide ample opportunities to observe and better understand the influence of international extremist themes in discourses originating in New Zealand. We detail some key findings in the following section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our analysis resulted in the identification of five major topic categories or themes. Four of these themes encapsulate comments that are applied generally, i.e., to global events, or internationally, i.e., in reference to events or conditions in other countries. These themes are:

1. racist commentary;
2. sexist and anti-rainbow community commentary;
3. denigration of established systems and institutions; and
4. white extremist commentary.

While topics or even individual comments included in these categories may not specifically reference New Zealand, they remain relevant because they are either from what appears to be New Zealand-based users (in the case of 4chan comments) or share on a New Zealand themed channel (the NZ Free Speech Forum or the Independent Nationalist New Zealand channel) on Telegram.

A fifth category of content, which overlaps in part with the four mentioned above, are comments that adopt and adapt narratives to a New Zealand-specific context. In the discussion below, we address each of these themes and provide a general overview of the prominent topics in each.

RACIST COMMENTARY

Racist expression can be seen in the hierarchy chart (see Figure 1 below). Dehumanising language targeting non-white people includes the common use of epithets and racist stereotypes. Also present are conspiratorial and paranoid tropes that position ethnic and racial minorities as both too uncivilised and thus unable to be productive members of civilisation and, at the same time, conniving, power hungry, and successful at making gains at the expense of white people. Here, racist expressions fault western democratic societies for being tolerant, with some posts explicitly calling for killing non-white people.

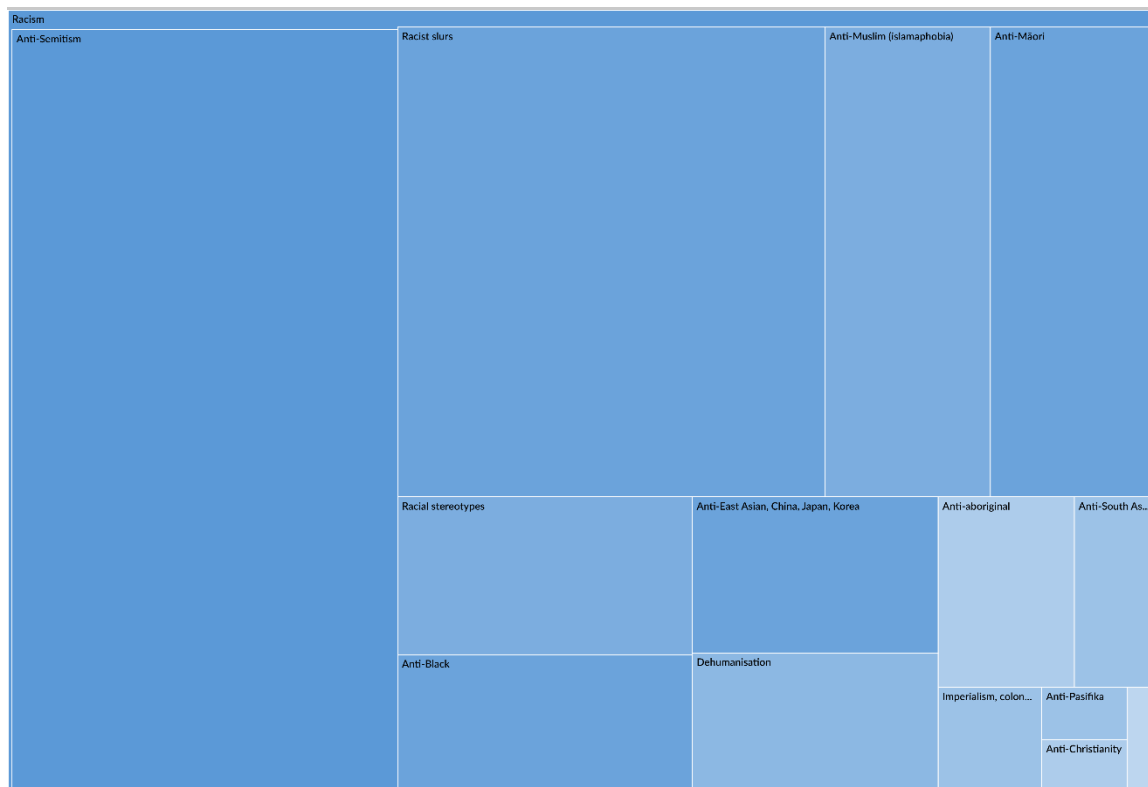


FIGURE 1: HIERARCHY CHART OF RACIST COMMENTARY IN THE DATA SAMPLE

Antisemitic Expressions are by far the most common in the dataset. 329 individual posts containing antisemitic content were coded. Antisemitic expressions utilised epithets, with many posts consisting of one- or two-word racial slurs and dehumanising terminologies. Stereotypical tropes about Jewish “globalist” conspiracies were common. Here, posts often link the government as well as institutions such as the media to an all powerful and hidden Jewish agenda. Some posts made references to the Crucifixion. Other posts celebrated Hitler and called for annihilation of Jewish people. Antisemitic content exhibits the typical contradictions of framing Jewish people in dehumanising terms, denying their cultural and civilisational contribution to the world, calling them “subhuman” while also representing Jewish people as all powerful, with deep connections to world governments and media, and abilities to puppeteer the world.

Anti-Muslim and anti-Māori discourse were also significant in the NZ dataset. There were 87 anti-Muslim individual posts, and 86 anti-Māori individual posts coded.

Anti-Muslim expressions utilised racist and dehumanising tropes about Muslims and Islam. The posts reveal the contradictions in anti-Muslim extremist content. Some posts often compared and linked Islam to Judaism, accusing both faiths of destroying Christianity. Posts accused Muslim people of plotting to take over western societies and impose Islam and Islamic codes. Some posts linked tolerance of Islam to being anti-Jewish, while other posts expressed antisemitism but presented Islam as more dangerous than Judaism. These types of posts were presented as mulling over which group to hate more and which group presents more danger and harm to white civilisation. Posts accused

Muslim people of demanding too much political power, expressing a desire to ‘ban’ Islam and strip Muslim people of their rights.

Anti-Māori expressions utilised racist and dehumanising tropes about Māori people, with denigrating comparisons to other Indigenous people. The posts reveal the contradictions in anti-Māori extremist content. Some posts linked Māori fight for equity and equality to larger conspiratorial Jewish plots to take over the world. Other posts noted that the Jewish plot is distracting New Zealand while Māori plot to take over the country. Some posts called for violence against Māori, including civil war while others decried the loss of democracy as Māori were accused of wanting political power.

Although these posts are based in New Zealand, they are not unique to New Zealand. They reflect a pattern seen elsewhere in the world, where sites such as 4chan and social network platforms such as Telegram are hotbeds for racist content. Studies by Al-Rawi on Telegram usage found the ubiquity of white grievances and racist expression, where posts blame liberal tolerance for unwanted racial and ethnic diversity and dilution of whiteness. Furthermore, Al-Rawi found that Jewish people are frequently blamed for social and political problems, while also being linked to other minoritised groups in a conspiracy to harm white people – patterns which are observed above.⁷

In a study on 4chan content, Bermudez-Villalva, Mehrnezhad and Toreini found that racist posts typically contain explicit racial epithet often alongside mentions of social and political issues, while posts about religion show hostile language that predominantly targets Jewish and Muslim people.⁸ Work by Rieger et al. on the extent and types of hate speech in alt-right 8chan, 4chan, and Reddit communities confirm similar patterns of hate speech, with Jewish communities being the most targeted group, and other groups such as Black and Muslims also being frequently targeted.⁹

Our findings confirm the wide reach of white nationalist ideologies in content in online spaces originating from New Zealand, as well as the adaptation of white nationalist ideas in other ideological spaces such as anti-vaccination discourse. These findings align with current literature on extremist ideologies and content online. Both Conway and Prucha, for example, note that online spaces are home to informal activism and cultural exchange,

⁷ Ahmed Al-Rawi, "Telegramming hate: Far-right themes on dark social media," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 46, no. 4 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2021v46n4a4055>; Ahmed Al-Rawi, "The Far-Right Online Communities and the Dissemination of Hate," in *Online Hate on Social Media* (Springer, 2024). Al-Rawi, Ahmed. Telegramming Hate: Far-Right Themes on Dark Social Media. Also see Diana Rieger et al., "Assessing the extent and types of hate speech in fringe communities: A case study of alt-right communities on 8chan, 4chan, and Reddit," *Social Media+ Society* 7, no. 4 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211052906>.

⁸ Adrian Bermudez-Villalva, Maryam Mehrnezhad, and Ehsan Toreini, "Measuring Online Hate on 4chan Using Pre-Trained Deep Learning Models," *IEEE Transactions on Technology and Society* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1109/TTS.2025.3549931>.

⁹ Rieger et al., "Assessing the extent and types of hate speech in fringe communities: A case study of alt-right communities on 8chan, 4chan, and Reddit."

where extremist content is produced and reproduced.¹⁰ Furthermore, while the internet holds multiple extremist ideologies that appear in the social engagement online, research on extremist content online notes that white nationalist ideologies outperform other ideologies online in terms of their reach and adaptabilities to other contexts.¹¹

SEXIST AND ANTI-RAINBOW COMMUNITY COMMENTARY

Sexist, misogynist, and anti-rainbow community discourse is another common category of discourse in the data sample. As the hierarchy chart for this theme shows, anti-rainbow or anti-rainbow community comments and slurs were by far the most common, with anti-women comments representing another significant proportion of the sample.

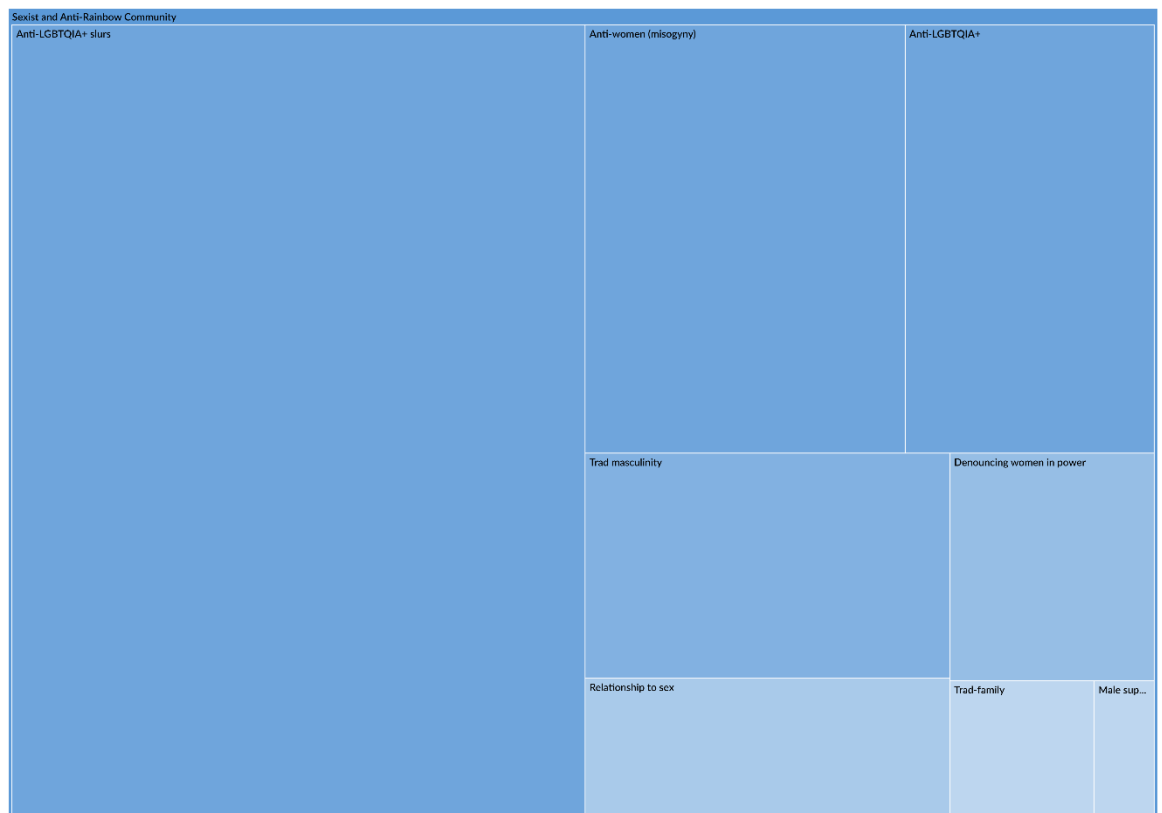


FIGURE 2: HIERARCHY CHART OF SEXIST AND ANTI-RAINBOW COMMUNITY COMMENTARY IN THE DATA SAMPLE

¹⁰ Maura Conway, "From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence and Development of an Online Radical Milieu," *CTX: Combating Terrorism Exchange* 2, no. 4 (November 2012 2012); Nico Prucha, "Online territories of terror—Utilizing the Internet for Jihadist endeavors," *ORIENT IV* 46 (2011).

¹¹ See, for example, John M Berger, "Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter: A comparative study of white nationalist and ISIS online social media networks," (2016).

Anti-rainbow community discourse was seen primarily through anti-rainbow community slurs, which appeared in 165 individual posts, and Anti- rainbow community expressions which appeared in 39 posts. Some of the posts shared both codes. However, the total of unique anti-rainbow community posts is 191. Anti- rainbow community slurs were used in posts aimed at denigrating individuals and groups by likening them to rainbow community. A large number of these posts contained one-word anti-rainbow community slurs, while some posts refer to minority groups including Jewish and Black people in anti-rainbow community slurs.

Anti-rainbow community posts contain epithets and explicit references to sexual violence such as rape. Posts propagate anti-rainbow community tropes that link HIV and AIDS to homosexuality, accuses the rainbow community of being paedophiles, and links homosexuality to rape of children. Anti-trans vitriol was also evident in posts attacking rainbow community access to gender-affirming care and blaming liberal leaning government and liberal parties for normalising rainbow community. Some posts express vitriolic outrage at the existence of queer users of online spaces and social networking sites, accusing digital companies of allowing paedophilia. The typical anti-rainbow community post was violent, accusing the rainbow community of perpetrating violence against children and/or celebrating violence against the rainbow community.

Anti-women language was coded in 50 posts. Some of the posts also have been coded for extremist expressions about sexuality, such as blaming women for incel men, calling women sexual epithets and blaming them for men's loss of status and social standing, encouraging sexual violence against women. Some of the posts contained derogatory references to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, and referring to her as "he," misgendering her. Other posts blame feminism for the decline of European birthrate in NZ and urge the re-education of women out of feminism and into being mothers. Posts about the decline of the birthrate connected the perceived crisis to communism taking over the country as well as white women giving up on their race and culture.

Notable here is the persistence of conspiratorial linking of falling birthrate to movements such as feminism, but also non-existent economic systems in New Zealand like communism. It is not unusual to see the expression of extremist hate or violent discourse against a minoritised group (such as racial minorities, the rainbow community, or women) being linked to external forces like "communism" or shadow governments and elites.

Indeed, although these posts are based in New Zealand, the content is not unique to New Zealand. In a study on transphobic and homophobic discourses on Twitter in Spain, Santos Fernandez found narratives that pathologised sexual diversity and nonbinary gender orientations. The study also found that anti-rainbow community posts associated the rainbow community with paedophilia and grooming of children as well as the collapse of

social and moral orders.¹² In a larger study on patterns of extremist online content and online hate, Andreasen reports similar patterns in the Scandinavian online landscape, such as questioning the existence of trans people.¹³

Similarly, misogynistic content is not unique to the New Zealand landscape. Its form and content can be seen among non-NZ users of online spaces including Telegram and 4chan in addition to online gaming forums and social media sites. Miller-Idriss argues that misogynistic content online is on the rise, with degrading and hateful refrains about women appearing across multiple platforms around the world. Use of epithets as well as threats of sexual violence against women function to contain women and assert men's power.¹⁴

DISDAIN FOR ESTABLISHED SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS

Another category identified in the data are comments that express disdain for established systems and institutions, such as corporations, elected governments, governmental and medical organisations, traditional or 'mainstream' media, and academics. These findings are reflected in other recent literature on online extremist content and ideology. James Ball, for example, links distrust in elected officials and anti-intellectualism to the spread of disinformation, often racist and anti-immigrant in nature, during the 2016 US Presidential election and the Brexit vote in the UK.¹⁵ Discussing the far-right in Europe, Franziska Schutzbach notes that many on the far-right adopt language that positions 'das Volk' [the people] in opposition to ruling 'elites'.¹⁶

Specific topics in this category can be seen in the hierarchy chart below (see Figure 3). Resistance to the 'mainstream' (however loosely defined in the posts) are elements of many of these themes. Interestingly, while comments disparaging 'liberal' thought comprise the second most common topic, there was also a significant number of posts that criticise what are seen as 'mainstream' right wing figures such as Republican

¹² Francisco Javier Santos Fernández, "Online Homophobia: Hate Speech and Conspiracy Theories towards LGBTQI+ people on Twitter in Spain," *Culture e Studi del Sociale-CuSSoc* 9, no. 1 (2024).

¹³ Maja Brandt Andreasen, "Humour, Harm, and Hate: The Discursive Construction of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Far-Right Extremist Memes," *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research* (01/02 2025), <https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2024i0.13897>, <https://spir.aoir.org/ojs/index.php/spir/article/view/13897>.

¹⁴ Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Misogyny incubators: how gaming helps channel everyday sexism into violent extremism," *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1537477>.

¹⁵ James Ball, *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017), 13.

¹⁶ Franziska Schutzbach, *Die Rhetorik der Rechten: Rechtspopulistische Diskursstrategien in Überblick* (Zürich: Xanthippe Verlag, 2018), Print, 93-94.

politicians in the US or Elon Musk, which suggests discontent with a wide range of political positions and figures. This sentiment is also reflected in the number of posts explicitly expressing disillusionment with political systems in general.



FIGURE 3: HIERARCHY CHART OF SEXIST AND ANTI-RAINBOW COMMUNITY COMMENTARY IN THE DATA SAMPLE

Disparaging comments about those supporting the views of established institutions. Of the 591 comments categorised under this theme, 69 of the posts reflect this topic, mostly in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Comments express disappointment in or disdain for people who, for example, wore masks, received the COVID-19 vaccination, or expressed concern about catching COVID-19. Several of these comments referred to such people as cultists, lemmings, NPCs (non-player characters, a video gaming reference to characters controlled by a game’s programming rather than a human), or sheep. These derogatory terms for people who took precautions against COVID-19 point to another common refrain in these comments, which is that people were unquestioning or ‘hypnotised’, which relates to other common comment categories such as distrust in media, authorities, elected government representatives, or the political system in general.

Anti-leftist or anti-liberal discourse is, as noted, the second most-common topic represented in the data, in 67 coded posts. Comments from 2022 data, which mostly intersected with the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, frequently refer to those supporting vaccines and vaccine mandates as ‘leftists’ or ‘communists’, sometimes

in conjunction with insults or slurs that call into question their intelligence (e.g., the ‘r-word’). Reflecting the anti-women discourse noted above, ‘leftist women’ or ‘left wing women’ in particular are framed as the source of pro-vaccine commentary. These comments also sometimes feature derogatory terms for women (e.g., the ‘c-word’). In addition, these comments often marginalised the severity of COVID-19 pandemic. This tendency is also reflected in international contexts, for example, in the rhetoric of far-right political parties in Italy, Spain, Slovakia, and Germany, where representatives of the party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) claimed that “the clearest victim of corona” was freedom of expression.¹⁷

Later posts from the 2023 and, especially, the 2024 data make occasional references to ANTIFA (anti-fascists). These references are, like those above, often paired with other derogatory slurs including anti-rainbow community slurs. In addition, elected members of Parliament are referred to as ANTIFA and called antisemitic slurs, again reflecting some elements of themes discussed above.

Taken together, these posts reflect a “far-right social turn” seen internationally. Imogen Richards argues that this turn was often in response to responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by both government and non-government entities, which contributed to a social environment in which “exclusionary, far-right sentiment” could become prevalent and contribute to or exacerbate discrimination or violence.¹⁸

Anti-media discourse is also prevalent in this theme, comprising 56 posts. In the 2022 data, some of these posts, as those above, dismissed the COVID-19 pandemic and accused the media of either fear mongering by exaggerating its severity, or being ‘useful idiots’ for politicians and officials. In either case, media are framed as being highly manipulative or coercive, and one of the primary reasons those in favour of the vaccine or vaccine mandates were ‘hypnotised’, as discussed above.

Throughout the data, there are repeated references to the ‘propaganda’ and ‘lies’ supposedly spread by traditional or ‘mainstream’ news organisations. There is a long history of press denigration by political actors from across the political spectrum but, in the last decade, there has been an international increase in rhetorical attacks against journalism that predate their prominence in New Zealand, particularly from conservative and far-right actors.

During the 2016 annual conference for his white nationalist think tank National Policy Institute (NPI), for example, far-right figure Richard Spencer referred to the ‘mainstream

¹⁷ Jakub Wondreys and Cas Mudde, “Victims of the pandemic? European far-right parties and COVID-19,” *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 1 (2022).

¹⁸ Imogen Richards, “Neoliberalism, COVID-19 and conspiracy: pandemic management strategies and the far-right social turn,” *Justice, Power and Resistance* 5, no. 1-2 (2022): 110.

media' as "Lügenpresse" and asked rhetorically if journalists "are people at all."¹⁹ During his first term as US President Donald Trump repeatedly referred to individual journalists and news organisations as an "enemy of the American people".²⁰ That idea is repeated nearly word for word in one post from our data.

These rhetorical attacks serve to weaken public trust in the press and undermine the press' watchdog role. They are also used as justification for threats of violence against journalists. Several posts in the data include explicit calls for journalists (and others, including politicians) to be beaten, hanged, or executed. International precedents demonstrate the danger of such rhetoric. In October 2018, for example, someone in the US mailed pipe bombs to several targets in the United States, including both prominent Democrats and the New York offices of CNN.²¹

Anti-authority, anti-expert discourse is another major type of content coded in this theme. In fact, when anti-government and anti-expert/academic codes are considered together, they represent the largest grouping in this theme, with a total of 116 posts.

Anti-academic and anti-researcher language is evident in 31 posts. Many of these concern a limited set of public intellectuals, namely one individual independent researcher and one now defunct research group. As with other codes above, several comments coded as anti-academic or anti-researcher also include anti-rainbow community or sexist slurs and language, racist (especially antisemitic) discourse, and allusions to violence.

These comments are indicative of the influence of 'alt-right' critiques of academics and education that emerged internationally in the 2010s. Andrew Jones details how these critiques argue that universities and other educational institutions have "abandoned their heritage and are corrupting the youth and the government with left-wing ideas that will lead to the end of Western civilisation".²² These references to "Western civilisation" are racially coded, as the term is associated with white supremacy.²³

Anti-government discourse makes up the other 85 posts, including posts that question the authority of elected officials, as well as posts that refer to the elected government in New Zealand as authoritarian or tyrannical. Multiple posts refer to politicians as enemies

¹⁹ Video excerpts of the speech were posted to YouTube by the magazine *The Atlantic*. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o6-bi3jlxk>.

²⁰ Michael S. Daubs, "From Misinformation to Modern Lügenpresse: The Redefinition of Fake News," in *Disinformation and Digital Media as a Challenge For Democracy*, ed. Elżbieta Kuźlewska et al., European Integration and Democracy (Cambridge: Intersentia, 2020), 23.

²¹ Daubs, "From Misinformation to Modern Lügenpresse," 29.

²² Andrew Jones, "From neoreactionary theory to the alt-right," in *Critical Theory and the Humanities in the Age of the Alt-Right* (Springer, 2019), 101.

²³ Luigi Esposito, "The Alt-Right as a Revolt against Neoliberalism and Political Correctness: the Role of Collective Action Frames," *Perspectives on global development and technology* 2019, no. 1-2 (2019): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691497-12341507>.

of people, reflecting Schutzbach's observation the far-right often adopts language that positions people as being in opposition to ruling 'elites'.

Some posts accuse elected officials of engaging in conspiracies against citizens, including claims that the government is planning to enact emergency powers to take away people's 'freedom' or to lead the way to a 'new world order', e.g., a new global government led by the World Economic Forum (WEF). This particular conspiracy, as we discuss more below, originated in international anti-globalist discourse. For example, the 'Freedom Convoy' in Canada in 2022 was in part motivated by allegations that the WEF was using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext for the "Great Reset".²⁴ As with other elements of this theme, these posts often include antisemitic references that allege a Jewish elite are orchestrating events for personal gain.

There are some limited references to politicians being put on trial for, among other things, crimes against humanity. References to violence are also evident. More evident, as with the posts about journalists discussed above (many of which are also included in this theme), are explicit calls for the execution of, or 'death penalty' for, elected officials, including then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Anti-elitist discourse (e.g., comments about upper-class members of society) are evident in economic precarity grievances reflected in '**class divide**' comments coded in 56 posts, as well as posts expressing '**anti-corporate**' sentiments, which were coded in 16 posts. Class divide in this report refers to posts expressing that wealth is unequally divided, with a small number of people enjoying wealth (specifically owning homes and other private property as well as being able to grow one's wealth). Anti-corporate expressions in this report refer to posts expressing criticism of corporations and corporate elite 'ripping off' everyday New Zealanders.

The posts varied in their expressions of frustration. However, expressions of criticism against the government, which were aimed at the previous government as well as the current government, criticised the government for advancing the interests of the wealthy and the elite and suggesting that the government leaders work to advance the interests of their billionaire friends. Some posts accused the government and the elite of destroying capitalism and encouraging cronyism. Posts varied in the diagnosis of the economic and social problems caused by the government. However, the thread that runs through the posts is expressions of elites taking over the country taking its wealth.

²⁴ Corey Robinson and Scott D Watson, "Conspiracy theory, anti-globalism, and the Freedom Convoy: The Great Reset and conspiracist delegitimation," *Review of International Studies* (2025): 3f11. As they note, the original idea behind the Great Reset was that the COVID-19 pandemic represented "a window of opportunity to 'reset' global capitalism and shape the direction of national economies. However, since the introduction of the idea in 2020, far-right groups have appropriated the Great Reset, grafting it onto the ready-made plot of New World Order conspiracy, centred on an alleged 'globalist' agenda of one-world government."

Of concern in this report is posts that point to an elite cabal conspiring to hoard power and wealth. Such posts seek to explain the state of the world in terms of ‘out-groups’ as secretly controlling the survival of the ‘in-group.’ Similar patterns of online posts have been observed in the work of Walther and McCoy on US extremist content on Telegram.²⁵

‘WESTERN IDENTITY’ AND WHITE EXTREMIST COMMENTARY

A fourth category identified in the data are comments that express the need to strengthen “Western” identity. Phrases like ‘Western identity’ or ‘Western civilisation’ are often coded language used by white extremists to refer to white identity.²⁶ The phrase ‘white extremism’ is an “umbrella term that incorporates white nationalists, white supremacists and other racially motivated far right groups”.²⁷ These topics are evident in the hierarchy chart below (see Figure 4).

²⁵ Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US extremism on Telegram," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021). For a study on extremist expressions including conspiracies and expressions of discrimination and victimisation see J. M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

²⁶ Luigi Esposito, "The Alt-Right as a Revolt against Neoliberalism and Political Correctness: The Role of Collective Action Frames," *Perspectives on global development and technology* 2019, no. 1-2 (2019): 94.

²⁷ Michael S. Daubs, "Internationalising white extremism: far right networks in New Zealand and beyond," in *Histories of intolerance: the radical right in Aotearoa / New Zealand*, ed. Matthew Cunningham, Marinus La Rooij, and Paul Spoonley (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 2022), 325.

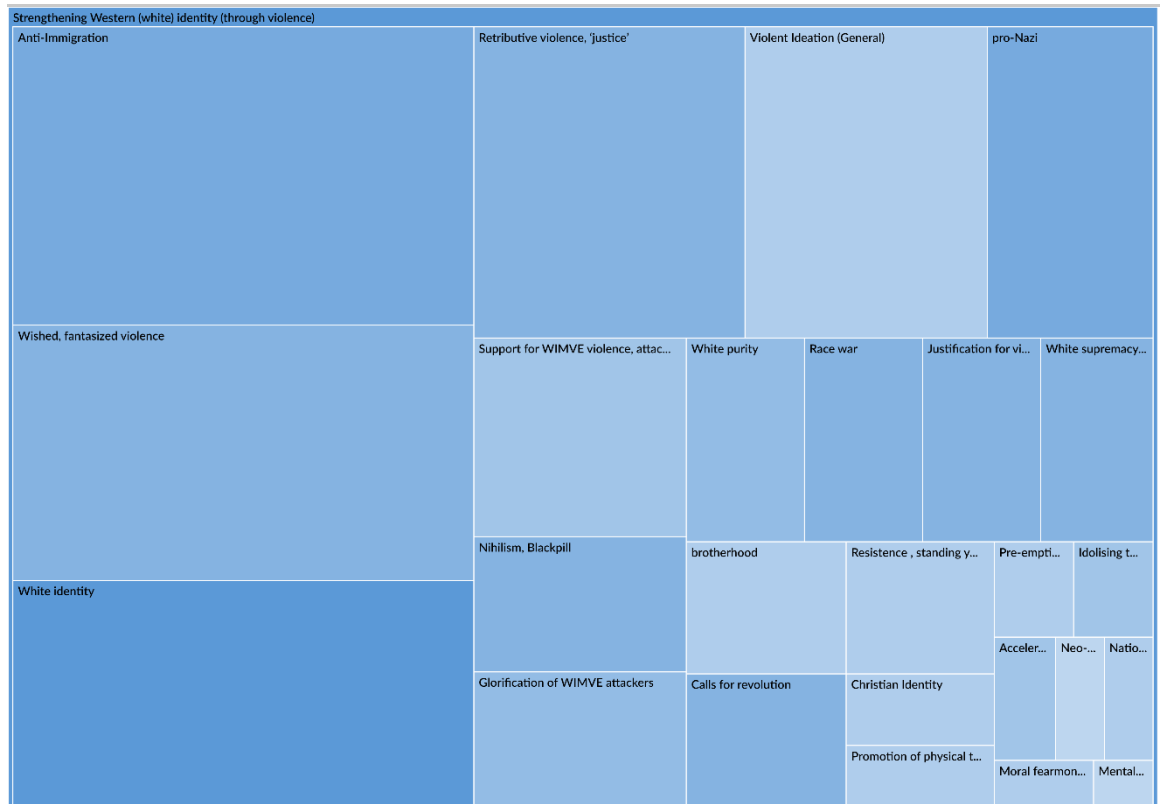


FIGURE 4: HIERARCHY CHART OF WESTERN IDENTITY AND WHITE EXTREMIST COMMENTARY

Much of the observed extremist commentary is related to grievances such as feeling excluded, discriminated against, and victimised by the government and elite groups. These grievances appear in a variety of comments that also discriminate against immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities.

Anti-immigrant themes were coded in 91 posts. Anti-immigrant expressions accused immigrants of invading the country, causing the replacement of white people. **Pro-European**, specifically **white supremacist themes** appear in 100 posts. The language in the posts elevate whiteness above other races, claim that other races are ‘savage’ and ‘subhuman,’ and that immigration and minoritised ethnic and racial groups pose a threat to the existence of white people and white culture.

White supremacist and anti-immigrant posts in this report echo the language that appears in extremist postings elsewhere. For example, Deem observed racist and supremacist discourses online in the US.²⁸ Berger and Zhang and Davis note that such expressions may gain traction during political or social upheavals, for example during the COVID-19

²⁸ Alexandra Deem, "Extreme speech: The digital traces of# whitegenocide and alt-right affective economies of transgression," *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019).

pandemic or the Christchurch Terrorist Attack but may not subside but instead may gain momentum online.²⁹

Comments expressing grievances also included calls for or justification of violence against minoritised groups (e.g., Muslims, immigrants), government officials, members of the judiciary, political figures, journalists, and academics.

Fantatised violence against specific figures, as well as violent expressions against nations and communities was evident in 128 posts. The violence was frequently presented as a 'one policy for all' of killing all traitors, or all paedophiles. In some instances, it appears as a fantasy of killing entire groups, while in others specific public figures suspected of being Jewish were targeted in antisemitic violent posts.

Retributive violence, seen as a form of 'justice' against perceived traitors as well as minoritised communities. This theme was evident in 56 posts. For example, in posts related to the COVID-19 government response, users called politicians who were accused of killing people with vaccinations to be hanged. Public figures, including activists, academics, scientists, and members of government and judiciary were frequently accused of terrorism and treason, and paedophilia. Such accusations legitimate the call for executing these figures. Posts often called for public executions to 'send a message' to other people and other countries.

Violent expressions online are present globally. Online platforms have been used by organised terrorist groups as well as extremist organisations to disseminate violent and hateful speech. Bradley and Varty observe that online platforms function as subcultural hubs and communal spaces where people connect through the production of hateful content.³⁰ Tores Soriano observes that the internet functions as a hub of adopting the beliefs which in turn facilitate violent radicalisation.³¹ Tores Soriano's study focuses on ISIS; however, it more broadly suggests that individuals can become radicalised by extremist content. Gaudette, Scrivens and Venkatesh observe that the Internet is critical in radicalising individuals because of the wide availability of extremist content and a network of like-minded individuals.³²

Accelerationism

These ideological-political environments provided context for accelerationist and conspiratorial narratives about COVID-19 and immigrants communicated among wider

²⁹ Berger, "Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter."; Xinyi Zhang and Mark Davis, "E-extremism: A conceptual framework for studying the online far right," *New Media & Society* 26, no. 5 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221098360>.

³⁰ Bradley, "'As long as we stick together everything is going to be OK.'"; Varty, "Us vs. Them."

³¹ Manuel R Torres Soriano, "Seven premises of jihadist activism on the internet," *Digital Jihad. Online Communication and Violent extremism* (2019).

³² Tiana Gaudette, Ryan Scrivens, and Vivek Venkatesh, "The role of the internet in facilitating violent extremism: insights from former right-wing extremists," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 7 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1784147>.

political networks, within economically-driven environments of counterfactual mass news and social media.³³ 'Accelerationism' is a term which refers to a belief that modern society is 'irredeemable'. Accelerationists believe that, as a result, society should be "pushed to collapse so a fascist society built on ethnonationalism can take its place".³⁴

These narratives originate in or emerged simultaneously in other countries. For example, racist and exclusionary conspiracies were promoted in 2020 and 2021 by accelerationist, neo-Nazi, and other politically violent groups, including from neo-Nazi organisations abroad such as Atomwaffen Division, alongside QAnon and other conspiracy proponents, further contributing to socially discriminatory environments impacting marginalised communities.³⁵

IMPORTED AND ADAPTED NARRATIVES

In many cases, topics discussed in the four major themes discussed above have been adapted for a New Zealand-specific context. Items in this final theme or category thus reflect many of the ideas already addressed but demonstrate how ideas that originate in other countries is adopted and modified to have more local relevance. These cases are outlined in the hierarchy chart below (see Figure 5).

³³ Richards, "Neoliberalism, COVID-19 and conspiracy."

³⁴ Cassie Miller, "'There Is No Political Solution': Accelerationism in the White Power Movement," (Web), The Southern Poverty Law Center, updated 23 June, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/23/there-no-political-solution-accelerationism-white-power-movement>.

³⁵ Richards, "Neoliberalism, COVID-19 and conspiracy," 111.

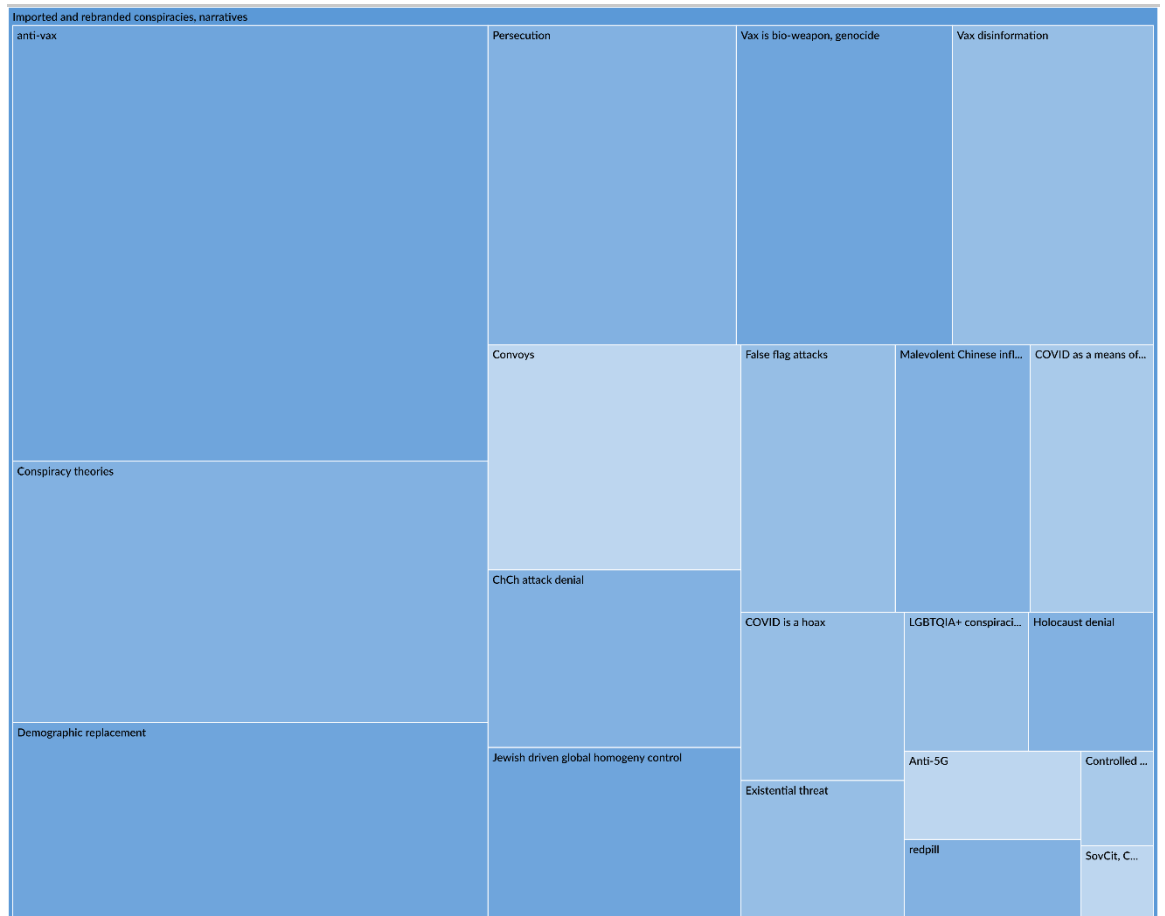


FIGURE 5: HIERARCHY CHART OF IMPORTED AND ADAPTED NARRATIVES

Anti-COVID-19 vaccine conspiracies and discussions dominate this theme. A total of 148 of the 590 posts coded to this theme express anti-COVID-19 vaccine sentiment. Some posts in this theme are more explicit in their critiques. For example, 40 comments from the data sample frame the **COVID-19 vaccine as a bio-weapon** that is causing the vaccinated to die. Many of the posts in this category either suggest or explicitly state that the vaccine caused more deaths than COVID-19 itself. Some (4) even suggest that the vaccine was being distributed as a form of **genocide** or a “cull” of the population, both globally and specifically within New Zealand, a decision most often attributed to former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern or her Government.

A similar number of posts (37; 10 included in the previous group) contain other **factually incorrect information about the vaccine** such as claims that the vaccine is altering the genetic makeup of those who get the vaccine, or that more people were hospitalised because of the vaccine than COVID-19.

Other COVID-19-related narratives that were important and adapted, reflected in 34 total posts, include the idea that the **COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax** (perpetuated both by the Government and media in New Zealand) and, more commonly (in 19 posts), that the Government was using the **COVID-19 pandemic as a way to track and control citizens**. These latter posts would, for example, point to vaccines passes and the scanning of QR

codes for the New Zealand COVID-19 tracer mobile app as evidence of government surveillance and limits on freedom.

The concept of the **'freedom convoy'** is another idea that began overseas and was adopted in New Zealand. Our analysis identified 33 posts that reference convoys as a form of resistance against the government control discussed above. Many of these posts reference the Canadian 'freedom convoy', a series of blockades and protests associated with 'truckers' that began in early 2022, as an inspiration and a model for a similar convoy in New Zealand. A New Zealand convoy was organised and carried out in the weeks after the Canadian iteration, culminating in the three-week occupation of Parliament grounds by anti-vaccine mandate protestors in February-March 2022.

Another conspiracy theory represented in the data include references to the **demographic 'replacement' of people in New Zealand with a white or European background**. This claim is similar to a long-circulating conspiracy theory referred to as 'The Great Replacement'. This conspiracy, which originated in an early 20th century anti-immigration book, argues that declining birth rates among white or European populations, coupled with immigration and higher birth rates among "non-Europeans (i.e., non-whites), is leading to the systematic erasure of white people and white culture".³⁶

Other conspiracy theories represented in the data that have international antecedents include claims that **the 2019 mosque attacks in Christchurch were either faked or a 'false flag' attack** designed to enable more government control (26 posts), multiple New Zealand political parties and prominent figures are supporting a **Jewish-driven global hegemony** (25 posts), and **5G mobile transmissions are harmful** or a means of control (9 posts).

Interestingly, while some conspiracy theories that have international origins have gained traction in New Zealand, there is little evidence of support for groups or entities that spread those conspiracies. For example, QAnon, the decentralised far-right movement that believes an anonymous source called Q is detailing US President Donald Trump's secret campaign against a powerful, global cabal of Satanic paedophiles in the 'deep state', has publicised many of the conspiracies discussed in the data. However, the group itself received little attention.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The report reveals the significant presence and currency of international extremist discourse in New Zealand-based online content. It reveals that global narratives are strategically adapted to local contexts. Through analysis of 4chan and Telegram content during three politically significant time periods, we identified patterns of racist,

³⁶ A Dirk Moses, "'White genocide' and the ethics of public analysis," *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 2 (2019): 3.

misogynistic, and anti-institutional rhetoric that mirror extremist content observed in other countries.

In terms of key findings, antisemitic, anti-Muslim and anti-Māori expressions were very common. Antisemitism functioned as a foundation that links various conspiracy theories. Also notable is that international extremist narratives such as conspiracy theories including the "Great Replacement" have been adapted in New Zealand. Such narratives integrate anti-Māori racism and grievances related to local political events.

The report reveals both continuity and change in extremist discourse. Themes such as distrust of mainstream media, and antisemitism, remained consistent across all three time periods. As such, extremist discourses become embedded in ongoing grievance narratives that outlast the initial triggers that gave rise to such narratives. These grievances contribute to the development of what Bharath Ganesh refers to as a "fuzzy collectivity" which can include people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and thus have an equally 'fuzzy' or unclear ideology that can be difficult to identify and counter.³⁷

Of particular concern is the prevalence of violent language throughout the dataset. Posts explicitly calling for the execution of public figures, journalists and academics, and members of minoritised communities were present across all time periods analysed. While expressions of violence online do not necessarily cause violent events, evidence from international incidents show that such rhetoric can and does inspire real-world violence. Furthermore, we note that violent discourse observed in the dataset was often framed as retributive justice. In the posts we observed, public figures were accused of crimes that called for their execution. Such calls could contribute to taking up violent action.

Finally, efforts to counter online extremism must recognise the global nature of extremist networks while addressing local grievances. Given the prominence of anti-institutional discourse, there is an urgent need to rebuild trust in democratic institutions, media, and expertise. Rebuilding trust serves to create resiliency against extremist expressions of grievances. Digital literacy programs must equip people not only to identify misinformation but also to recognize the emotional appeals and grievance narratives that make extremist content compelling.

³⁷ Bharath Ganesh, "The Western Far Right and Digital Technology: Fuzzy Collectivity From Translocal Whiteness to Networked Metapolitics," *Sociology Compass* 19, no. 2 (2025): 3, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.70038>, <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/soc4.70038>.