

Understanding the Relationship between Overseas Extremist Narratives and Domestic Extremist Narratives in New Zealand

This is a summary of the research project examining the relationship between international and domestic extremist discourse in New Zealand.

Research Question and Objectives

The primary research question was: **To what extent do foreign ideologies and conspiracy theories influence extremist discourses and actions in New Zealand?**

The project examined New Zealand-specific content to contribute to the understanding of the New Zealand online environment, and to explain the connections between grievances and engagement with extremist content online. The overall aim was to increase academic, policy, and public understanding of the flow of dis/misinformation and harmful ideologies into New Zealand. Understanding the proliferation process can contribute to the development of policy prevention measures.

Sources for the Research

The analysis was based on New Zealand-specific content collected from specific channels on two online platforms known to carry extremist ideologies: 4chan's /pol/forum and Telegram's NZ Free Speech Forum and Independent Nationalist New Zealand channels.

The data collection spanned three distinct time periods between 2022 and 2024, strategically aligned with major political events:

- **January 28 – February 28, 2022:** Aligning with the Parliament occupation by anti-vaccine mandate protesters.
- **October 14 – November 14, 2023:** Aligning with the 2023 New Zealand election.
- **October 15 – November 15, 2024:** Aligning with the 2024 US Presidential election.

Approximately 12,000 posts were collected from each platform for analysis. To establish a manageable and rich dataset, research assistants thematically coded the first 1,000 posts, chronologically, from each period in each dataset.

Key Findings

The thematic content analysis identified five major categories of extremist online discourse, confirming that New Zealand-based extremist content echoes findings from international research. A crucial overarching finding is that users actively adapt overseas discourses, tailoring them to local grievances and political contexts. The five major themes identified were:

1. Racist Commentary

Racist expressions which include Antisemitic, Anti-Muslim, and Anti-Māori discourse were very common in the dataset.

- **Antisemitic expressions:** The most prevalent, with 329 posts. Antisemitic content contained dehumanizing language, celebrated Hitler, and included ‘globalist’ conspiracy tropes.
- **Anti-Muslim:** Common, with 87 posts. Posts accused Muslims of plotting to take over western societies and impose Islamic codes. Islam was compared to Judaism but seen as more dangerous.
- **Anti-Māori expressions:** Common, with 86 posts. They contained racist and dehumanising tropes against Māori, and called for violence, including civil war.

2. Sexist and Anti-Rainbow Community Commentary

Discourse targeting women and the rainbow community was common.

- **Anti-rainbow community slurs and expression:** This category was highly common, appearing in 191 unique posts. The posts propagated tropes linking the rainbow community to paedophilia and violence against children and contained anti-trans vitriol.
- **Anti-women language:** Prevalent in 50 posts. It included sexual epithets, blaming women for men's grievances, and linking feminism and declining birthrates to communism.

3. Disdain for Established Systems and Institutions

This theme expresses discontent with systems such as elected governments, media, academics and corporations. Resistance to the ‘mainstream’ was a core element.

- **Anti-Authority/Anti-Expert:** This category, combining anti-government (85 posts) and anti-academic/researcher (31 posts) content, was the largest grouping (116 posts). Posts accused officials of exercising emergency powers to establish a ‘new world order’ orchestrated by the World Economic Forum (WEF).
- **Anti-Media:** Prevalent in 56 posts, the media was framed as being manipulative and coercive, and spreading ‘propaganda’ and ‘lies.’
- **Anti-Elitist:** Economic grievances were expressed through ‘class divide’ (56 posts) and ‘anti-corporate’ (16 posts) comments, accusing the government of advancing the interests of the wealthy elite.

4. White Extremist Commentary

This theme centred on the need to strengthen “Western” identity, which serves as coded language for white supremacy. Topics included **anti-immigrant discourse** (91 posts) and **pro-European white supremacist themes** (100 posts). These posts claimed immigration poses a threat to white culture and the existence of white people by causing their “replacement.”

5. Imported and Adapted Narratives

This theme highlights how foreign ideological concepts are localized for New Zealand-specific context.

- **Anti-COVID-19 Vaccine Conspiracies:** Dominant in this theme (148 posts), including claims that the vaccine was a bio-weapon causing death or that the pandemic was a hoax used to enable government control of citizens. Some posts claimed the vaccine was being distributed as a form of genocide, often attributed to former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern or her government.
- **Localised Foreign Concepts:** The Canadian ‘freedom convoy’ concept was referenced and adopted as a model for local resistance, culminating in the 2022 Parliament occupation. The “Great Replacement” conspiracy was adapted to integrate anti-Māori racism and local political grievances. Other imported conspiracies included claims that the Christchurch Mosque attacks were a ‘false flag’ (26 posts) or that New Zealand political parties support a Jewish-driven global hegemony (25 posts).

Prevalent Violent Language

Of concern is the high prevalence of violent language across the entire dataset. Posts calling for the execution of public figures, journalists, academics, and members of minoritised communities, were present across all time periods analysed. Calls for violence were frequently framed as **retributive justice**, e.g., accusing public figures of crimes like terrorism and treason to legitimate calls for their execution. Fantasised violence against specific figures was evident in 128 posts, including explicit calls for the ‘death penalty’ for elected officials such as Jacinda Ardern.

Recommendations

The report concludes with recommendations aimed at countering online extremism:

1. **Address Local Grievances:** Efforts to counter online extremism must recognize the global nature of extremist networks while simultaneously addressing the local grievances that fuel the adaptation of international narratives.
2. **Rebuild Trust:** Given the prominence of anti-institutional discourse in the online content, there is an urgent need to rebuild public trust in democratic institutions, media, and expertise. Rebuilding this trust is presented as a measure to create resiliency against extremist expressions of grievances.
3. **Enhance Digital Literacy Programs:** Digital literacy programs must be implemented to equip people with tools to identify misinformation and recognize the underlying emotional appeals and grievance narratives that make extremist content compelling. Such tools should be developed by government and non-government agencies to counter the appeal of harmful content.

Note: A full version of the research report is available from DPMC.