

Misinformation, disinformation and malinformation threats impacting New Zealand audiences

A critical analysis of the New Zealand Information Environment



Logically.

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Glossary.....	6
Background.....	7
Timeline of Significant Events.....	9
Methodology.....	10
New Zealand MDM Threat Matrix.....	13
Four Pillars of MDM Risk and Quantitative Analysis.....	15
1. Public Safety	15
Demographics.....	16
Politically Motivated Offline Action (PMOA).....	18
Identity Motivated Offline Action (IMOA).....	22
White Supremacy.....	22
Anti-Islam.....	24
Anti-Semitism.....	25
Anti-LGBTQ.....	28
Faith-Motivated Offline Action (FMOA).....	30
Mixed, Unstable, and Unclear Ideologies (MUU).....	31
Effect on Political Landscape.....	33
2. Public Health	34
Demographics.....	35
Anti-Vax and Anti-COVID-Vax Movements.....	36
Alternative Medicine.....	40
Demographics Affected by Vaccine Hesitancy.....	42
Effect on Political Landscape.....	42
3. National Security	43
Demographics.....	44
Foreign Information Manipulation or Interference.....	45
Assessing Foreign Influence.....	45
Effect on the Political Landscape.....	49
4. Elections	50
Demographics.....	51
Foreign Information Manipulation or Interference.....	53
Effect on Political Landscape:.....	54
Conclusion.....	55
Annex A: 2022 Wellington protests case study.....	56
Annex B - Platforms Glossary.....	57
References.....	59

Executive Summary

From 1 January 2020 to 20 October 2023, we researched New Zealand's online information environment, examining misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) narratives. The findings are organised under the categories of Public Safety, Public Health, National Security, and Election Integrity. Using our threat matrix further explained in Table 1, we assigned a risk grading (A-D) and reach grading (1-4) to each category to measure the impact of MDM narratives on New Zealand audiences.

Public Safety (C3 Major Risk, Medium Reach)

The dominant narratives that posed a risk to public safety were The Great Reset and conspiracy theories regarding that topic. We class this as a meta-conspiracy containing sub-narratives regarding uncontrolled immigration, anti-Semitism, and anti-LGBTQ rhetoric.

There was little evidence of explicitly extremist content on mainstream social media, and that which we did find had low reach. However, it is possible that such content exists on closed platforms and end-to-end encrypted channels to which we did not have access.

Also observed were MDM encouraging offline activities (tangible, real-world activities resulting from dissemination or belief in false or misleading information), including anti-migrant and anti-government protests. These calls to action often intertwine with conspiracy theory ideology and, in rare cases, radical ideology.

These types of MDM narratives pose a major risk to public safety as they receive significant exposure. While mostly propagated by fringe influential figures, these narratives could motivate and influence individuals and groups to violence.

Public Health (C3 Major Risk, Medium Reach)

During our research period – which encompassed the COVID-19 pandemic, the public health response, and the 2020 general election – heightened interest and amplification of COVID-19-related conspiracy narratives were observed, impacting election-related discourse. For instance, individuals sceptical of electoral processes or political party policies were likely to use public health MDM narratives, leveraging suspicion of government overreach and civil liberties infringement, to support their views.

There was significant growth in New Zealand's Anti-Vax movement. While the volume of Anti-Covid Vax content has trended down since 2020, observable spikes correlate with the vaccine rollout and political commentary on the government's vaccination campaign.

Public health-related MDM narratives are considered a major risk with medium reach. These narratives played at least an influencing and motivating role in the Wellington occupation of Parliament grounds in February-March 2022. By fostering distrust in public services and stoking anti-government sentiment, they create permissive environments for other MDM narratives and ideologies to take hold.

National Security (C2, Major Risk, Low Reach)

We found no evidence of coordinated Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) targeted at New Zealand or foreign attempts to disrupt the domestic online information environment. But the impact of state-backed MDM during the observed period should not be minimised.

Throughout our research, we have observed that those with strongly held beliefs in MDM narratives, including conspiracy theories, may be more susceptible to belief in other narratives. We consider this to make them more vulnerable to foreign-state interference, and we have found evidence of foreign-state-supported media strategically positioning their messaging to resonate with audiences who believe in MDM narratives.

In our view, influence operations that leverage MDM narratives present a major risk, but the reach of such operations in New Zealand is constrained and has low sustained engagement..

Election Integrity (C2 Major Risk, Low Reach)

We found no Foreign Information Manipulation of Interference (FIMI) in the 2023 general election. We also found a low volume of election integrity-related MDM, which suggests a lack of foreign interest in shaping the information environment.

Additionally, no Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour (CIB) targeting voters or the political process was found during our research period. It is important to note that our research was limited to observable online activity, and we may not have captured sophisticated or covert attempts at interference. The absence of identified FIMI during the 2023 election period does not negate the potential for future attempts at foreign interference in New Zealand's democratic process.

MDM narratives questioning the integrity of the 2023 electoral process were observed. Claims of election fraud and manipulation emerged in online discussions. However, these narratives were predominantly propagated by fringe influential figures and had low reach and little sustained interaction.

Glossary

For the purpose of this report, the following definitions will be used:

- **Misinformation:** False or misleading information that has not been created or shared with the intention of causing harm.
- **Disinformation:** False or misleading information deliberately spread to manipulate a person, social group, organisation, or country.
- **Malinformation:** Factual information taken out of context to mislead, harm, or manipulate.
- **Conspiracy theories:** Broad beliefs centred around the notion that secret groups orchestrate and manipulate world events to impose their worldview on society through deception. These plots are discerned through a specific interpretation of culture, politics, and society, often leading to the discrimination of one or more groups. Due to their requirement of narrativised and interconnected worldview, conspiracy theories are susceptible to exploitation as a form of misinformation or disinformation allowing the insertion of additional narratives by different actors.
- **Foreign information manipulation or interference (FIMI):** Messaging designed to “influence, disrupt or subvert New Zealand’s national interests by deceptive, corruptive or coercive means.”¹
- **Information environment:** The online space where information is spread. This varies depending on the country and the level of internet access and literacy of the population.
- **Content:** User-created information online. Videos, images, text posts, and other media posted by users to social media platforms.
- **Narrative:** A unifying stance and story that groups content, often informing a worldview or explaining world events.

Background

This section provides context for the examination of the primary misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) campaigns and narratives that influenced New Zealand audiences from January 1, 2020, to October 20, 2023.

These MDM campaigns can involve spreading false or misleading information on social media platforms, websites, or other channels, with the intention of deceiving or manipulating public opinion. As countries worldwide have implemented online safety regulations, these groups have also evolved in constructing, developing, and spreading conspiracy narratives^{2,3}. Conspiracy theories and other forms of MDM narratives are often amplified through engagement by notable public personalities, or ‘influencers,’ fringe politicians, and other individuals with a large public.

Conspiracy theories tend to spread quickly due to people’s ingrained biases, which originators of these theories target intentionally. Communities that subscribe to or endorse conspiracy beliefs are often vulnerable to foreign state interference in various ways. As conspiracy theories attack or are highly critical of established governments in countries they take root in, their believers can be leveraged through external messaging to cause real-world disruption in that country, such as protests. Foreign states may also position their state-supported media in opposition to the “mainstream media,” increasing the reach and uptake of their soft power and propaganda⁴.

This report categorises the MDM spread by these different groups into four main categories: Public Safety, Public Health, National Security, and Election Integrity.

Public Safety:

MDM narratives in the context of public safety have demonstrated the potential to incite real-world harm through calls to action and pathways to radicalisation. They often react to news and current events, fluctuating in reach and activity. Influential domestic figures can endorse narratives that contribute to biases, prejudices, or the dissemination of MDM, potentially leading to offline actions. This spillover from online discourse to tangible offline action poses a significant risk, as specific grievances exploited by MDM could incentivize or radicalise individuals, resulting in real-world consequences.

Public Health:

MDM narratives in public health, particularly regarding vaccinations and COVID-19, have been persistent and impactful. They have led to a broader distrust of mainstream health initiatives, political actors, and media. These narratives have had a broad demographic reach, with particular risks identified among women, especially those of Māori, Pacific, or Asian ethnicity, or those from deprived backgrounds. Demographic breakdowns indicate a predominantly male presence in public health-related narratives.

National Security:

MDM narratives in national security have aimed to undermine social cohesion and trust in institutions. They are vulnerable to exploitation through amplification via state-controlled media. Russia has been identified as enhancing its influence in New Zealand by strategically using state-controlled media to resonate with domestic audiences aligned with local MDM narratives.

Elections:

MDM narratives have posed significant risks to election integrity, primarily through the widespread adoption of conspiracy narratives. These narratives offer alternative perspectives to guidance and messages from purportedly malign mainstream authorities, making audiences vulnerable to shifting toward extremist views. Despite not identifying widespread narratives during the 2023 New Zealand general election, claims involving vote manipulation or election rigging in favour of a “the Great Reset’s globalist agenda” have been noted.

Timeline of Significant Events

This timeline provides an overview of key moments from early 2020 to the present that have shaped the MDM landscape in New Zealand. It highlights the evolution of conspiracies and the impact they have had on public discourse and social movements. The timeline also underscores the interconnected nature of global and domestic narratives, showing how events and ideas from around the world can influence local conversations and actions.

Early 2020

During the pandemic, a 'knowledge vacuum' was filled with various speculative conspiracies. In March 2020, a conspiracy theorist from the United Kingdom, known globally, alleged censorship. The conspiracy theorist used a 'cut' YouTube livestream as evidence of being silenced for exposing the 'truth' about the pandemic. This incident solidified the COVID-19 & 5G conspiracy as an early defining narrative, capturing global attention, including in New Zealand.

Mid to Late 2020

Lockdowns resulted in increased online activity, leading more people to discover conspiracy communities. QAnon, which gained international prominence through the #saveourchildren hashtag, became a rallying point for various protests and marches worldwide.

The global anti-lockdown movement, commonly referred to as the 'freedom movement,' organised street protests and marches. It mobilised under the banners of being Anti-COVID-Vax, anti-lockdown, and generally opposing all measures aimed at containing and controlling the pandemic. These marches persisted well into 2022.

Early 2021

In 2016, a video from the World Economic Forum titled '8 Predictions for 2030' went viral within conspiracy networks. The video introduced the phrase, "you will own nothing and be happy." The Great Reset spread across established conspiracy networks as a meta-conspiracy to interpret current events.

Bans on the 'freedom movement' across mainstream platforms, partly resulting from a broader crackdown on conspiracies after January 6th, dispersed domestic networks.

2022 to present

On 6 February 2022, protestors gathered at the Wellington Parliament Building, driven in part by belief in conspiracy narratives.

Telegram became a significant organisational structure for both domestic and international conspiracy networks.

The Great Reset continued to wield substantial influence as the preferred meta-conspiracy for interpreting global events. See Annex A for a case study on the Wellington Protests.

Methodology

Logically conducted this report's analysis using publicly available information, adhering to all rules and regulations aligned with New Zealand's Privacy Act 2020. Publicly available information in the context of New Zealand's Privacy Act refers to data that is accessible to the general public through legal means, such as information published on websites, in publicly accessible databases, or in publicly available reports.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Logically collected and analysed data from January 1, 2020, to October 20, 2023, utilising proprietary tools and analytical methods applied to publicly available information. The analysis encompassed the development of pattern and trend analyses related to online behaviour, misinformation, and disinformation activities.

Data collection involved the use of customised queries based on Boolean logic and researched keyword combinations. These keywords were applied in English and te reo Māori during the primary ingestion query to ensure comprehensive and relevant coverage. The collected data, obtained through tailored Boolean searches, included multi-modal content, incorporating images, video, and audio attached to posts with relevant keywords for subsequent analysis.

In our research, particular attention was given to geolocation and gender data, allowing for a detailed analysis of these aspects to enrich the depth of our insights. This approach ensures that our reporting covers textual content and provides a nuanced understanding of the geographical context and gender-related dynamics associated with the collected data. Gender data is calculated using proprietary AI that infers the likelihood of user gender based on username and biography data. If there is any ambiguity in username or no detail for the AI pipeline to the user, then no gender is assigned. This data is used to infer gender and is not stored or collected. Only a likely gender tag is added to content.

Sources and Platforms:

The New Zealand online information environment consists of four main areas: social media platforms (sites such as X, Facebook, and Instagram), online forums (such as NZIssues.com), instant messaging platforms (such as Telegram and WhatsApp), and online news outlets (both mainstream and alternative). 95% of the population is understood to have ready access to the internet, with 81% accessing social media platforms.

Information provided by Meta, ByteDance, X, Snap Inc, and Google (see *Fig. 1*) indicated the total registered users per platform in New Zealand as of early 2023 are: Facebook - 2.95

million, YouTube - 4.24 million, Instagram - 2.15 million users, TikTok - 1.65 million users (over 18 users only, advertising data is not collected on users aged 13-18), Snapchat - 1.45 million users, and X - 791,000.

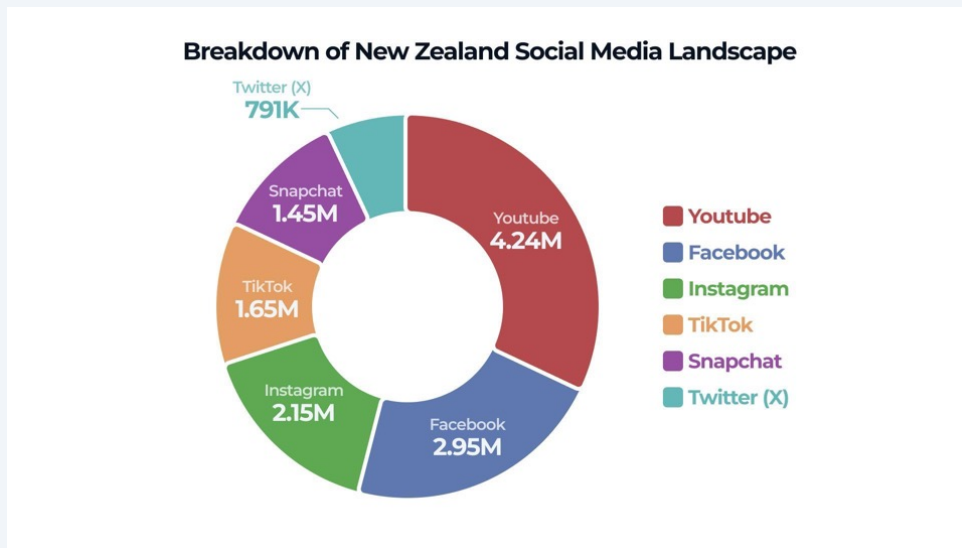


Fig. 1. Segmented breakdown of New Zealand's social media landscape

With this context in mind, Logically gathered information for this report from various open and publicly available sources across the internet. These platforms included, but were not limited to, the following:

- X (formerly known as Twitter)
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Reddit
- Telegram
- YouTube
- Tumblr
- Web-log (Blog) platforms
- Forums and message boards
- News websites

Utilisation of AI for Analysis:

Logically leveraged AI tools to support data collection and analysis efforts. AI was used to enhance the efficiency of data collection, identify patterns in MDM narratives, and measure engagement and reach. However, all analytical conclusions were verified by human analysts to ensure accuracy and mitigate biases.

Limitations:

During this report's analysis, it was sometimes necessary to utilise 'geofencing' to obtain results specific to New Zealand. Geofencing involves filtering online to include only posts from users based in New Zealand, offering the advantage of highlighting content actively targeting New Zealand audiences. However, it has limitations as it will not show users who are based in New Zealand but have listed their profile as being somewhere else for satirical or anonymization reasons.

For example, between January 1, 2020, and October 20, 2023, the research environment collected over 92.5 million mentions. With geofencing applied, this reduced the mentions to 1.68 million. Both formats will be used throughout the report, providing explanations for the choice of display.

Compliance:

Logically's reporting centres around the overarching harmful narratives and behaviours related to the information environment. No personal information is directly or indirectly reported on or stored within this research environment. This approach aligns with the Privacy Act 2020, the Intelligence and Security Act 2017, the Search and Surveillance Act 2012, and all other relevant legislation. All information collected and analysed for this report is considered publicly available information and adheres to the applicable Privacy Principles set out in the Privacy Act 2020.

Techniques, Tactics, and Procedures (TTPs) for Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB) Analysis:

Logically used TTPs for CIB analysis to identify and map coordinated misinformation and disinformation networks. This involved examining the behaviour of accounts, dissemination patterns, and inauthenticity indicators to detect coordinated efforts to manipulate information. Additional supporting evidence, such as case studies and specific examples, are included throughout the report to further clarify the methodology, alongside the threat matrix outlined in the next section.

New Zealand MDM Threat Matrix

Logically developed a threat matrix (depicted in Table 1) to enable clear assessment and grading of relevant MDM (as depicted in Table 2) threats. This matrix uses an A-D grade for the risk associated with a piece of content, narrative, or MDM campaign and a 1-4 grade for the reach. In addition, the matrix has a red-amber-green coding for at-a-glance assessment of potential threats.

The matrix can be applied to individual pieces of content for alert reporting or, as is the case with this report, applied cumulatively to observed high-performing pieces of content to assess a narrative or risk area. The matrix and grading criteria offer a broad framework, allowing analysts to exercise judgment and provide further details. For instance, an item earning a D grade for risk or a 4 grade for reach is not obligated to fulfil all criteria outlined in the definition; instead, the definition serves as a guiding reference.

Risk <i>(Impact + Likelihood)</i>	D	D1	D2	D3	D4
	C	C1	C2	C3	C4
	B	B1	B2	B3	B4
	A	A1	A2	A3	A4
		1	2	3	4
	Reach <i>(Potential Reach / Established Reach / Velocity / Demographics)</i>				

Table 1. New Zealand MDM Threat Matrix.

Risk	Definition	Reach	Definition
D Severe	<p>Threat to life. Direct call for violence. Threat to critical national infrastructure. Direct impact on election integrity. Direct, targeted involvement of Hostile State Actors (HSA). Spread by influential figures, political leaders, influencers, and international personalities. Explicit targeting of NZ audiences.</p>	4 High	<p>Multiple demographics targeted to cause tensions. 1m+ reach. High engagement (00,000s+). Spread by influential figures, political leaders, influencers, and international personalities. Multiple social media platforms. Sustained and increasing engagement over time. Multiple languages with English language targeted.</p>
C Major	<p>Distrust of public services. Offline action - protest, low-level civil unrest with potential risk to public safety. Possible HSA involvement. Indirect HSA involvement. Spread by fringe influential figures - minor political leaders, low-level influencers, international personalities.</p>	3 Medium	<p>Moderate, or multiple demographics impacted. Less than three social media platforms. Sustained engagement. Spread by fringe influential figures - minor political leaders, low-level influencers, and international personalities. HSA language reached English-language audiences. Medium engagement (0,000+).</p>
B Moderate	<p>Conspiracy theory MDM designed to influence government policy/law. Harmful/inflammatory narratives with the potential to cause unrest or offline action at a later stage. Mainstream/public involvement in spreading narratives. Foreign state involvement (not hostile intent). Spread by fringe influential figures, ministers, low-level influencers, and national personalities.</p>	2 Low	<p>Minority demographic impact. Mention spike with no, or negligible, sustained engagement. Spread by fringe influential figures - ministers, low-level influencers, and national personalities. HSA language origin with no translation spread. Low engagement (<0,000).</p>
A Minor	<p>Contained within the online environment. Confined to echo chambers/niche environments.</p>	1 Negligible	<p>Fringe demographic impact Negligible engagement on any platform. Unless - Threat to life, significant, manifestos, and intent to harm.</p>

Table 2. MDM Threat Matrix Grading Criteria.

Four Pillars & Quantitative Analysis

1. Public Safety

In examining the intersection of public safety and MDM, Logically analysed how harmful narratives correlate with offline action. The analysis revealed that MDM content prompting offline action often intertwines with conspiracy rhetoric. In extreme cases, it can also align with genuine radical ideologies.

To understand the impact of MDM on public safety, analysts focused on how extremist ideologies utilise MDM and the rhetorical similarities in online environments. This analysis is crucial because not all MDM content leads to radicalisation. Monitoring and moderating for these similarities can be tough because they include biased, prejudiced, and excluding language rather than directly extremist content. This highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing broader grievances that MDM narratives often appeal to rather than solely focusing on explicit hate speech.

The subsequent subsections delve into key aspects of MDM narratives in New Zealand, starting with an analysis of demographic data to understand how different groups engage with and are affected by MDM content. This section also examines Politically Motivated Offline Action, Identity Motivated Offline Action, white supremacy, anti-Islam sentiments, anti-Semitism, anti-LGBTQ narratives, and Mixed, Unstable, and Unclear ideologies. These subsections aim to provide a comprehensive view of the diverse narratives present in the MDM landscape and their potential impact on public health and safety in New Zealand.

Overall, the analysis underscores the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the impact of harmful narratives on public safety. It highlights the importance of proactive measures to counter misinformation and disinformation that could lead to real-world harm. The primary concern regarding public safety related to these narratives is the general risk of offline actions and the potential for violence by individuals or groups influenced or motivated by online content.

Analysts applied the threat matrix across top-performing content and narratives in the research environment, assessing them collectively as indicative of the risk area as a whole. Based on the content observed and collected for this report, the risk level assigned to the public safety pillar of the information environment is C3.

C3 Major Risk, Medium Reach

The content poses a major risk due to its promotion of distrust in public services, creating the potential for involvement by hostile state actors. Additionally, there is a notable encouragement of offline action such as anti-migrant and broad anti-government protests that could be permissive environments for exposure to further MDM narratives and ideologies. This categorization as a C3 grading in risk signifies the substantial level of risk associated with the content.

In terms of reach, the content gains significant exposure. While it is mostly disseminated by fringe influential figures, it manages to achieve medium engagement figures, surpassing 100,000. Moreover, even though sustained engagement is limited, there are instances where small amounts of content maintain prolonged interaction. This qualifies the content for a 3 grade in reach, highlighting its notable impact and visibility.

Demographics

Gender plays a crucial role in how individuals respond to certain types of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) content, which can impact public safety concerns. For example, research has shown that women are more likely to be influenced by narratives that emphasise the protection of vulnerable groups, such as children or the elderly, from perceived threats. This could lead to increased support for policies or actions aimed at enhancing public safety for these groups.

Conversely, men may be more responsive to narratives that emphasise individual freedom and autonomy, leading to different attitudes towards government interventions or safety measures. Understanding these gender-specific responses is essential for crafting targeted messaging and interventions to address public safety concerns related to MDM.

Moreover, gender-specific narratives or beliefs can lead to different offline action forms. For instance, in cases where MDM spreads conspiracy theories about vaccines, women may be more inclined to seek out alternative healthcare options or resist vaccination mandates out of concern for their family's well-being. On the other hand, men may be more prone to join protests or engage in other forms of activism that align with their beliefs about government overreach or personal freedoms.

By analysing gender data in conjunction with MDM content and public safety concerns, policymakers and researchers can better understand how different demographics respond to and interpret online information. This can help tailor interventions and communication strategies to effectively address public safety risks related to MDM and mitigate the impact of harmful narratives on society.

As shown in Fig. 2, authors discussing public safety are generally male, with 69% of users identifying as male on their social media profiles. Female users were more likely to post content relating to beliefs that the government was trying to control or deceive the population

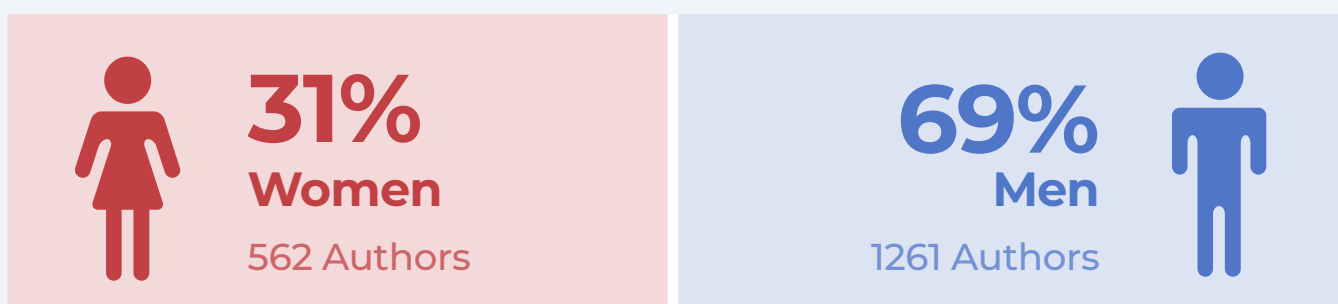


Fig. 2. Demographic split between genders.

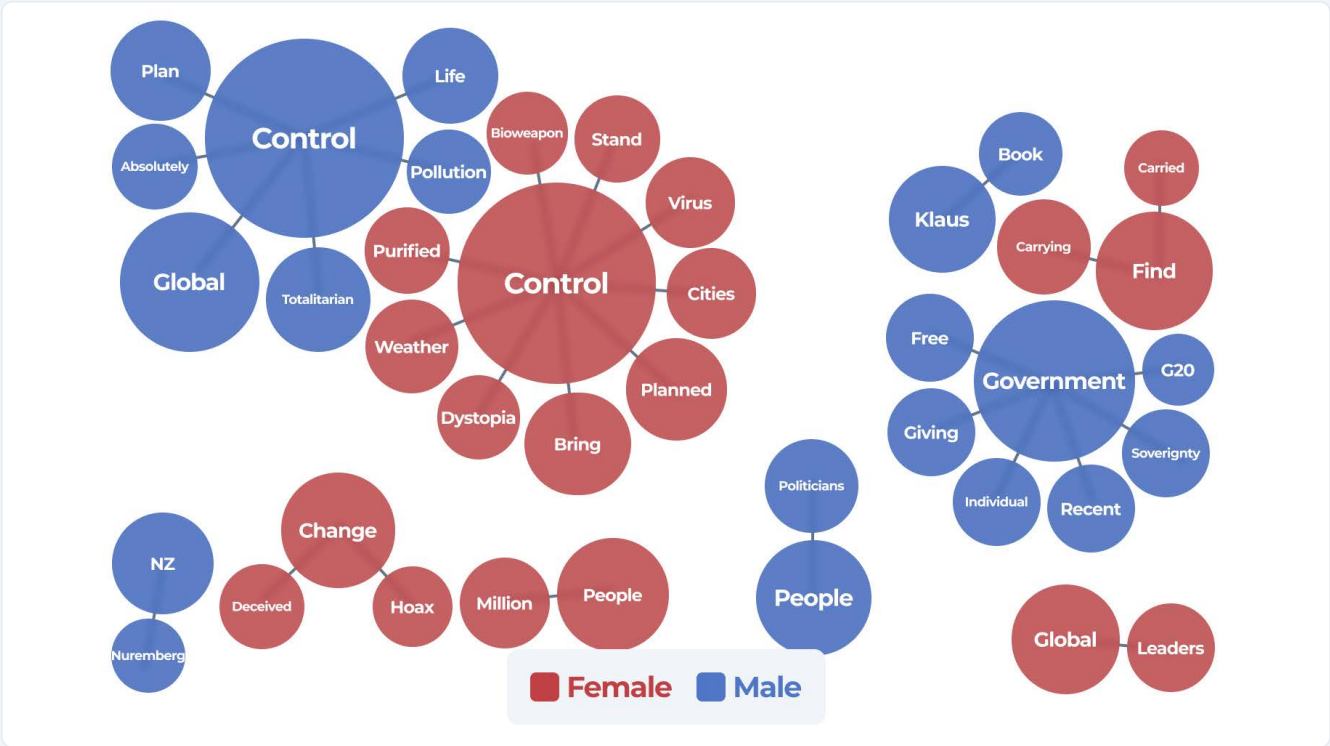


Fig. 3. Topics most discussed and posted, broken down by subtopic and colour coded by gender.

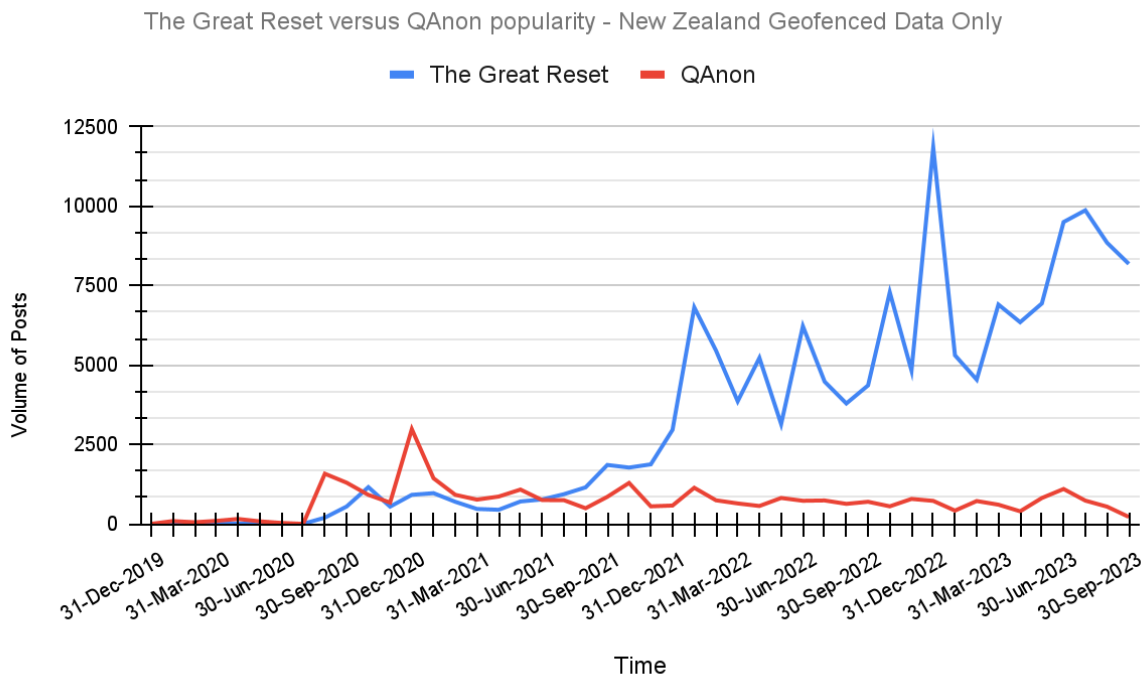


Fig. 5. The Great Reset and QAnon conspiracy popularity in New Zealand.

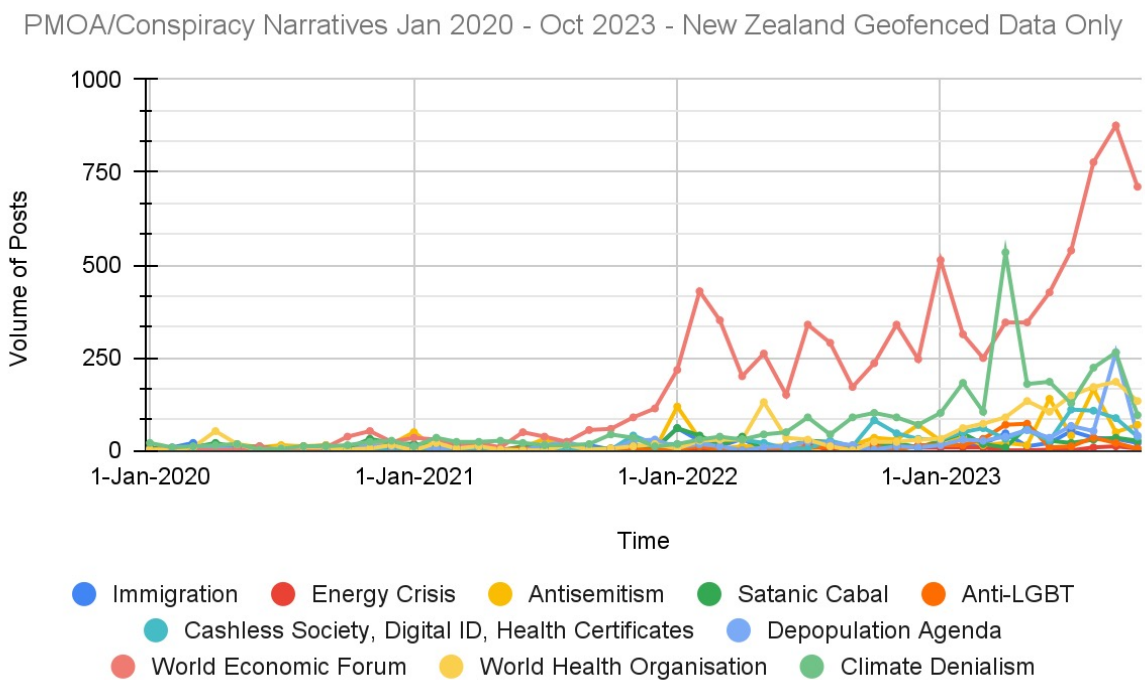


Fig. 6. PMOA/Conspiracy narratives broken down as single-issue grievance attractors.

In Fig. 6 above, the correlation between engagement with conspiratorial narratives surrounding the World Economic Forum and the 2022 Wellington Protests underscores The Great Reset conspiracy theory's influence on real-world events. The initial peak coincides with the 2022 Wellington Protests, fueled by content suggesting that New Zealand is leading The Great Reset implementation by the World Economic Forum. Subsequent peaks maintain this sentiment, gaining both reach and intensity.

Peaks in Fig. 6 related to climate denialism and Anti-Vax, notably in early April 2023 and September 2023, are influenced by New Zealand's interaction with United Kingdom conspiracy media websites, domestic influencers, and prolific social media users. The belief in The Great Reset serves as a unifying factor for these sub-narratives, suggesting that secret groups arrange and design world events. This connection allows PMOA engagement with a conspiracy framework, exposing New Zealand citizens to broader single-issue grievance narrative activity.

The initial peak aligning with the 2022 Wellington Protests highlights a key correlation between the engagement with conspiratorial narratives and offline political actions, underscoring the potential impact of online narratives on real-world events. In summary, the correlation between conspiracy narratives and PMOA underscores the importance of monitoring and addressing these narratives to mitigate public safety risks posed by misinformation and extreme ideologies.

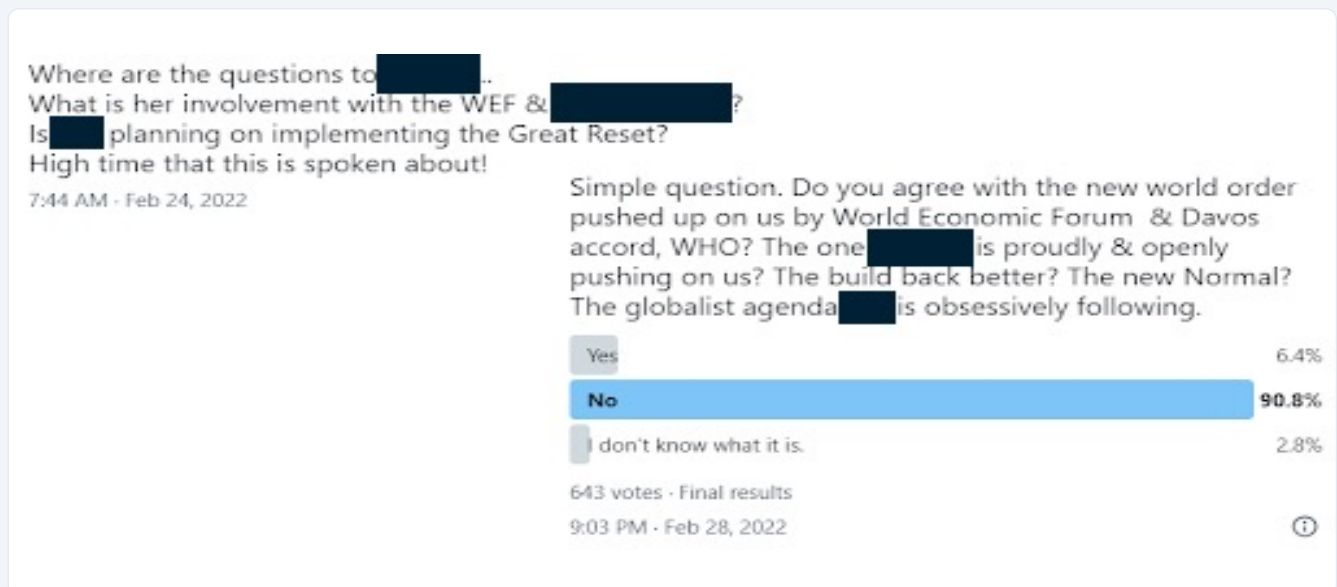


Fig. 7. Popular content connecting the New Zealand Government to The Great Reset conspiracy. The combined reach of ~70,000.

Identity Motivated Offline Action (IMOA)

Identity Motivated Offline Action stems from identity-focused MDM content and narratives. There is a noticeable alignment in rhetoric, tone, and stance between online MDM addressing identity-based grievances and the language used by individuals supporting identity-based superiority ideologies, such as White Supremacy. This alignment arises from shared conspiratorial beliefs and disinformation-driven explanations about the world's state, which can potentially escalate tensions.

Logically has identified common overlaps and vectors for online MDM utilizing identity, further detailed in subcategories: anti-Semitism, anti-LGBTQ, and white supremacy (including anti-Māori and anti-Islam sentiments). These identity-based grievances often rely on disinformation and misinformation to reinforce beliefs and recruit others.

WHITE SUPREMACY

Logically has identified specific MDM narratives that promote white supremacy ideals, advocating for the notion of “racial” superiority over others and disparaging other ethnicities while delegitimizing their ways of life. These narratives, as identified by Logically, target Māori communities and emphasise topics such as the belief that Māori are not indigenous or that other groups settled the land before them. Moreover, these narratives include claims suggesting that Aotearoa is not the accurate Māori name for New Zealand.

One notable claim circulated in May 2023 asserted that Aotearoa is a “made-up” name, as depicted in Fig. 8. The original post alone reached 73,317 users, and the 44 content reports extended the reach to 87,697. Over a 48-hour period, the post accumulated over 297 likes across the 44 posts.



Fig.8. Claim that Aotearoa is a name taken from a children's story.

A 2018 survey revealed that New Zealanders inaccurately believed around 11% of the population were Muslim, compared to the actual figure of 1%⁵ revealed that New Zealanders inaccurately believed around 11% of the population were Muslim, compared to the actual figure of 1%. Within the research environment, content targeting Muslims in New Zealand totaled 212 mentions during the reporting period, reaching 398,000 users. As illustrated in Figs. 9 and 10, which show the cumulative reach of all relevant posts over time, spikes in reach figures (85,000 in Mar 2020, 108,000 in September 2020, and 47,000 in December 2020) were all attributed to anti-Islam posts.

These examples highlight the dissemination of misinformation and the targeting of marginalised communities, such as Māori and Muslims, to further white supremacist ideologies. The significant reach of these narratives underscores the impact of MDM in promoting racial superiority beliefs and perpetuating discrimination against minority groups in New Zealand.

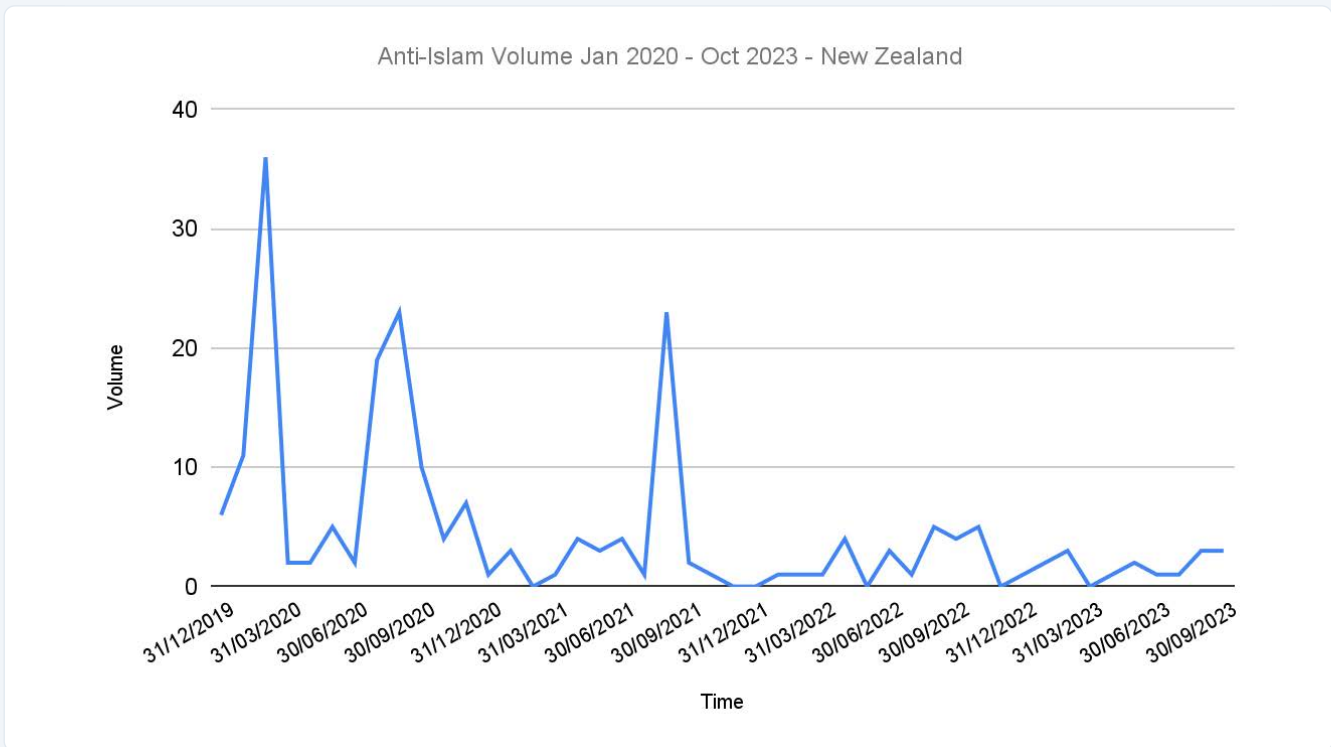


Fig. 9. Anti-Islamic content by mention volume.

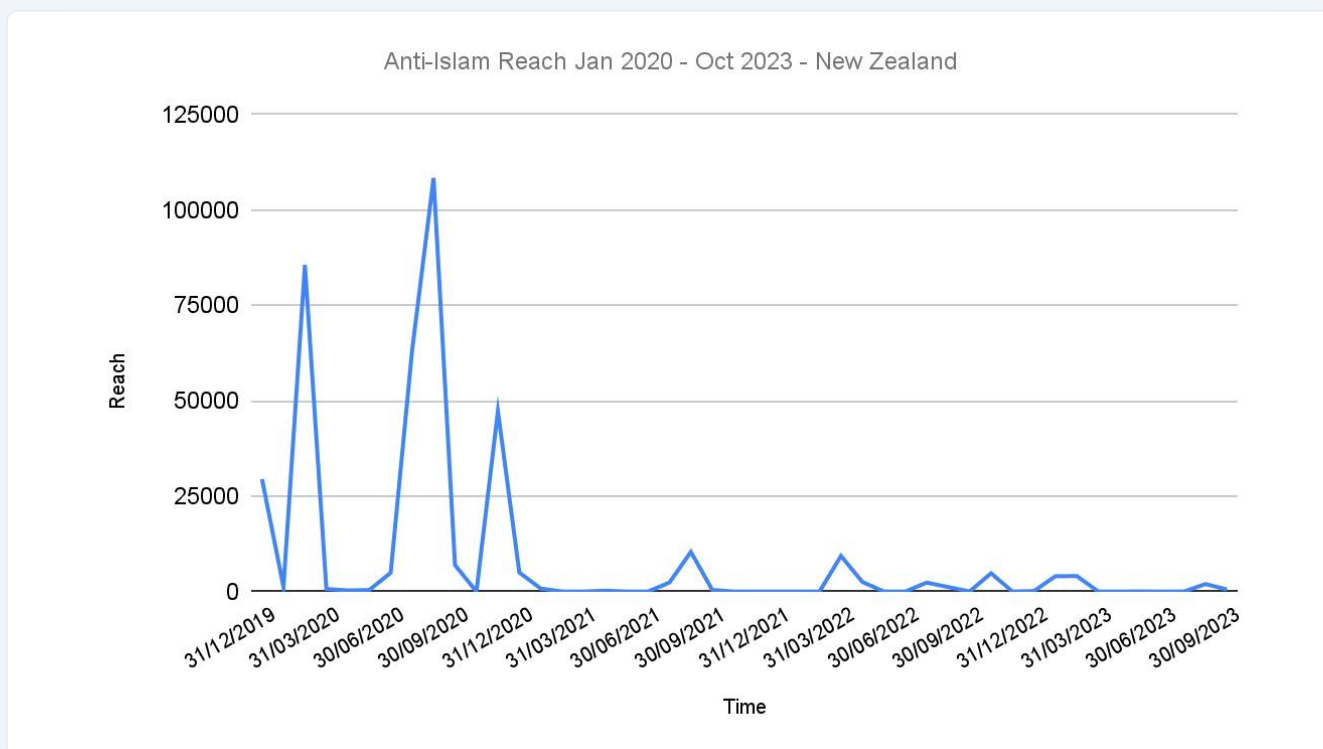


Fig. 10. Anti-Islamic content by reach.

ANTI-ISLAM

Anti-Islam sentiments in New Zealand have manifested in various ways, reflecting a potential increase in resentment towards Muslims. Posts on forums focused on New Zealand included statements such as “What happens when you welcome Taliban and its supporters into your nation” and “...stop all Muslim immigrants and refugees. Their religion and way of life are not compatible with ours.” Other content originating from New Zealand employed broad, derogatory language, seemingly satirical, equating Islam with New World Order conspiracy narratives.

These examples highlight the nature of the rhetoric used in certain online discussions and forums, illustrating the type of language and ideas that contribute to anti-Muslim sentiments. Some posts have criticised the government’s response to the Christchurch attack, suggesting that it has emboldened Muslims and led to an increase in Muslim immigration, which is portrayed as a threat to New Zealand’s culture. While these posts may not have a wide reach, they indicate a troubling trend of anti-Islam rhetoric in certain online circles.

Additionally, posts have surfaced on social media and forums suggesting that Muslims are not compatible with New Zealand’s values and way of life. Some of these posts have called for stricter immigration policies to prevent Muslim immigrants and refugees from entering the country. Despite their limited reach, these posts contribute to a narrative that portrays Islam and Muslims in a negative light, potentially fueling anti-Muslim sentiment in New Zealand.

Themes within anti-semitism in New Zealand focus on three main areas:

- **Conspiracy theory that Jewish individuals control the world:** This theme is often promoted within alt-right circles, promoting the belief in an imagined globalist world order controlled by Jewish people. This narrative, which is foundational to many conspiracy theories, is most notably associated with The Great Reset but is also indirectly referenced throughout QAnon. For example, in January 2022, a social media post targeted supporters of globalists amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The post expressed disbelief at those promoting the globalist agenda, using the term “Goyim” to refer to non-Jewish people, attracting a reach of 1,545.
- **Noticing patterns:** This term is applied to various conspiracy theories and serves as a connecting narrative that intersects The Great Reset conspiracy with forms of anti-Semitism. For instance, in December 2022, an NFT known as ‘Zion’ caused a peak in anti-Semitic mentions. The term “Zion” is often used in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories to refer to a perceived Jewish globalist agenda. “Pattern noticing” involves identifying signs or trends reinforcing the belief that Jewish people control the world. When used without additional context, it acts as a subtle means for anti-Semites to signal their beliefs.
- **Use of terms:** Anti-Semites emphasise the importance of scrutinising media language, particularly terms like “banker” and “cabal/kabbalists,” which are often linked to conspiracy theories alleging Jewish control of banks and global affairs. For example, in July 2023, New Zealand-based social media users highlighted that “ultra-right-wing nutters” have distorted the term “globalist” to mean “Jew.”

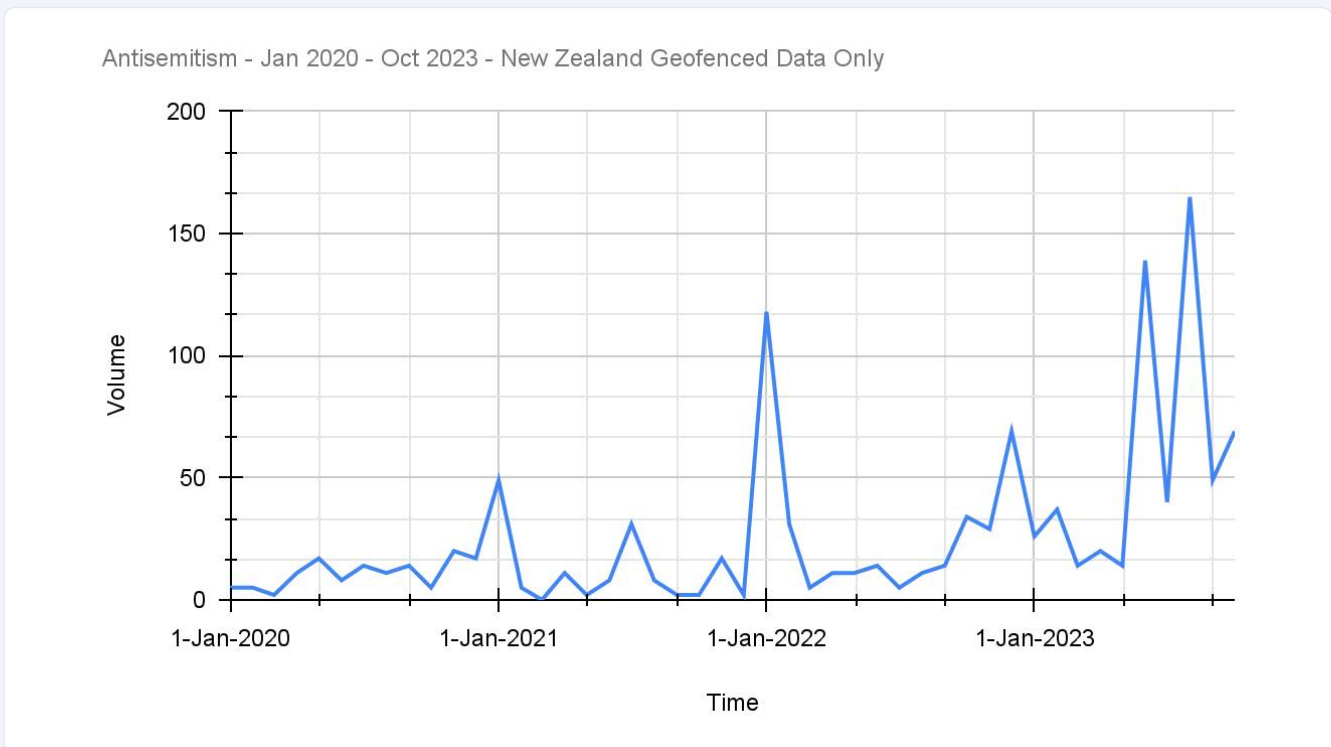


Fig. 12 Anti-semitism content by mention volume.

Anti-Semitism mentions within New Zealand's information environment peaked five times during the reporting period - January 2021, January 2022, December 2022, June 2023, and July 2023. The trend line has also continued to increase throughout the reporting period, indicating a concerning rise in anti-Semitic sentiment. The first peak in Fig. 12, January 2021, resulted from discourse criticising anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists who believe in the Jewish people taking over the world and instituting the New World Order. The second peak, January 2022, was driven by a post targeting supporters of globalists amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The post expressed disbelief at those promoting the globalist agenda, using the term "Goyim" to refer to non-Jewish people, attracting a reach of 1,545.

Discounting the third peak in December 2022 is warranted, as it resulted from an NFT (non-fungible token) known as 'Zion.' The fourth peak, June 2023, was caused by the global response to the former President of the United States post-indictment speech, in which he criticised "globalists" and "Marxists." Social media users in New Zealand interpreted his statements as a veiled reference to Jews, viewing the terms as "hate speech for Jews." The fifth peak, July 2023, was also caused by New Zealand-based social media users highlighting that "ultra-right wing nutters" have distorted the term "globalist" to mean "Jew." Although instances of anti-Semitism in the mainstream New Zealand information environment are infrequent, they likely exist on niche websites dedicated to hate speech.



Fig. 13. Example of a social media extract showing "Please keep the world clean" anti-Semitic messaging.



Fig. 14. Anti-Semitic messaging, Auckland protest.

The attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023, sparked global anti-Israel protests. From October 4, 2023, to October 11, 2023, the top trending topics in New Zealand centred on the attacks in Israel and the subsequent Israeli declaration of war against Hamas on October 9, 2023. A rally in Auckland supporting Palestine on October 14, 2023, attracted anti-Semitic sentiments, as evidenced by a placard displaying the phrase "please keep the world clean" (see Fig. 13) accompanied by a stickman placing the Star of David into a bin. This image also appeared at anti-Israel demonstrations in Canada in 2022, the United States in 2023 (see Fig. 14), and on various social media profiles, indicating a coordinated anti-Semitic campaign.

ANTI-LGBTQ

Conspiracy theorists often interpret recent attention to LGBTQ-related issues as part of a globalist agenda to disrupt or replace traditional notions of gender and sexuality⁶. This perceived agenda is seen as an attempt to ‘corrupt’ and ‘demoralise’ Western culture and destroy the traditional family structure, which is considered a bastion of traditional values and a bulwark against globalism. This sentiment is illustrated in the prominence of the term “New World” as a reference to New World Order conspiracies (see Fig. 19)

Anti-LGBTQ content within New Zealand was consistently low throughout the reporting period before peaking in 2023. In May 2023, there were 200 mentions of a post targeting a shift in New Zealand’s education system to include teaching gender-related topics and sexual diversity, which increased the reach of the anti-LGBTQ messaging. The report linked in this post was also targeted for its part in the global agenda. This original post reached an audience of 115,873, which was extended to 413,696 as the total audience reached by the 190 reposts of the content.

This example highlights how narratives aligned with the sexualization or the grooming of children (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16) are often successful in gaining attention. Content such as this has the possibility of obtaining seemingly viral status, reaching an estimated 385,087 users within 48 hours. However, due to an ever-moving news cycle and the short lifespan of virality, the post’s reach and reposts diminished over the next three days (with 63 reposts on day two and a reach of 16,499, eight reposts on day three, and a reach of 12,108; and zero reposts on day four).

Groomer alert: The NZ Herald is now just casually encouraging the grooming of children into LGBTQ lifestyles.

Honestly @nzherald - does this not cross some sort of line? We’re talking about kids here.

Fig. 15. Claim mainstream media is complicit in encouraging LGBTQ activities.

If the LGBTQ+ movement can’t stay away from grooming minors we should make sure it ceases to be a movement 🏳️‍🌈

Fig. 16. Example of United States content reposted in New Zealand.

 @YouTube Kids is grooming children with LGBTQ+ propaganda 🏳️‍🌈

I made an account and what I found was disgusting

7:33 PM · Jan 31, 2023 · 8.3M Views

2,126 22.6K 49.8K 6,221 

Fig. 17 Example of US content, reposted in New Zealand.

Anti-LGBTQ content within New Zealand was consistently low (see Fig. 20) throughout the reporting period before peaking in 2023. In May 2023, 200 mentions of a post (Fig. 18) targeting a shift in New Zealand’s education system to include teaching gender-related topics and sexual diversity increased the reach of the anti-LGBTQ messaging. The report linked in this post is also targeted for its part in the global agenda⁷. The original post reached an audience of 115,873, which was extended to 413,696 as total audience reached by the 190 reposts of the content.

The prominence of LGBTQ-related issues in conspiracy theories often stems from a belief that these issues are part of a broader agenda to reshape societal norms and values. This perception is reinforced by the use of terms like “New World,” which are associated with conspiracy theories about a secretive global elite seeking to establish a totalitarian world government. This narrative resonates with individuals who are sceptical of societal change and fear the erosion of traditional values.

Well, well, well... the plot thickens. It turns out the requirement to disrupt heteronormative gender and sexuality in young children is on United Nations orders. This 2022 study is coded SDG4. Agenda 2030 link.springer.com/article/10.1000...

Fig. 18. Post targeting New Zealand’s education system.



Fig. 19. Trending topics relating to anti-LGBTQ narratives in New Zealand.

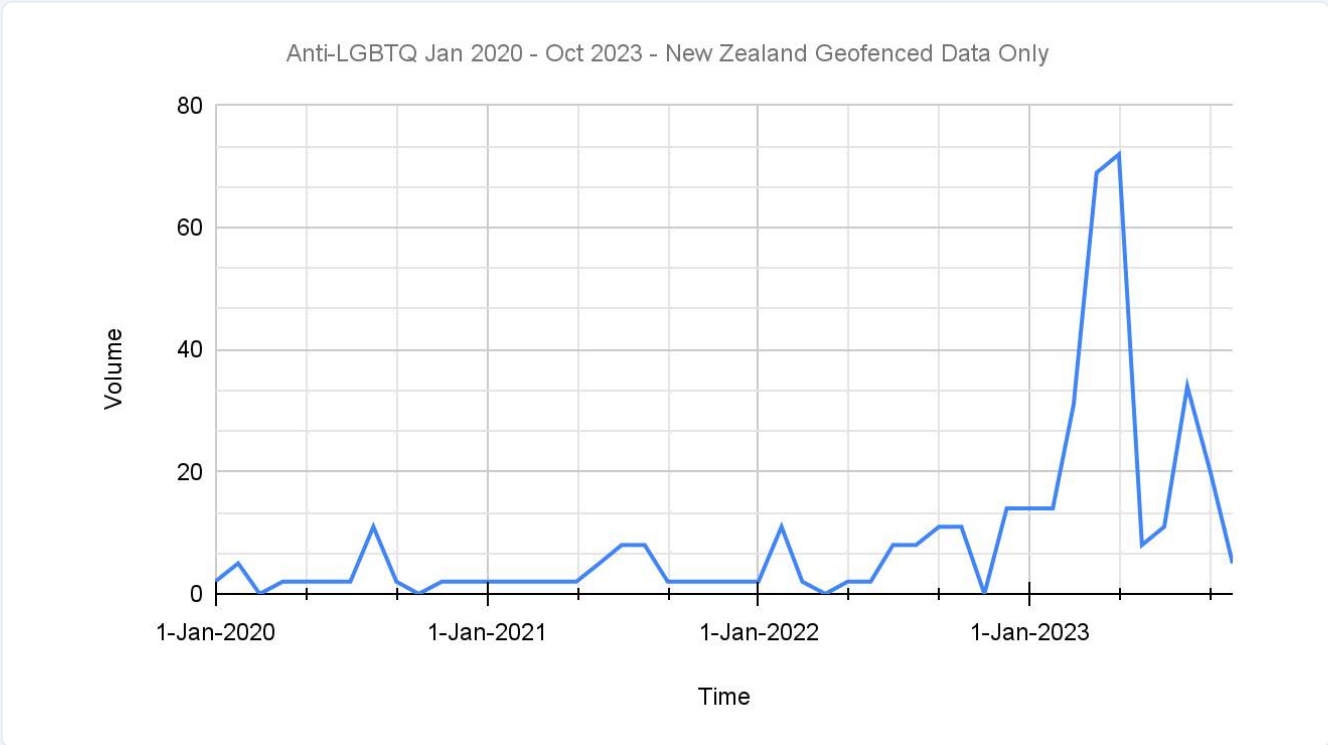


Fig. 20. Anti-LGBTQ content by mention volume.

Faith-Motivated Offline Action (FMOA)

Unlike radical ideologies, FMOA is seldom accessible via Open-Source⁸ means. Individuals expressing sentiments that could lead to harmful offline actions along religious lines, fueled by MDM, often violate platform terms of service. This violation makes it easier to flag and remove such content. Otherwise, FMOA activities occur in end-to-end encrypted channels or group messages during organised discussions.

ISIS/Daesh-related messaging is not often found on mainstream social media platforms for the reasons outlined above. It is highly likely that content exists on niche or closed messaging platforms beyond the scope of this report. A 2021 study claims invite-only and user-owned channel platforms like Discord are likely havens for FMOA content⁹.

These platforms can be accessed by New Zealand citizens, with Discord currently the 37th most popular website in the country based on traffic. Discord's primary role as a gaming community hub makes moderation and content restriction difficult.

Mixed, Unstable and Unclear Ideologies (MUU)

Mixed, Unstable, and Unclear ideologies are rising globally, representing a form of harmful offline action that connects with extremism, particularly appealing to younger demographics. These ideologies have close ties to the aftermath of the Christchurch attack¹⁰. They are often fueled by disinformation and malinformation aligned with conspiracy theories, reinforcing broad prejudices and biases as a rejection of contemporary society. In the United Kingdom, MUU accounted for 37% of all under-20 anti-extremism referrals in 2022, a significant figure compared to Right-Wing Extremism at 13% and Islamist extremism at 8%.

Despite being labelled as “Mixed, Unstable, and Unclear,” MUU exhibits throughlines and unifying patterns. Content associated with MUU often aligns with the extreme right (see Fig. 21). These throughlines typically revolve around rejecting the perceived cultural, economic, or political status quo, which is characterised as ‘degenerate.’

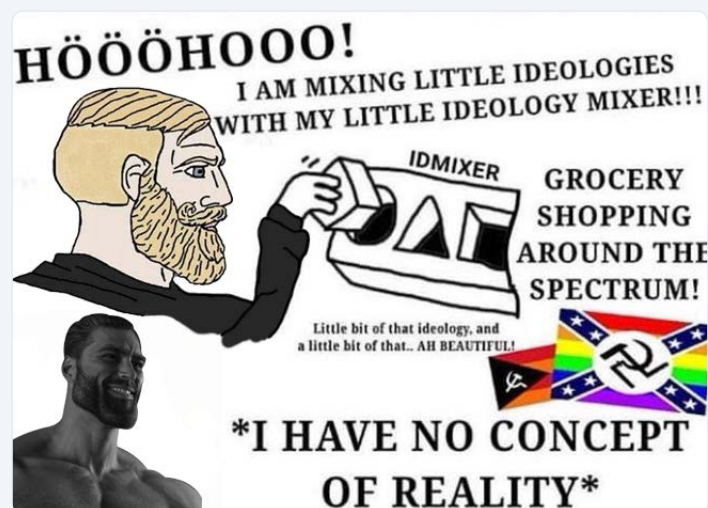


Fig. 21. Is an example of MUU meme culture

Traditional Identity Motivated Offline Action typically organises around a unified ideology like nationalism, anti-minority action, or established offline groups such as extreme-right street gangs or pseudo-political organisations¹¹. In contrast, MUU views existing Identity Motivated Offline Action groups as a resource for imagery, iconography, subcultural content, and ideological stances. It utilises these elements in flexible and undefined ways to signify participation in a rejection of contemporary liberal and progressive culture.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, much of this conspiracy rhetoric references terminology and symbols from multiple strains of extremist ideology. This framing frequently connects to other radicalised or extreme beliefs, assigning blame to specific groups for orchestrating both cultural shifts (which, in turn, target other minority and vulnerable groups) and world events.

In addition to collecting and remixing signifiers of different ideologies, there is an emergent “ideology of the mass shooter or terrorist” driven by “terrorgram” - a collection of Telegram channels that have grown out of esoteric extremist groups dedicated to hastening the collapse of Western culture through acts of terror.

Terrorgram venerates previous shooters as “saints” and cites the Christchurch terrorist as a significant inspiration for future action, promising that future offline actors will be similarly “sanctified.” Here, the individual grievances of the terrorists are less important than the fact they took action. ‘Saints’ within the ideology range from explicit neo-Nazis to eco-terrorists.

The Christchurch terrorist’s reputation and veneration in MUU-aligned spaces illustrate the reciprocal impact of MUU on a local scale. The effect of MUU on New Zealand can be better understood by considering how New Zealand has influenced the global MUU and aesthetically driven online extremist movement.

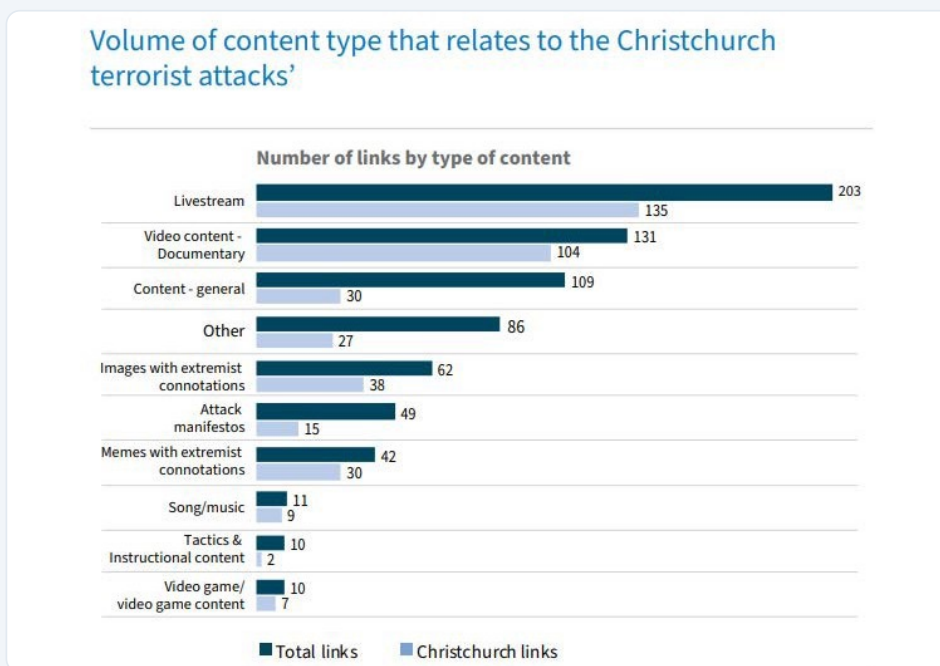


Fig. 22. Breakdown of content type relating to the Christchurch terrorist attacks.¹²

Distinct geographical data for Terrorgram and other MUU-style users and participants could not be discerned for this report as the channels and charts used by MUU subcultures are often international, with very little to signify the geographic location of individual members. Unlike more organised forms of radical belief where online sharing of MDM is part of participation, MUU spaces online used to interact and exchange content are not separated into geographic or national ‘chapters.’

MUU calls for careful consideration of how other forms of grievance narratives interact based on aesthetic and narrative lines (such as imagery and rhetoric) that may align with underpinning disinformation or malinformation. This can then be used as a way to identify fault lines where MUU radicalisation via MDM may take place.

Effect on Political Landscape

Faith-Motivated Offline Action (FMOA) and Mixed, Unstable, and Unclear Ideologies (MUU) are unlikely to directly impact the political landscape, as they represent forms of ideology beyond routine politics. FMOA activities often occur in encrypted channels, not accessible through open-source means, limiting their influence on mainstream political discourse. Similarly, MUU narratives, while aligning with extreme right-wing ideologies, do not directly contribute to political discourse except in the context of national security.

On the other hand, Politically Motivated Offline Action (PMOA) that poses a risk to public safety can significantly influence political discourse. Post-COVID PMOA, connected to The Great Reset conspiracy theory, implies a rejection of various political infrastructures, including elections, except for endorsing “outsider” candidates who align with this conspiracy. MDM contributing to Identity Motivated Offline Action, harm, and prejudice in New Zealand, can serve as a resource for populist politicians. It allows for scapegoating and targeting specific groups while appealing to other demographics. This doesn’t necessarily mean the rhetoric is extremist, but it draws on and enables the support of radical ideologies.

The analysis of Politically Motivated Offline Action (PMOA) in New Zealand underscores the significant impact of MDM on public safety. The correlation between online conspiracy narratives, such as The Great Reset, and offline actions, like the Wellington Protest, highlights the potential for MDM to incite real-world harm. The broad appeal of The Great Reset conspiracy theory in New Zealand, surpassing the popularity of QAnon, demonstrates its substantial reach and influence on public discourse.

This alignment with the assigned risk level of C3 Major Risk, Medium Reach, reflects the potential for PMOA to engage a wide audience and incite violence, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the risks posed by harmful narratives.

2. Public Health

In New Zealand, misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) targeted Māori communities and perceptions of vaccine uptake rates in different groups, although such incidents were infrequent during the reporting period. Influential figures, including political leaders, internationally recognized celebrity influencers, and prominent domestic conspiracy theorists, often exploit narratives related to public health for MDM purposes, contributing to their widespread dissemination and high reach.

Logically's assessment indicates that influential figures within the New Zealand information environment and on the global stage impact the reach and reception of public health-related MDM narratives in the country. The spread of these narratives poses a risk by fostering a general distrust in public services, the government and the potential development of growing resentment within communities. Additionally, MDM is disseminated on ethnic grounds, as baseless claims target specific ethnic communities, attempting to justify persistent racist views.

Analysing the intersection of public health and MDM, analysts focused on how harmful narratives correlate with offline actions. The analysis revealed that MDM content prompting offline action often intertwines with conspiracy rhetoric and, in extreme cases, aligns with genuine radical ideologies. This analysis is crucial because not all MDM content leads to radicalisation. Monitoring and moderating based on these rhetorical similarities can be challenging, as they involve bias, prejudice, and exclusionary rhetoric rather than explicit extremist content. This highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing broader grievances that MDM narratives often appeal to rather than solely focusing on explicit hate speech.

The subsequent subsections delve into key aspects of MDM narratives in New Zealand's public health landscape, starting with an analysis of demographic data to understand how different groups engage with and are affected by MDM content. This section also examines anti-vaccine sentiments, spikes observed related to 2022 vaccination rates, siloed communities resisting COVID-19 vaccination efforts, correlation to Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) beliefs, and the demographics affected. These subsections aim to provide a comprehensive view of the diverse narratives present in the MDM landscape and their potential impact on public health in New Zealand.

Analysts applied the threat matrix across top-performing content and narratives in the research environment, assessing them collectively as indicative of the risk area as a whole. Based on the content observed and collected for this report, the risk level assigned to the public health pillar of the information environment is C3.

C3 Major Risk, Moderate Reach

The content is classified as C3 due to its significant risk factor. It predominantly promotes a distrust of public services, posing a potential risk of involvement by hostile state actors. Moreover, there is content that actively encourages offline actions such as Anti-Vax protests that could be permissive environments for exposure to further MDM narratives and ideologies, contributing to the elevated risk level, resulting in a C grading in risk.

In terms of reach, the content has a moderate yet substantial impact. Mainly disseminated by fringe influential figures, it achieves medium engagement figures, surpassing 100,000. Notably, the content also garners international engagement, further amplifying its reach. While sustained engagement is limited, small amounts of content manage to maintain prolonged interaction. This justifies its classification as a 3 grade in reach, indicating its notable influence and visibility.

Demographics

Understanding the demographics of those engaging with public health-related misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) narratives is crucial for contextualising their impact on the New Zealand population. Analyses reveal that authors discussing public health are generally male, with 68% of users identifying as male on their social media profiles (see Fig. 23). Female users, on the other hand, are more likely to post content regarding the consequences of COVID-19 or the belief that COVID-19 was developed as a bioweapon (see Fig. 24).

This gender disparity in content creation suggests that different demographic groups may be exposed to and influenced by distinct types of public health-related MDM. Women, who are often primary caregivers and responsible for family health decisions, may be more susceptible to narratives that emphasise the protection of loved ones or concerns about vaccine safety. Men, on the other hand, may be influenced by narratives that appeal to notions of personal freedom or scepticism of mainstream health authorities.

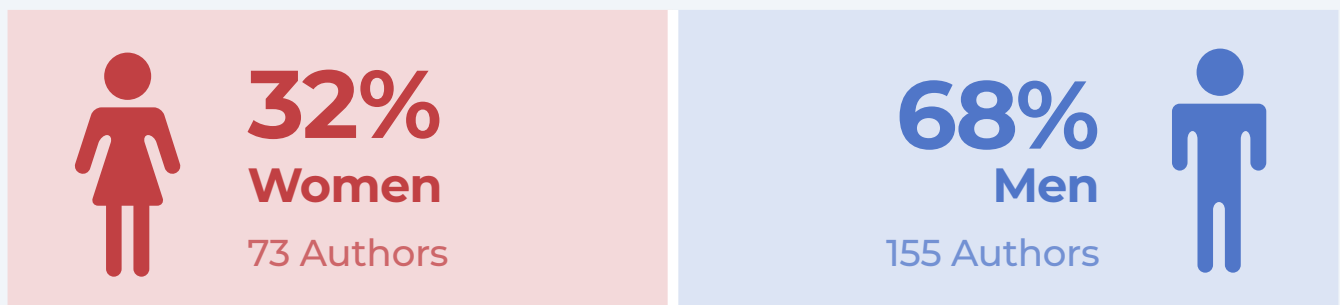


Fig. 23. Demographic split between genders.

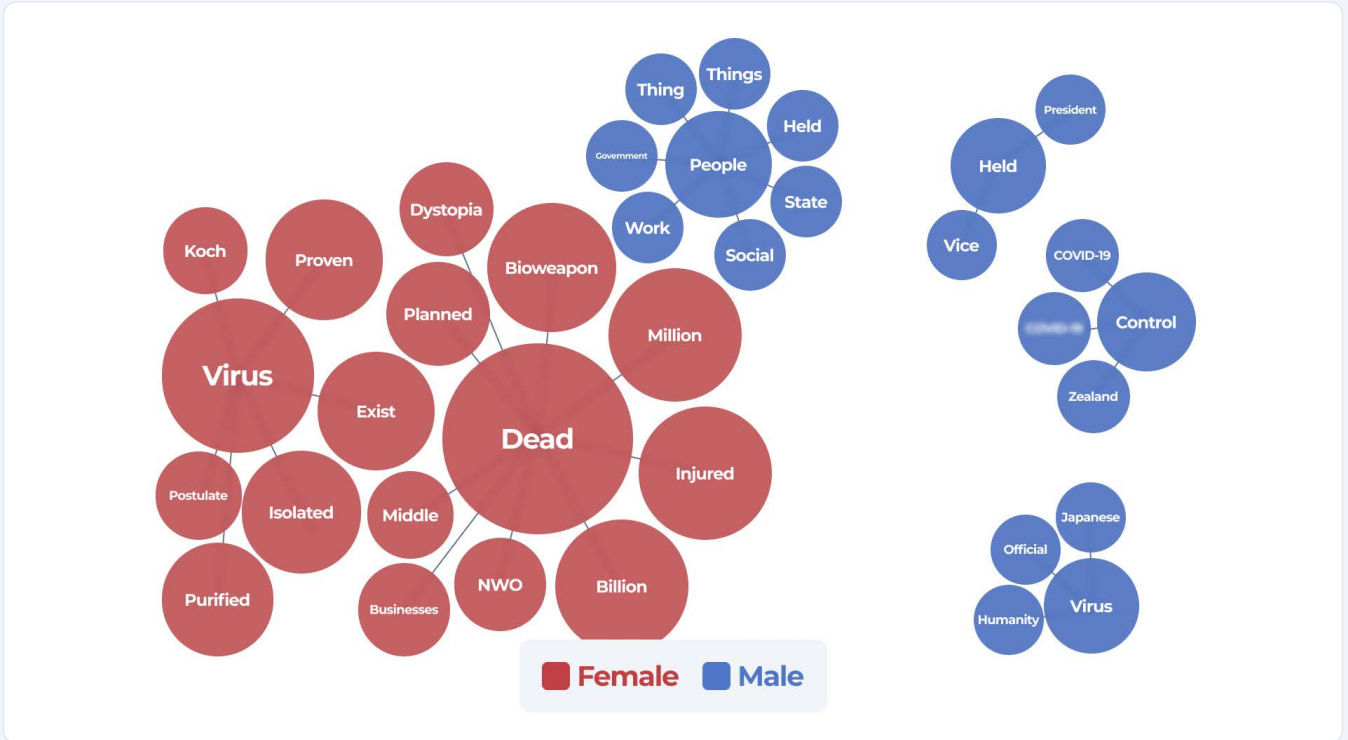


Fig. 24. Topics most discussed and posted, broken down by subtopic and colour coded by gender.

Anti-Vax and Anti-COVID-Vax Movements

In New Zealand, the Anti-Vax movement has experienced significant growth, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This movement has expanded to encompass a wide range of vaccines, with claims of rare side effects being widely shared as supposed evidence of vaccine harm.

Spikes in Anti-Vax content were observed in New Zealand, especially in early 2022, coinciding with the vaccine rollout and increasing vaccination rates across the country. Political commentary on the government's vaccination campaign also led to spikes in Anti-Vax content in 2023, driven by domestic Anti-Vax adherents reacting to current events and government actions against the pandemic.

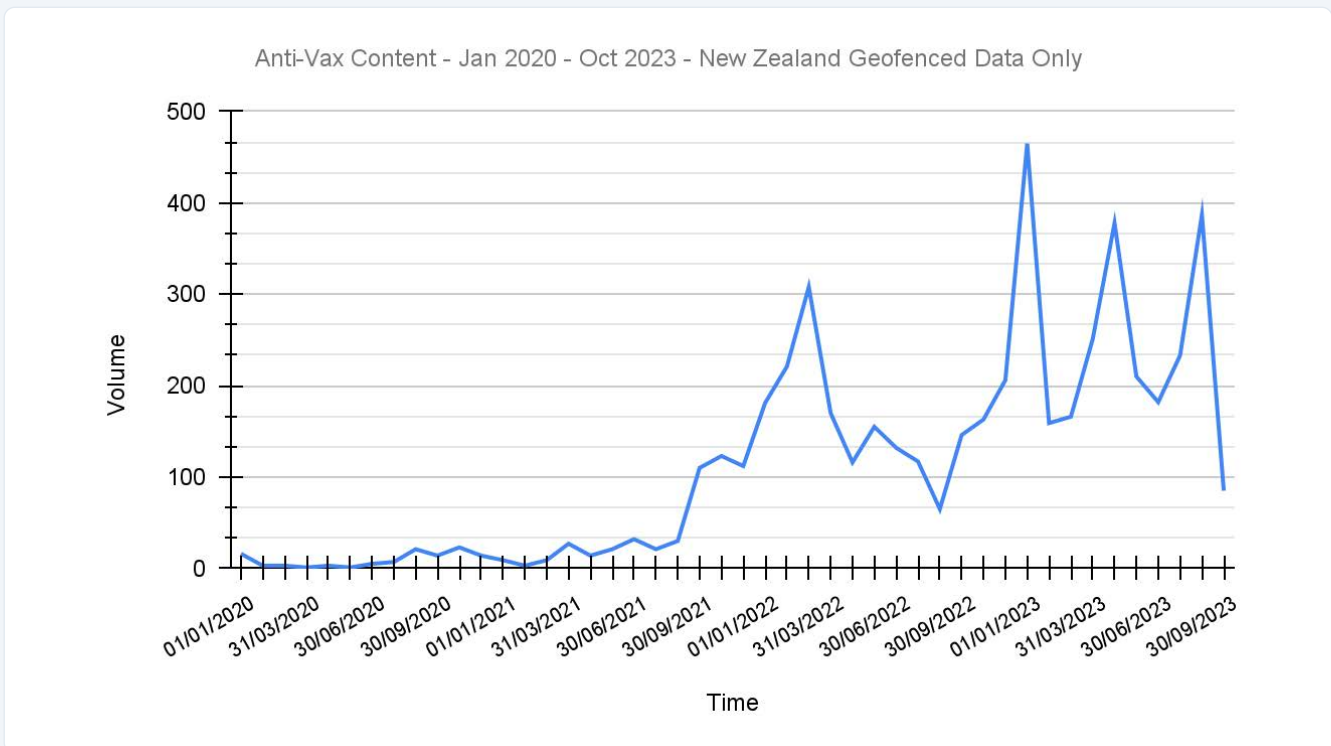


Fig. 25. Anti-Vax content by volume.

New Zealand has garnered a well-deserved positive reputation for its handling of the COVID-19 crisis. The country's early closure of its border in March 2020, combined with other proactive measures, allowed New Zealand to twice eliminate the virus within the community. New Zealand boasts a highly vaccinated population, with 90% of the total population having received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. This contrasts with vaccination rates in the United Kingdom (75%) and the United States (68%). As of November 28, 2022, New Zealand's death toll from COVID-19 stands at 2,212, equating to 45 people per 100,000 population. In comparison, the United States has a death toll of 322 per 100,000, France has 238, and the United Kingdom has 289, all above the global average of 84 per 100,000. Additionally, New Zealand's numbers are lower compared to countries with comparable populations, such as Ireland (164) and Costa Rica (177).

One notable event highlighting the strong anti-vaccination sentiment in New Zealand was the Wellington protest in September 2022. Thousands gathered to demonstrate against COVID-19 restrictions, including vaccination mandates. The protest, which turned violent at times, underscored the depth of opposition to vaccination within certain segments of the New Zealand population.

The Anti-COVID-Vax movement in New Zealand has also grown significantly, particularly in response to global lockdowns. Initially focused on anti-lockdown rhetoric, the movement shifted to Anti-COVID-Vax content when vaccines were rolled out in late 2020 (see Fig. 26 below).



Fig. 26. New Zealand-specific Anti-COVID-Vax meme, over 19,000 views.

In 2020, a report by the Social Media Analysis Toolkit (SMAT) found that spikes (see Fig. 27 and 28) in content relating to New Zealand on platforms like Parler and Telegram correlated with New Zealand Government announcements regarding COVID-19 politics, such as alert levels, lockdown conditions, and infection rates. Although the research environment used in the report did not filter for Anti-COVID-Vax content specifically, spikes in content on platforms commonly used to spread MDM and conspiracy theories indicated increased discourse (see Fig. 31) surrounding the government's policies regarding the pandemic and the likelihood of distrust towards such policies.

In 2022, New Zealand geofenced search results indicated sustained engagement with Anti-COVID-Vax content, while global results revealed a significant decline in mentions through 2021 (see Fig. 29 and 30). This decline is likely attributed to the response to the pandemic by the New Zealand Government, which faced ongoing negative messaging from anti-lockdown and Anti-COVID-Vax individuals and groups within New Zealand.

The rise of the Anti-COVID-Vax movement in New Zealand is another example of how narratives can be exploited to spread disinformation, which can have significant implications for public health and democratic processes.

Parler - Posts containing 'New Zealand' per day

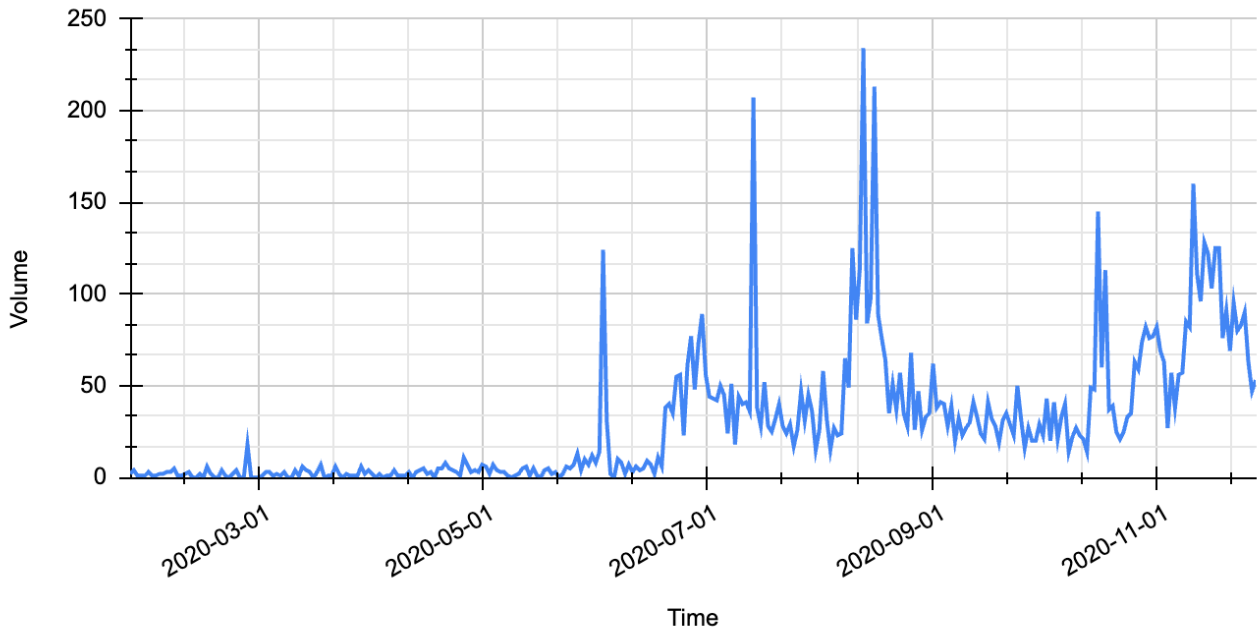


Fig. 27. Graphic from SMAT report depicting Parler's "New Zealand" activity.

Telegram - Posts containing 'New Zealand' per day

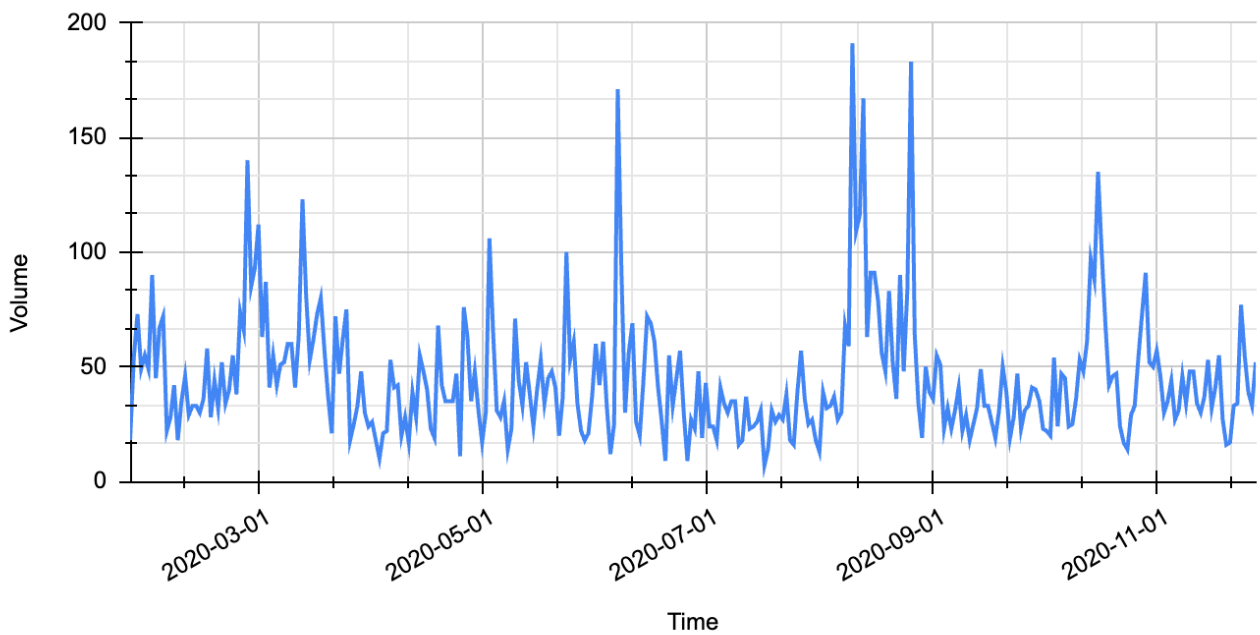


Fig. 28. Graphic from SMAT report depicting Telegram "New Zealand" activity

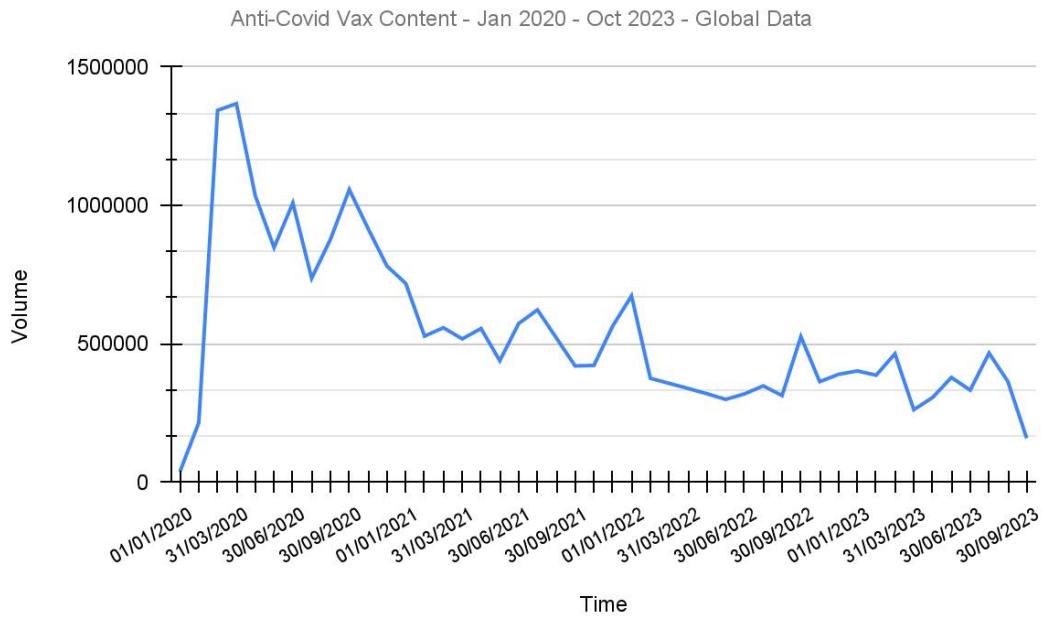


Fig. 29. Anti-COVID-Vax content by mention volume..

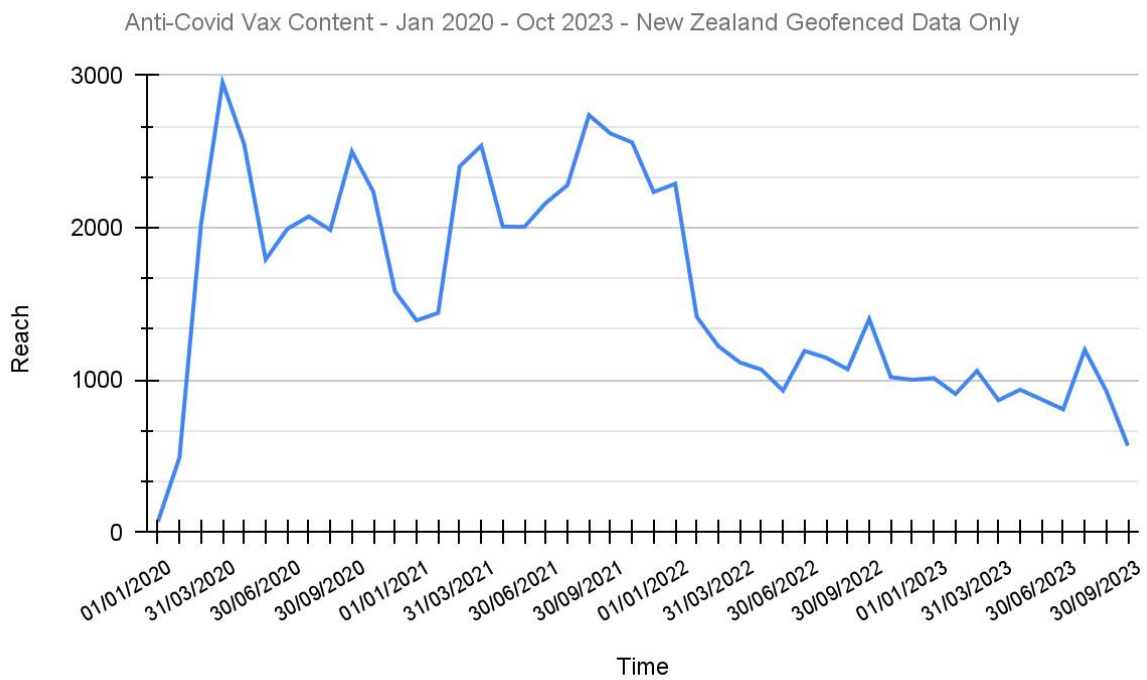


Fig. 30. Anti-COVID-Vax content by reach.

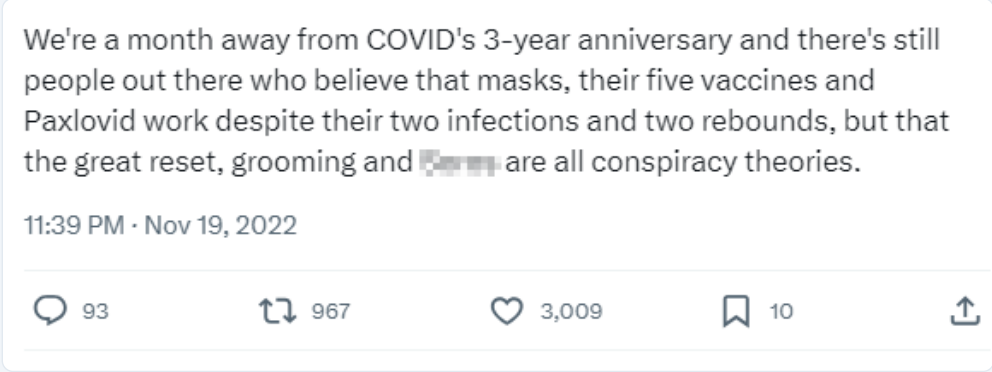


Fig. 31. Example of content linking COVID with the Great Reset, anti-semitism and anti-globalism.

Alternative Medicine

Categorising alternative medicine under Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM), a study mentioned, "CAM encompasses diverse practices outside the dominant evidence-based medical paradigm. They are popular despite lacking empirical evidence of efficacy, or endorsement by mainstream medical or scientific authorities"¹³. Logically examined the engagement in New Zealand with CAM beliefs and identified websites that promote CAM beliefs and health-related MDM.

The results, shown in Fig. 32 below, show a breakdown of that activity, with links circulated to known sources of CAM belief and health MDM represented by the blue line and discourse containing health MDM narratives around alternative cures represented by the red line.

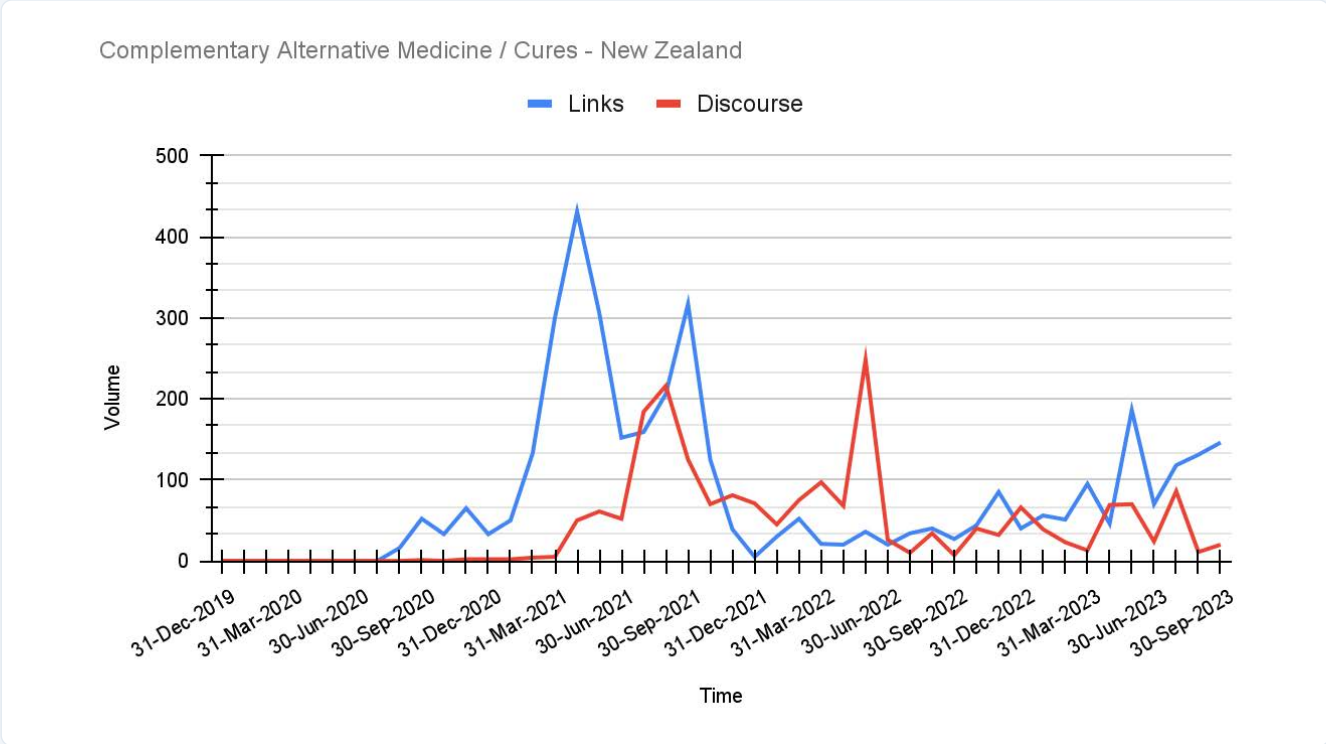


Fig. 32. Mapping volume of discourse and links to known CAM/ Health Disinformation websites over time in New Zealand.

From early to mid-2020, websites affiliated with pre-eminent CAM information hub Natural News (such as Depopulation News) pushed articles targeting New Zealand's lockdown measures while appealing to broad orchestrated conspiracy beliefs. Spikes for links are established around the rollout of COVID-19 vaccine treatments, illustrating the overlap between CAM websites and Anti-COVID-Vax rhetoric (see Fig 32). These websites do not originate from New Zealand but find their way to New Zealand's social media environment through readership and domestic influencers within conspiracy and CAM communities.

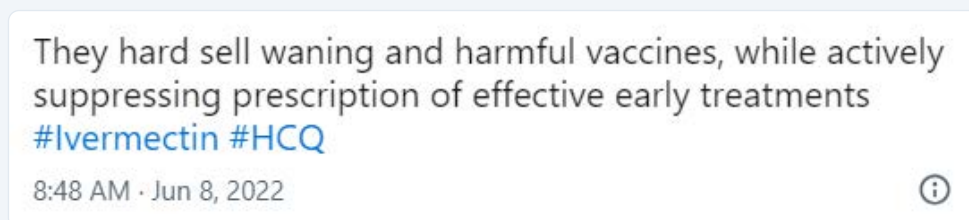


Fig. 33. A comment driving discourse regarding alternative cures.

Discourse on alternative treatments in New Zealand was predominantly driven by the global Anti-COVID-Vax support for Ivermectin and Hydroxychloroquine with domestic influencers again driving the conversation. The overarching narrative suggested that pharmaceutical companies, in concert with world governments and the WEF, are suppressing known cures for COVID-19 to compel untested vaccines upon populations^{14, 15}. These views align with medical and cognitive studies on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) uptake, indicating a significant overlap with a “low-level of trust in the government” and a risk of conspiracy ideation “associated with a mistrust of science”.^{16, 17} This corresponds with the findings in this report that Anti-Vax, Anti-COVID-Vax, and broader conspiracy ideation have amalgamated into a comprehensive domestic PMOA supported by single-issue grievance narratives.

The promotion of alternative medicine and CAM beliefs has had a tangible impact on public discourse and behaviours in New Zealand, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite lacking empirical evidence of efficacy, these alternative cures have been actively promoted on social media and alternative health websites, contributing to a climate of misinformation and mistrust in established medical authorities and scientific consensus. As a result, some individuals have opted for these alternative treatments instead of following evidence-based medical advice, potentially putting their health at risk.

Furthermore, the promotion of alternative cures has been intertwined with broader conspiracy narratives claiming that pharmaceutical companies and governments are suppressing known cures to promote untested vaccines. This narrative has resonated with individuals who already harbour a mistrust of government and scientific institutions, leading to further dissemination of misinformation and rejecting mainstream medical advice. In some cases, this misinformation has led to real-world consequences, such as individuals self-medicating with unproven treatments or refusing to adhere to public health guidelines. This has the potential to undermine public health efforts to control the spread of COVID-19 and protect vulnerable populations. Overall, promoting alternative cures and CAM beliefs in New Zealand has significantly impacted public discourse and behaviours, highlighting the importance of addressing misinformation and promoting evidence-based medical practices.

Demographics Affected by Vaccine Hesitancy

A [longitudinal survey](#) examined confidence in the safety of childhood vaccinations among the New Zealand public from 2013 to 2017¹⁸. The survey revealed that vaccine sceptics were more likely to be women of Māori, Pacific, or Asian ethnicity, reside in more deprived regions, and have lower levels of educational attainment. Logically assesses that these communities are likely more susceptible to Anti-Vax conspiracy theories and overlapping MDM narratives. They could also be targeted by individuals or groups seeking to influence New Zealand's information environment. However, individual attitudes and behaviours are influenced by various factors beyond demographic characteristics, including cultural, social, and political contexts.

A 2021 study explored social and demographic differences in the risk of and reasons for vaccine hesitancy, particularly regarding COVID-19¹⁹. The study found that younger people reported lower vaccine acceptance rates compared to older groups, ranging from 62.1% of 18-24-year-olds expressing they were very likely or somewhat likely to take the vaccine to 79.9% of those aged 65 years and older. Additionally, respondents who identified as Māori reported lower vaccine acceptance rates (64.8% vs. 70.7% among the total sample) and higher rates of being unlikely to take the vaccine (21.5% vs. 14.2% among the full sample). These findings highlight the influence of demographic factors on vaccine acceptance rates in New Zealand, with younger and Māori populations exhibiting higher levels of vaccine hesitancy. However, it's essential to consider that these findings are based on survey data and may not capture the full complexity of individual attitudes and behaviours.

Effect on Political Landscape

The impact of public health-related misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) narratives in New Zealand is significant, with implications for public opinion and political discourse. The global reach of Anti-COVID-Vax conspiracy theories, coupled with ongoing discourse in New Zealand, suggests that these narratives can reach and impact individuals not directly engaged in the Anti-Vax information environment. Those sceptical of electoral processes or political party policies are likely to use public health MDM to support their claims, leveraging scepticism and suspicion of government overreach and civil liberties infringement. These narratives, while influential, are one of many factors shaping public opinion and should be considered alongside other factors in political discourse and decision-making processes. The public health pillar of the information environment is rated as C3, indicating a major risk with moderate reach. This classification is based on the significant risk posed by the content in fostering distrust in public services and its potential to create permissive environments for exposure to further MDM narratives and ideologies, as well as its moderate yet substantial impact in terms of reach.

3. National Security

In the realm of national security, New Zealand faces significant challenges from foreign jurisdictions, particularly China and Russia, which have demonstrated capabilities to conduct influence operations using MDM narratives. This influence is evidenced by the frequent appearance of keywords like sanctions and invasion in discussions, as shown in Fig. 35. These countries often reference New Zealand in their national media, discussing diplomatic relations and growing ties, which can gain significant reach domestically when reposted by local actors.

The primary national security risk associated with leveraging MDM in New Zealand is the potential to undermine social cohesion by fostering distrust in public services and the state. MDM narratives originating in New Zealand are vulnerable to exploitation through amplification by state-controlled media from other countries. This can lead to a breakdown in trust and weakening national unity, creating opportunities for external actors to exploit divisions within the country.

Logically's assessment of foreign influence and manipulation of information (FIMI) impacting New Zealand illustrates this risk. For example, Russia strategically positions its media to resonate with domestic audiences aligned with local MDM narratives. It fosters an audience receptive to critiques of international organisations like World Health Organization (WHO), WEF, NATO, and "Five Eyes."

The subsequent subsections delve into key aspects of foreign interference and manipulation of information in New Zealand's national security landscape, starting with an assessment of demographic data to understand how different groups may be targeted or influenced. This section also includes an analysis of FIMI tactics used by China and Russia, a comparative analysis of state-supported media from these countries to assess their potential targeting of New Zealand and an examination of the potential impact of these influence operations on New Zealand's national interests. These subsections aim to provide a comprehensive view of the threats posed by foreign interference and manipulation of information in the context of New Zealand's national security.

Analysts applied the threat matrix to top-performing content and narratives in the research environment, assessing them collectively as indicative of the risk area as a whole. Based on the content observed and collected for this report, the risk level assigned to the national security pillar of the information environment is C2.

C2 Major Risk, Low Reach

The content is categorized as C2 due to a notable risk factor. It primarily fosters a distrust of public services, presenting a potential risk of involvement by hostile state actors, leading to a C grading in risk.

In terms of reach, the content has a constrained impact. Predominantly disseminated by fringe influential figures, it attains low to medium engagement figures, remaining below 100,000. While some sustained engagement is observed for small amounts of content, the overall reach is considered limited. Therefore, it is classified as a 2 grade in reach, indicating its relatively modest influence and visibility.

Demographics

Analysing the demographics of authors engaging in discussions on national security, it is notable that 69% of users identifying as male dominate these discussions, *as illustrated in Fig. 34*. The topics discussed are evenly divided between Russia and China, indicating a broad interest in both countries' activities and policies.

Further analysis reveals a gender disparity in the focus of discussions, with female users mentioning China more frequently than Russia (226 vs. 101 mentions), while male users mention Russia more than China (455 mentions vs. 425 mentions), *as shown in Fig. 35*. This gender disparity in focus suggests differing perceptions or interests among male and female users regarding national security issues related to China and Russia.

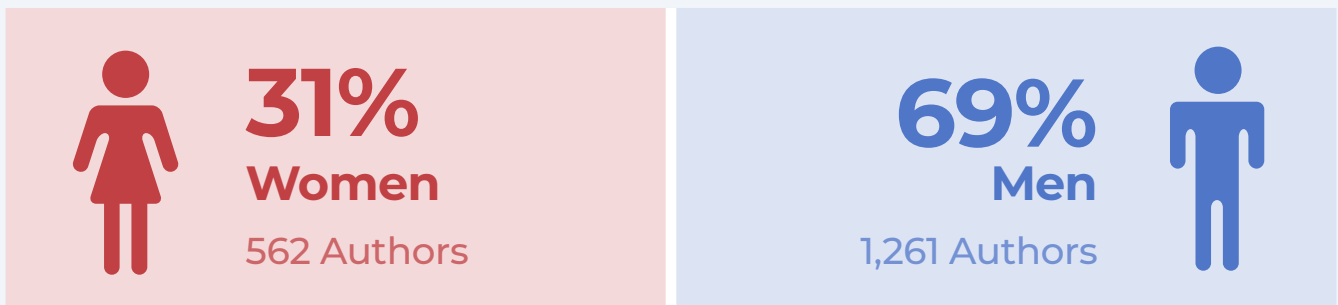


Fig. 34. Demographic split between genders

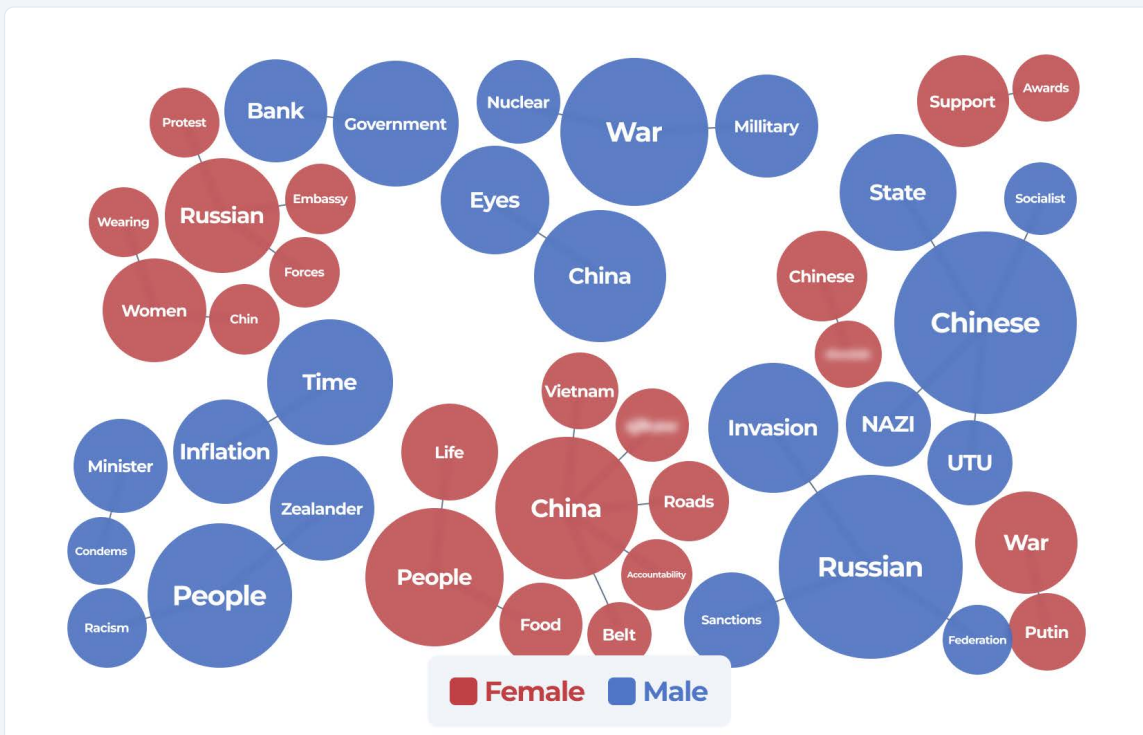


Fig. 35. Topics most discussed and posted, broken down by subtopic and colour coded by gender.

Overall, these findings underscore the significance of foreign influence in shaping the national security landscape in New Zealand and highlight the importance of understanding demographic trends in discussing and addressing these influences.

Foreign Information Manipulation or Interference

Foreign Interference, or foreign information manipulation or interference (FIMI), involves messaging designed to influence, disrupt, or subvert New Zealand's national interests by deceptive, corruptive, or coercive means. Logically has observed foreign jurisdictions, particularly China and Russia, have demonstrated the capability to conduct influence operations using misinformation and disinformation (MDM) narratives, influencing the international security landscape.

Assessing Foreign Influence

Logically conducted a comparative analysis of both Russian and Chinese state-supported media to assess their potential targeting of New Zealand throughout 2022. The approach involved capturing all mentions of, links to, and interactions with known state-supported media sources and accounts that historically carried the 'state-affiliated' tag on X. To ensure a comprehensive historical overview, the collection process was conducted twice. Initially, it was performed globally, followed by filtering for all mentions related to New Zealand. Subsequently, the historic process was repeated without additional filtering but with geofencing applied exclusively to New Zealand.

This comparative analysis enables us to understand the reach and influence of Russian and Chinese state media narratives in New Zealand. It does not, however, indicate that either Russian, Chinese, or other foreign state media have engaged in FIMI activity in New Zealand.

Mentions of "New Zealand" across Chinese and Russian state-supported media globally are illustrated in Figures 36 and 37, showcasing the volume and reach of these mentions. China consistently exhibited higher volume and reach globally compared to Russia, likely due to its higher overall readership and restrictions on Russian state-supported media following the invasion of Ukraine.

China's content focused on relationship-building with New Zealand, diplomatic movements, cultural events, and reporting on New Zealand's position with Russia regarding Ukraine. Social media volume was primarily driven by official media channels and Chinese diplomatic presence on mainstream platforms, aiming to position China as a friend and economic boon to New Zealand.

On the other hand, Russia's content directly related to New Zealand was significantly lower. The reach spike in late February to early March was driven by content regarding New Zealand's approval of mRNA vaccines over Russia's Sputnik V vaccine for COVID-19. The increase in reach is indicative of resonance with Anti-Vax and conspiracy audiences. Another reach spike on April 18, 2022, aligned with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs report on New Zealand assisting Ukraine, suggesting a possible strategic communications campaign to distort New Zealand's image. The reach spike on May 27, 2022, correlated with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioning New Zealand sanctions and trade and reports on New Zealand's offer to train Ukrainian troops.

A 2022 Microsoft Digital Defense Report assessment highlighted a surge in Russian propaganda related to COVID-19 in late 2021, preceding an increase in public protests in early 2022. The report is based on Microsoft's Russian Propaganda Index, measuring user traffic to "Russian state-controlled and state-sponsored news outlets and amplifiers" as a proportion to traffic to all news sites. The index does not investigate user direction to those outlets or networks, so its findings don't suggest explicit targeting of New Zealand by FIMI campaigns.

Logically's assessment proposes that New Zealand citizens' particular susceptibility to MDM narratives about the COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Reset meta-conspiracy likely influenced the data observed by Microsoft. During the pandemic, Logically monitored Russian state-controlled media, noting a shift in status among Western conspiracy theory believers, turning it into a trusted news source opposing the "mainstream media." Russian media capitalised on this by criticising entities like the World Economic Forum, Western-developed COVID-19 vaccines, and Western nations' lockdown protocols. Traffic to sites such as Russia Today and Sputnik is common in countries with an active domestic conspiracy community.

The affiliation of a former New Zealand leader with the WEF's Forum of Young Global Leaders likely lent legitimacy to the conspiratorial interpretation of the New Zealand Government's COVID-19 response. These ties increased domestic susceptibility to disinformation, including Russian state-controlled sources reframing geopolitical events. While this perception fueled urgency within New Zealand's conspiracy theory community to act against the government and the perceived existential threat of the Great Reset, it does not imply direct targeting by Russia as part of an organised FIMI effort.

Geofencing mentions of Russian and Chinese state-supported media to New Zealand without any other filtering provides a slightly different picture (see Fig. 38 and 39). Chinese media volume and reach within New Zealand's information space were notably lower than their global presence, showing no indication of FIMI or coordinated campaigns to boost engagement. On the other hand, a significant increase in volume occurred in Russian media following Sky TV's decision to block Russia Today within the country. This surge was driven by domestically originated accounts, mainly fuelled by conspiracy beliefs and reporting, likely influenced by Russia's portrayal as a counter to the "mainstream media" and a defence against "The Great Reset." Additionally, a small network of emerging accounts within New Zealand was identified, engaging with and tagging Russian state-supported accounts, indicating a possible attempt at influencing New Zealand's information environment.

Mentions of “New Zealand” across Chinese and Russian state-supported media globally:

PRC/Russian Media Mentions of New Zealand - Volume

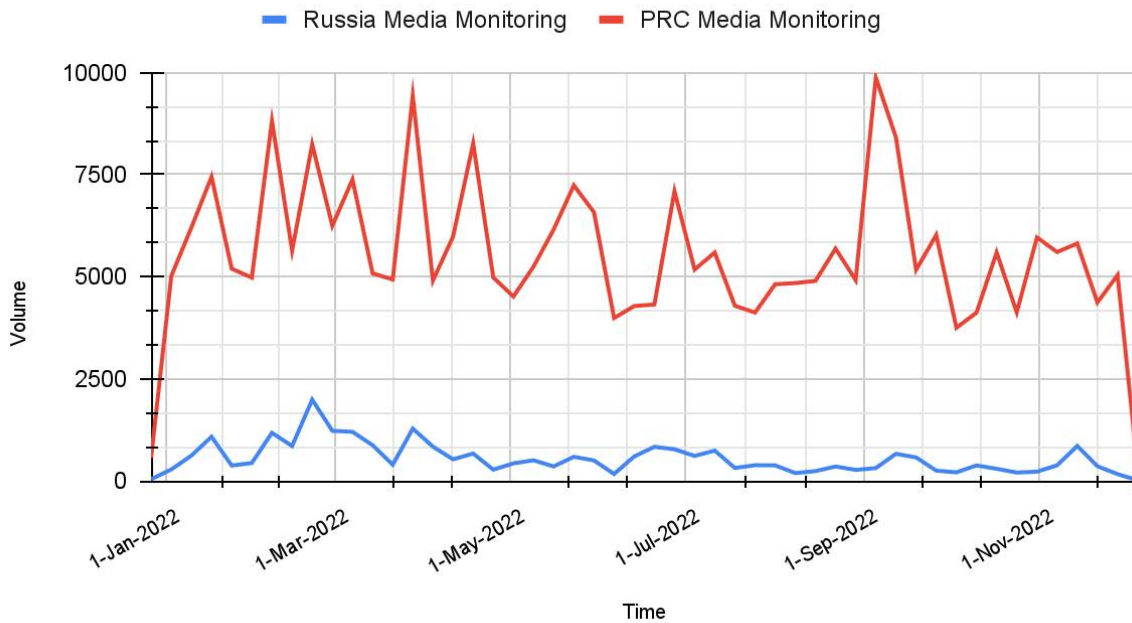


Fig. 36. Comparative breakdown of Russian and Chinese state media mentions of “New Zealand” by volume.

PRC/Russian Media Mentions of New Zealand - Reach

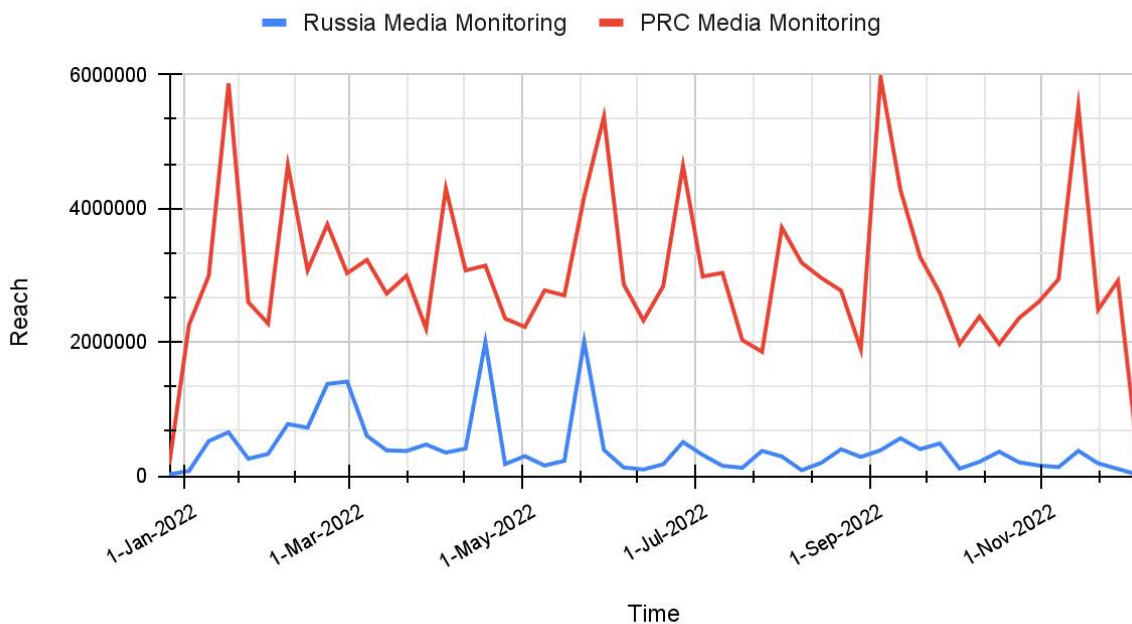


Fig. 37. Comparative breakdown of Russian and Chinese state media mentions of “New Zealand” by reach.

Geofencing mentions of Russian and Chinese state-supported media to New Zealand with no other filtering:

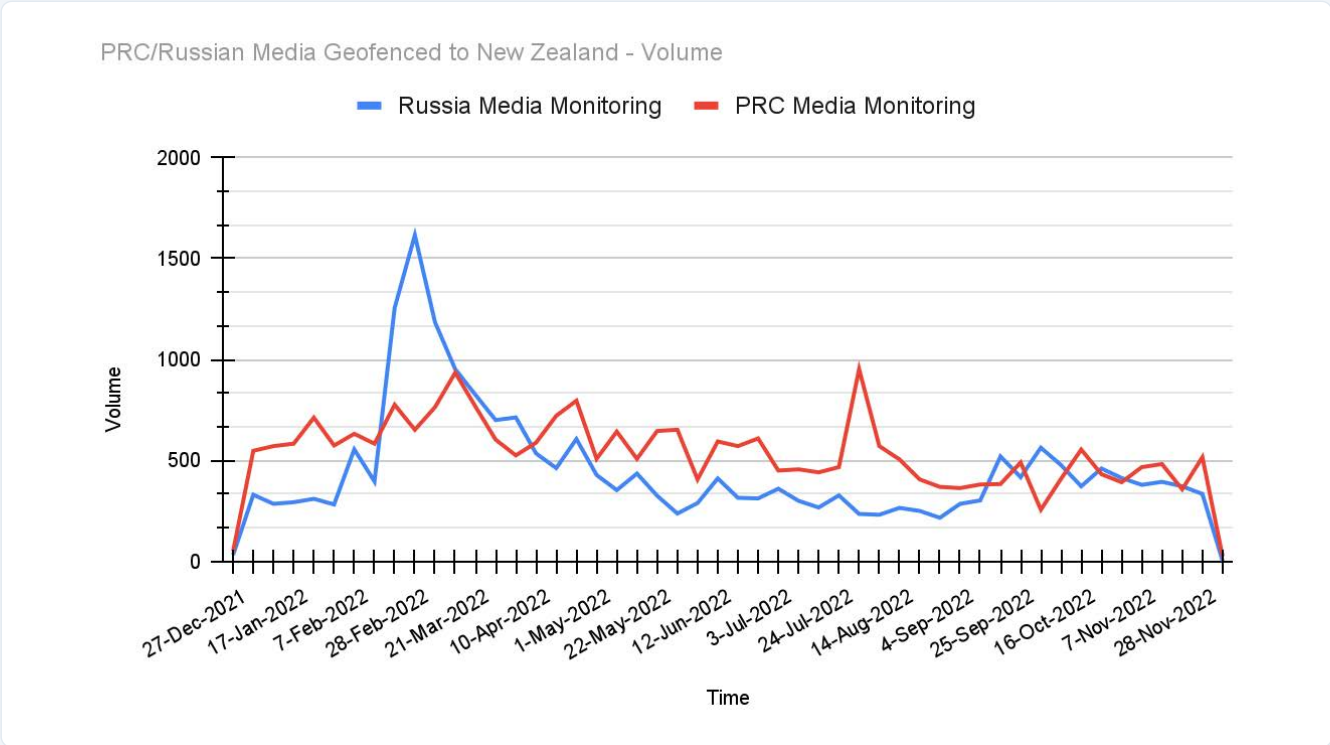


Fig. 38. Comparative breakdown of Russian and Chinese state media interactions within New Zealand by volume.

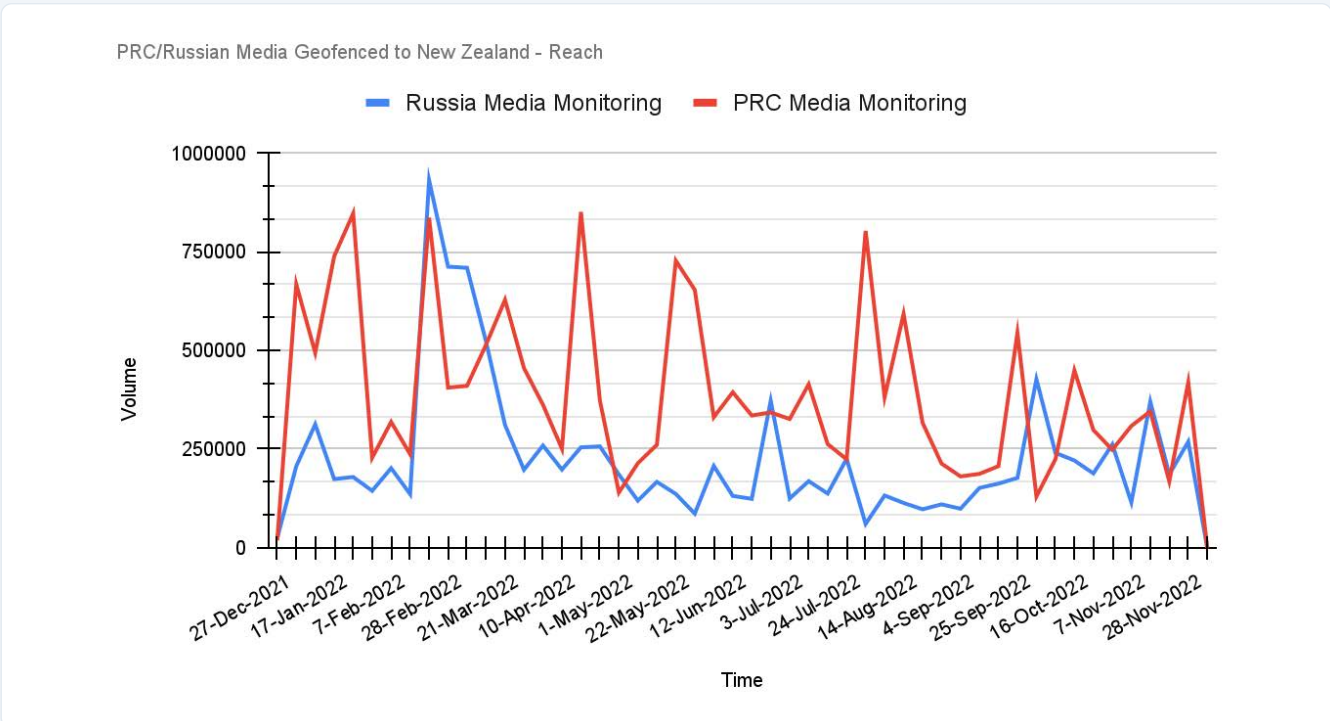


Fig. 39. Comparative breakdown of Russian and Chinese state media interactions within New Zealand by reach

The data suggests that while both Chinese and Russian state-supported media have mentioned New Zealand in their content, the intent behind these mentions varies. China appears to focus on narratives that portray the country in a positive light, emphasizing its cultural friendship and economic partnership with New Zealand and the benefits of an amenable relationship between the two nations. In contrast, Russia's mentions are more strategic, aiming to influence perceptions of New Zealand's actions regarding Ukraine and COVID-19 vaccines. The volume, reach, and content differences indicate potential efforts to shape New Zealanders' perceptions and attitudes through media messaging. However, it is important to note that the analysis is limited by the availability of data and the challenges of attributing intent to media content.

Effect on the Political Landscape

The impact of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) is significant, affecting both domestic political discourse and international relations. FIMI campaigns can shape public perceptions and attitudes toward political issues, influencing how these issues are framed and understood.

FIMI campaigns can shape the narrative in domestic political discourse by amplifying certain viewpoints while marginalizing others. This can lead to a distortion of the public debate and a lack of balanced information for citizens. FIMI campaigns that undermine trust in public institutions, such as the government or the media, can have long-lasting effects on the political landscape. By promoting conspiracy theories or misinformation, foreign actors can erode public confidence in the democratic process and institutions, leading to increased polarization and political instability.

Internationally, FIMI campaigns can impact a country's image and its relations with other nations. Foreign actors can manipulate public opinion and sow discord between countries by spreading misinformation or promoting conspiracy theories.

While it is challenging to attribute specific political outcomes directly to foreign influence campaigns, evidence suggests that FIMI can shape public perceptions and attitudes towards political issues domestically and internationally. It is crucial for policymakers and the public to be aware of these campaigns and to critically evaluate the information they consume to safeguard against undue foreign influence on the political process.

Logically has assigned a C2 risk level for Foreign Influence and Manipulation of Information (FIMI) against New Zealand. This indicates a major risk with low reach. The assessment reflects the potential for FIMI to have a significant impact on New Zealand based on international examples. It also considers the potential for hostile state actors to exploit existing domestic misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) narratives, such as those concerning election administration. It is important to note that, according to the assessment, New Zealand has not been significantly targeted by FIMI from hostile state actors during the reporting period.

4. Elections

The 2020 New Zealand elections emerged as a pivotal moment for those disseminating election-related misinformation and disinformation (MDM). This surge was influenced by global events such as the aftermath of the 2020 United States presidential election, the January 6th attack on the United States Capitol, and claims of election rigging in the United States.

The 2020 New Zealand elections took place amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, adding a layer of complexity and disruption. A report by the Social Media Analysis Toolkit (SMAT) and Tohatoha revealed that narratives linked to COVID-19 and associated conspiracy theories about public health measures influenced discussions around the 2020 election²⁰. The SMAT tool indicated that social media content and online discourse posed a threat to democratic processes in New Zealand. These MDM narratives identified during the 2020 election likely continued to impact the discourse surrounding the 2023 election.

In analysing the impact of these narratives, analysts considered various factors such as the content's virality, the credibility of sources, and the consistency of messaging across different platforms. This analysis provided insights into the dissemination and reception of election-related MDM narratives in New Zealand, highlighting the potential risks posed by these narratives in undermining democratic processes. Additionally, the analysis considered the level of engagement and reach of the content, with top-performing narratives often being disseminated by fringe influential figures and garnering low to medium engagement figures, indicating their relatively modest influence and reach in the broader context.

The subsequent subsections delve into key aspects of MDM narratives in New Zealand's electoral landscape, starting with an analysis of demographic data to understand how different groups engage with and are affected by MDM content. This section also includes an assessment of foreign interference and manipulation of information (FIMI) tactics used during elections, a comparative analysis of state-supported media to assess their potential targeting of New Zealand. These subsections aim to provide a comprehensive view of the diverse narratives present in the MDM landscape and their potential impact on democratic processes in New Zealand.

Analysts utilised the threat matrix to evaluate top-performing content and narratives in the research environment, considering them to indicate the risk area as a whole. Based on the content observed and collected for this report, the assigned risk level for the elections pillar of the information environment is C2.

C2 Major Risk, Limited Reach

This content is designated as C2 due to a significant risk associated with it. Its primary focus is on fostering distrust in public services, particularly concerning election administration, potentially inviting indirect involvement by hostile state actors. This risk categorization warrants a C grading.

In terms of reach, the content has a restricted impact. It is predominantly disseminated by fringe influential figures and garners low to medium engagement figures, staying below 100,000. Despite some engagement, the content achieves little sustained interaction, resulting in a 2 grade in reach. This indicates its relatively modest influence and reach in the broader context.

Demographics

The analysis of social media engagement regarding New Zealand elections revealed interesting trends in gender distribution. Analysing the gender breakdown of authors engaging in discussions about elections is crucial for understanding the nuances of political discourse. As depicted in Fig. 40, a significant majority of these authors are male, with 61% of users identifying as male on their social media profiles. This gender disparity is noteworthy, especially when compared to discussions on Public Safety and Public Health topics, where the gender distribution may differ significantly.

Both genders focus their discussions on individuals and political parties, as evidenced by the topics most discussed and posted, depicted in Fig. 41. Interestingly, one political party received the label “Nazi” in 212 mentions, indicating the intensity of political discourse and the potential for inflammatory language in online discussions.

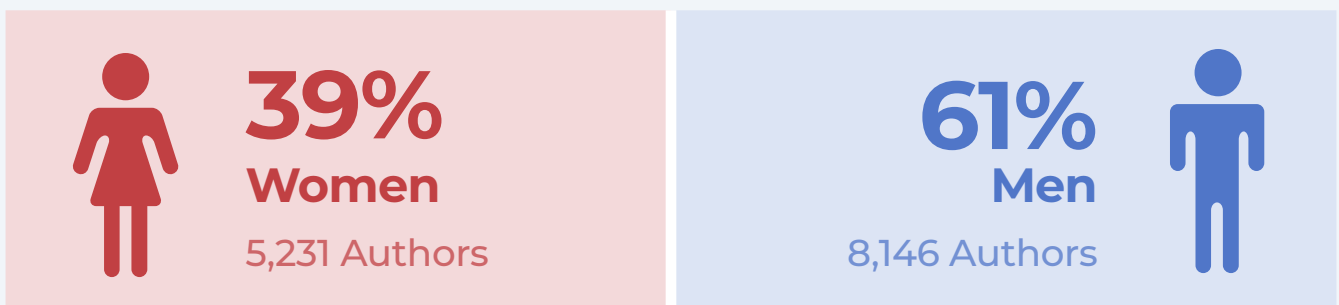


Fig. 40. Demographic split between genders.

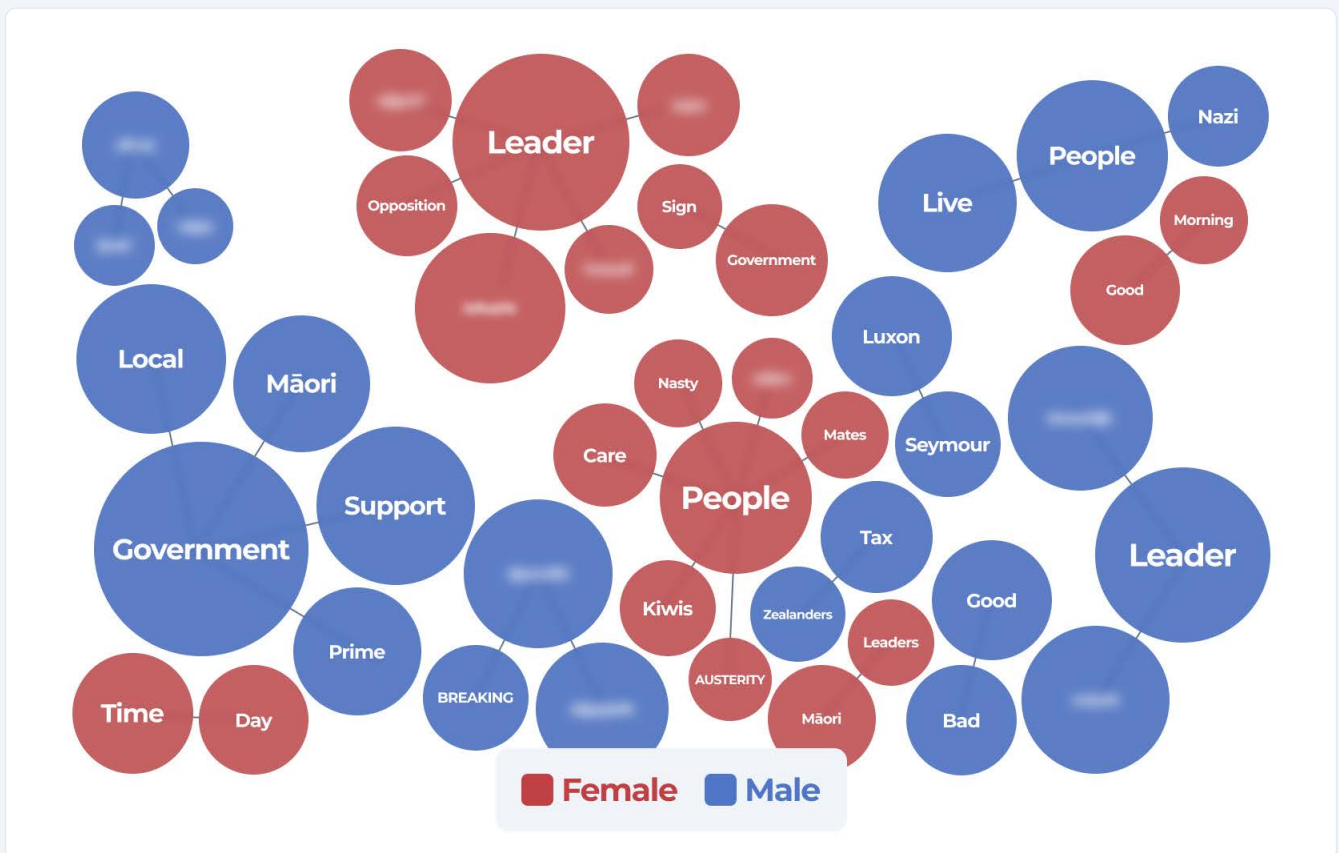


Fig. 41. Topics most discussed and posted, broken down by subtopic and colour coded by gender.

The inclusion of demographic data, particularly gender, in the analysis of election-related discourse is crucial for several reasons. First, it helps identify trends and patterns in online discussions that can inform strategies to combat misinformation and disinformation. Second, it highlights disparities in how different groups engage with and perceive political narratives, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of communication strategies. Last, it underscores the importance of promoting a more inclusive and informed electoral discourse that considers diverse perspectives and experiences.

Logically monitored various narratives related to the integrity of New Zealand's general election, both before and after announcing the preliminary results on October 14, 2023. This process involved identifying MDM narratives during the election, focusing on their impact on confidence in the democratic process, potential voter suppression, and the risk to public safety and order during the electoral process. Fig. 42 illustrates these aspects, with Anti-Vax MDM included for comparison. Despite being disseminated across various social media platforms and online forums, MDM narratives associated with the election remained consistently low throughout the election period. Engagement with these narratives declined rapidly over time, reaching a peak of 102 online mentions related to MDM that could potentially undermine democratic processes.

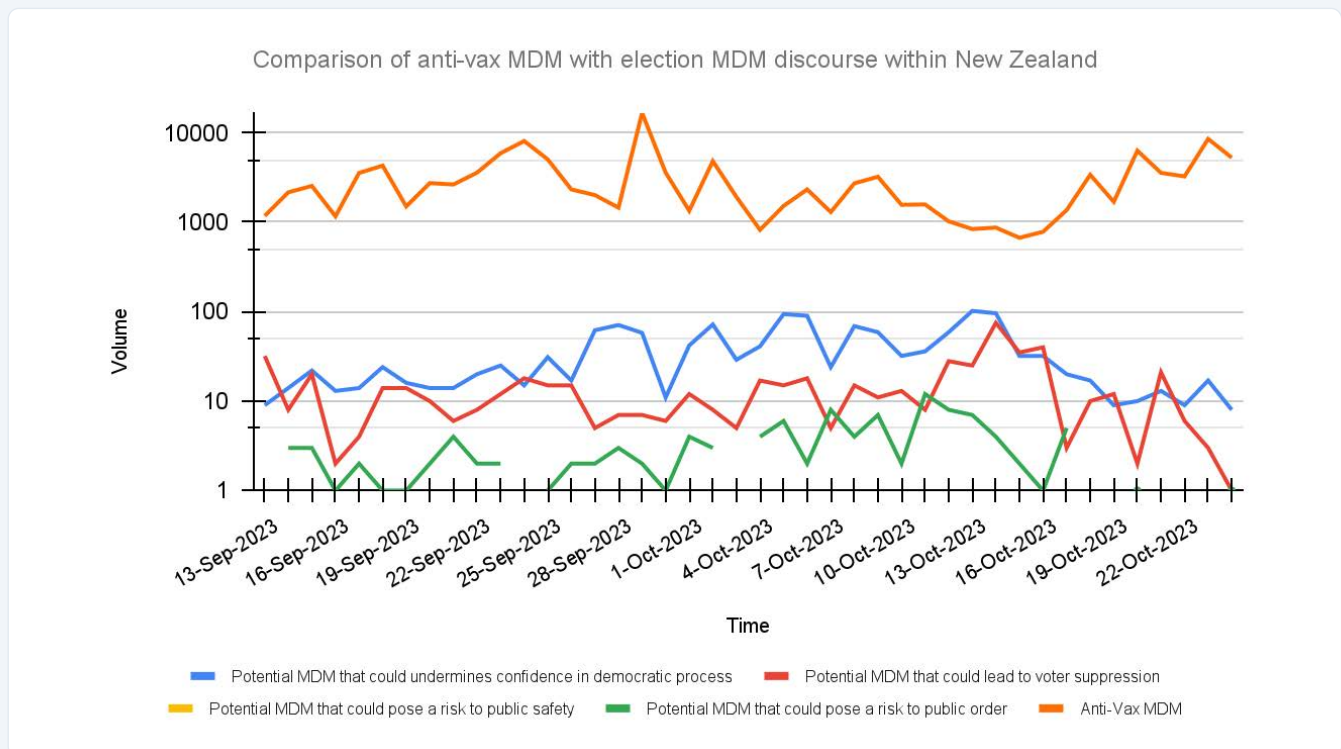


Fig. 42. A graph plotting discourse related to election MDM categories.

Both emerging and ongoing geopolitical events likely took precedence over online discourse about the New Zealand election. For example, between October 4 and October 11, 2023, the top ten trending topics in New Zealand on X focused on the attacks in Israel and the subsequent Israeli declaration of war against Hamas on October 9, 2023, rather than the New Zealand general election. Following the announcement of the preliminary election results, narratives surfaced from online discussions analysing the results. Users claimed that the “mainstream media” was working on behalf of a mainstream political party. Claims targeting the election’s outcome alleged that the new and previous governments are “in it together,” especially concerning COVID-19 and lockdown measures in New Zealand. Similar to MDM narratives identified during the beginning of the election period, these narratives had low user engagement. Amplification of these narratives will likely result from those dissatisfied with the election’s results and the electoral procedures.

Foreign Information Manipulation or Interference

No FIMI was identified targeting the 2023 general election. The low amount of MDM identified as a result of other major world events taking precedence in the New Zealand information space may demonstrate a lack of foreign interest in shaping the information environment.

Additionally, online activity connected with the New Zealand election did not indicate any CIB targeting voters or the political process during the collection period. The indicators for CIB include recent date of account creation; high frequency of shares/posts; shared user bases; shared topics, messaging, keywords, and phrases; co-ordinated deployment of links and URLs; a high ratio of posts or shares to interactions or replies; lack of conversational engagement with other platform users. The observed activity fell within the parameters expected of organic and authentic behaviour. This lack of foreign interest in shaping the information environment suggests that the election process was relatively free from external manipulation.

One limitation of this assessment is the reliance on observable online activity, which may not capture more sophisticated or covert attempts at interference. Additionally, the absence of identified FIMI during the election period does not negate the potential for future attempts at interference in New Zealand’s democratic processes.

The resilience of New Zealand’s election process to external manipulation is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the democratic process in the country. This resilience ensures that the voice of the people is not unduly influenced by outside actors, preserving the democratic values that underpin New Zealand’s governance. By safeguarding the integrity of its elections, New Zealand can uphold its commitment to democracy and empower its citizens to make informed decisions about their government.

Effect on Political Landscape

Although no FIMI was identified, the impact of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) on the political landscape during the 2023 New Zealand elections was notably evidenced by narratives questioning the integrity of the electoral process. Claims of election fraud and manipulation emerged in online discussions, aiming to sow doubt about the legitimacy of the election results and the democratic process as a whole. This dissemination of false narratives and conspiracy theories had the potential to influence public opinion, undermine trust in democratic institutions, and affect voter behaviour.

Additionally, the 2023 elections in New Zealand occurred in the context of broader geopolitical tensions and disinformation campaigns. The global spread of misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines, as well as narratives related to The Great Reset and other conspiracy theories, influenced the political discourse in New Zealand. These narratives often sought to exploit existing divisions within society and undermine trust in government institutions.

Furthermore, the use of social media platforms to spread MDM added a new dimension to political campaigning. Micro-targeting specific groups with tailored messages allowed for the amplification of certain narratives and the suppression of others, shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes in unprecedented ways.

The impact of these narratives was evident in the Wellington protests, where conspiracy theories and extremist ideologies were amplified, leading to a heightened sense of political polarisation. The protests, fueled by anti-government sentiments and misinformation surrounding COVID-19 measures, underscored the broader implications of MDM on the political landscape.

Additionally, the prevalence of conspiracy theories and false narratives during the election period highlighted the challenges faced by democratic processes in combating the spread of misinformation. The narratives surrounding the election results and the role of the “mainstream media” further emphasised the need for critical media literacy and fact-checking efforts to ensure the integrity of the democratic process.

Overall, the prevalence of conspiracy theories and false narratives during the election period highlighted the challenges faced by democratic processes in combating the spread of misinformation. The narratives surrounding the election results and the role of the “mainstream media” further emphasised the need for critical media literacy and fact-checking efforts to ensure the integrity of the democratic process. This section’s analysis supports the assigned risk level of C2, indicating a major risk with limited reach, as the content primarily fosters distrust in public services, particularly concerning election administration, potentially inviting indirect involvement by hostile state actors.

Conclusion

This report has investigated the landscape of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) in New Zealand from January 1, 2020, to October 20, 2023. Despite not finding evidence of coordinated Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) or foreign attempts to disrupt the country's online information environment, the impact of state-backed MDM cannot be discounted. New Zealand audiences are susceptible to encountering similar information online as those in countries actively targeted by foreign actors.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic conspiracy beliefs have significantly influenced New Zealand's security risk landscape. MDM has thrived online, spreading false claims and endorsing fringe beliefs related to the pandemic. While offline activity has decreased compared to previous years, the online infrastructure supporting influence operations and conspiracy theories remains robust.

The Great Reset has emerged as a potent framing device for various groups and actors, attracting individuals and radicalising them with intensified, exclusionary rhetoric. This meta-conspiracy has gained mainstream attention, indicating its resilience and adaptability to incorporate new conspiracy theories if they align with the overarching anti-globalist theme.

The ongoing risk of COVID-19 and the continuous influx of Anti-Vax narratives and MDM suggest that the Great Reset conspiracy theory is unlikely to diminish significantly over the next 12 months. Additionally, emerging conspiracy theories, often influenced by geopolitical developments, are expected to continue, with climate change remaining a significant topic for conspiracy theories.

The impact of conspiracy theory-driven Politically Motivated Offline Action (PMOA) has been observed in protests and civil disobedience incidents linked to these theories, highlighting the potential risk to stability in New Zealand.

Overall, the analysis underscores the need for continued monitoring and proactive measures to counter misinformation and disinformation in New Zealand. It is crucial to address the underlying grievances and vulnerabilities that make individuals susceptible to MDM, while also building resilience against the spread of harmful narratives. The interconnected nature of the digital landscape requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach from government, media, and civil society to mitigate the risks posed by misinformation and disinformation.

Annex A: 2022 Wellington protests case study

The 2022 Wellington Parliament protests serve as a case study highlighting the significant risk posed by conspiratorial thinking in New Zealand's information environment. These protests occurred against the backdrop of global unrest surrounding lockdowns and vaccination mandates, which fueled discontent related to efforts to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. The prevalence of conspiracy beliefs, exacerbated by an early "infodemic," attracted diverse communities seeking alternative explanations about the pandemic²¹.

Far-right activists capitalised on this suspicion, recruiting individuals and shifting focus towards narratives of Information Manipulation and Information Operations (IMAO and PMOA)²². The Wellington protest, inspired by the "Freedom Convoy" in Ottawa, Canada, aimed to replicate its success by extending occupation of the grounds of their Government building. The protest expanded to include various grievances against COVID-19 mitigation efforts, with fringe elements adopting conspiracy rhetoric, specifically regarding The Great Reset.

The use of terms like a "depopulation agenda" at the protest underscored the shift from criticising mandates to viewing government COVID-19 measures as an existential threat²³. Calls for a "Nuremberg 2.0," rooted in the belief that COVID-19 vaccines were 'experimental' and violated the Nuremberg code, gained popularity among Anti-COVID-Vax and conspiracy groups, rooted in "Sovereign Citizen" beliefs²⁴.

This phrase gained popularity among Anti-COVID-Vax and conspiracy groups, rooted in "Sovereign Citizen" beliefs; it served as a connecting narrative between conspiracy theorists and extremists.

The protest likely intensified due to global spread of The Great Reset conspiracy, especially as a member of the World Economic Forum's Young Global Leaders program served in New Zealand's Government, creating a focal point for grievance narratives. The underpinning of The Great Reset and its affinity for conspiracy, disinformation, and malinformation likely contributed to extremist rhetoric, such as anti-Semitism, at the protest.

While Logically assessed the potential for Foreign Information Manipulation or Interference (FIMI) as a precursor to the protest, no confident assessment could be made that New Zealand's information environment was directly targeted or manipulated before the protest. The prevalence of conspiracy-based disinformation and malinformation beliefs in New Zealand suggests that traffic to Russian websites was likely organic from this community.

The global adoption of Russian state-controlled sources like RT and Sputnik has largely been organically driven by Russia's stance against Western vaccines and propaganda regarding Western biolabs in Ukraine. Both narrative topics appeal to conspiracy communities, interpreted as proof that Russia reports 'the truth' about COVID-19.

Annex B - Platforms Glossary

Facebook - Founded in 2004, Facebook is the most active social media platform in the world, with nearly 3 billion monthly active users. Facebook has seen some notable controversies in recent years, including the Cambridge Analytica scandal, whereby data was collected on 87 million users, and reported political manipulation in the 2016 US Presidential Election.

X - Founded in 2006, X (formerly known as Twitter) is one of the most active social media platforms in the world, with over 200 million active users per day visiting the platform. Currently, X is banned or restricted in China, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. X has been instrumental in the spreading of information (true, mis- and disinformation) at pace, and has played a major role in widespread civil disorder uprisings from 2009 to present.

YouTube - Launched in 2005, YouTube is owned by Google, and is the second most popular website in the world, after the Google search page, with over 80 billion visits per month. YouTube allows users to share content as videos, and has been criticised for its algorithms which tend to promote conspiracy theory videos to those who have not displayed an interest in the topic. Due to the nature in which content is viewed, it is harder for moderators to police than written posts on Facebook and Twitter.

Telegram - First launched in 2013, Telegram is an encrypted instant messaging service, with its operation HQ in Dubai, UAE. With over 700 million active users, Telegram is considered to have overtaken WhatsApp and Facebook messenger in Belarus, Moldova, Jordan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Russia, and Ukraine. The ability to have large scale group chats (6.2million are currently subscribed to Telegram News) has led to the platform being used to spread mis- and disinformation and conspiracy theories, as well as unrestricted content considered to be illegal or age restricted, with impunity.

4chan - Launched in 2003, 4chan is an anonymous English language imageboard (focuses on the posting of images, alongside text and discussion) website. The site is split into 'boards. There is no registration process, with posts created by anonymous users, so tracking usage is difficult, but it is estimated over 22 million unique users visit the site each month. 4chan has been linked to numerous illegal postings, including child pornography and celebrity photo leaks.

Reddit - Since 2005, Reddit has expanded to be consistently in the top-10 of most visited sites in the world, with nearly half of its user base coming from the US. The platform has approximately 430 million active users per month. The site works similar to a bulletin board, with site content split into communities (or 'subreddits'), of which there are approximately 138,000. Category names are noted by the r/ prefix, with u/ for usernames. Created in 2008, the r/conspiracy subreddit has 1.9 million members.

Gab - Established in 2016, and going public in 2017, it is known as an alternative to mainstream social media sites. Gab is known for its far-right user base, and has been described as a haven for “neo-Nazis, racists, white supremacists, white nationalists, antisemites, the alt-right, supporters of Donald Trump, conservatives, right-libertarians, and believers in conspiracy theories such as QAnon,” it has also repeatedly linked to radicalization leading to real-world violent events, including the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting in 2018 and the Capitol riots on 06 Jan 2021. There are an estimated 100,000 active users, with approximately 4 million registered users.

Parler - Similar to Gab, Parler is known as an alternative to X, with those who have been banned on X, ending up on Parler. Launched in 2018, the platform has approximately 1 million active users, with over 20 million registered users. The platform is known for its minimal content moderation, and was one of the platforms used to plan the 6 Jan 2021 Capitol riot. Its user base is predominantly right wing and American.

GETTR - Launched in 2021, Gettr has around 400,000 daily users, with approximately 3 million registered users on the platform. The site targets US conservatives, and has direct links to Donald Trump. Racism, anti-semitism and terrorist related propaganda has been seen on the site, with groups such as the Proud Boys being widely promoted.

Mastodon - Launched in 2016, it is another alternative platform to X, with its user base growing significantly following Elon Musk’s acquisition of X in Oct 2022. The platform is free and uses open source software, with no ads and instead relying on crowdfunding to provide its bandwidth and storage. Content moderation is carried out on the community level, with each server able to moderate its content. It is registered as a Germany not-for-profit organisation, with approximately 2.5 million active users per month (up from 300,000 pre-Musk takeover of X).

Truth Social - Is a social media platform created by Trump Media, a tech company founded in 2021 by former President Donald Trump. The platform is designed to be an uncensored alternative to Facebook and Twitter, and a competitor of Parler and Gab. It faced release restrictions on Android, until it satisfied requirements set by Google on regulations of incitement to violence. Ohio shooter, Ricky Shiffer, posted numerous times on Truth Social, before attacking the FBI offices in Aug 2022. There are 1.7 million unique visitors per month (as of Sep 2022).

TikTok - The international version of the Chinese market specific social media platform Douyin, TiKTok launched in 2017. During 2020/21, it was subject to misinformation campaigns around the Covid-19 pandemic and the US elections. TikTok claims to have 1.534 billion users, out of which approximately 1 billion are monthly active users. There are between 15-17 million UK users of the platform, every month, with users spending over an hour on the app per day. Due to its video-only content, it is difficult to ascertain the level of mis- and disinformation on the platform, but targeted searches are highly likely to produce illicit or harmful content.

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ABOUT LOGICALLY

Logically combines advanced AI with human intelligence and expertise to tackle harmful and problematic online content at scale. The company's mission is to enhance civic discourse, protect democratic debate and process, and provide access to trustworthy information.

In 2021, Logically was named one of the world's most innovative artificial intelligence companies by Fast Company and won the Rising Star in Tech CogX Award. Logically has helped mitigate threats to elections in the United States, United Kingdom, and India since 2017.

Visit [Logically.AI](https://logically.ai) for more information, or contact us at info@logically.ai

