

Transgressive transitions

**Transphobia, community building, bridging, and bonding
within Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation ecologies
March-April 2023**

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Content warning: Explicit language, threats, misogyny, racism, violence.

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Introduction

Since February 2020 a small interdisciplinary team, The Disinformation Project, has been observing, collating, categorising, and analysing open source publicly available data related to Covid-19 mis- and disinformation. This includes data across social media, mainstream media, and in physical and other digital forms of information and knowledge dissemination. To do so, we have developed a novel mixed methods approach which combines a range of standard open-source quantitative reporting from social media, media platforms or sources with a rich text and artefact-based narrative analysis of longform qualitative data. This creates a dataset capable of mapping the depth and breadth of subscription to mis- and disinformation and its impacts.

Originating in a location of study that comprised of elements of Covid-19 minimisation or denial information ecologies within Aotearoa New Zealand, over the period of study (February 2020 – present day) the themes, narratives, groups, and individuals present within this ecosystem have changed over time. Increasingly, shifting norms and narratives incorporate more conspiratorialism, more features of international far-right talking points – immigration, reproductive rights, LGBTQIA+ (and particularly trans rights), globalisation, nativism, loss of hegemony¹ – alongside other, localised conspiratorial frames encompassing 1080 drops to co-governance. Our project charts these shifts, and significantly, does so within an existing online and offline community which has demonstrated in near real-time features of networked manoeuvres, the impact of key influencers, and the re-setting of social, cultural, and political norms.²

These shifts can best be understood as both community bridging and bonding - features of decentralised, social media networks, as theorised by American political scientist Robert Putnam³. Based on research establishing Putnam's theorisation in contemporary social media networks⁴, we understand bonding social capital not only acting as "a social glue, building trust, and norms within groups but also potentially increasing intolerance and distrust of out-group members." The same research established that, in social media networks, "bridging social capital exists in the ties that link otherwise separate, often heterogeneous, groups—so, for example, individuals with ties to other groups, messengers, or more generically the notion of brokers. Bridging social capital allows different groups to share and exchange information, resources, and help coordinate action across diverse interests."

This theoretical frame describes the large, and interconnected network of communities and individuals who form The Disinformation Project's location of research. As a tactic, we have consistently studied community bridging in combination with other features of disinformation and influence activity, compelling members of a community formed around one set of ideas to take on another set of ideas in order to absorb and incorporate new ideological standpoints into their existing shared identity.

This working paper describes several incidents of near real-time community bridging, including what we describe as '*multipolar bridging*', in which existing ideologies and their supporters are bridged into the disinformation community, without barrier or pushback. A key tool which enables community and multipolar bridging is the repeated use of semantic infiltration and semantic

¹ The Ezra Klein Show, "Transcript: Ezra Klein Interviews Pippa Norris,"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/01/podcasts/transcript-ezra-klein-interviews-pippa-norris.html>, Accessed 18 April 2023.

² *The impact of disinformation on democratic processes and human rights in the world*, Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament, April 2021.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU\(2021\)653635_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU(2021)653635_EN.pdf) Accessed 18 April 2023.

³ *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, Robert Putnam (2001), <http://bowlingalone.com>.

⁴ 'Tweeting Alone? An Analysis of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital in Online Networks', Javier Sajuria, Jennifer vanHeerde-Hudson, David Hudson, Niheer Dasandi, and Yannis Theocharis. *American Politics Research*, Volume 43, Issue 4. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1532673X14557942>.

distortion, “the process whereby we come to adopt the language of our adversaries in describing political reality”⁵ such as the self-nomenclature of the ‘freedom movement’.

This working paper documents narratives, shifts, and patterns for the period from the aftermath of an anti-trans rally in Melbourne, Australia on 18 March 2023 to mid-April 2023, with specific focus on the period 25-31 March 2023. It comprises three parts: a narrative analysis of discourse and community-bridging on Telegram; a comparative quantitative analysis of disinformation and mainstream media ecologies on Meta platforms and products; and a mixed methods analysis of the role of existing community influencers in solidifying what we describe as ‘*the transphobic narrative turn*’. Goodson and Gill describe how “the narrative turn arose at a time of a pressing need for self-reflexive modes of inquiry into the social phenomena that encompass individuals’ personal and collective biographies and social history”.⁶ We frame the term here, in order to describe the pivot from anti-mandate/anti-vaccination narratives to transphobic narratives as organisational and motivational network meta structures within disinformation communities, and the ways by which this pivot is providing a core sense of narrative belonging, just as anti-mandate narratives did. This pivot was signalled in our earlier work where we described a series of ‘Trojan Horse’ narratives⁷ through which individuals could be recruited into more conspiratorial ideologies:

“The ecologies and spread of mis- and disinformation point to a broader threat: that Covid-19 and vaccination are being used as a kind of Trojan Horse for norm-setting and norm-entrenchment of far-right ideologies in Aotearoa New Zealand. Such ideologies include, but are not limited to, ideas about gun control, anti-Māori sentiment, anti LGBTQIA+, conservative ideals around family and family structure, misogyny, anti-immigration. Mis- and disinformation and ‘dangerous speech’ pose significant threats to social cohesion, freedom of expression, inclusion, and safety.”

Since November 2021, The Disinformation Project has described how mis- and disinformation related to Covid-19, and the communities built around it, could pivot to other, more broader concerns impacting Aotearoa New Zealand’s democracy, electoral integrity, democratic institutions, public discourse, and social cohesion.

The Disinformation Project now studies a diverse and dynamic disinformation ecosystem preoccupied with multiple and shifting ideological concerns, including but not limited to misogyny and reactionary ideas about the role of women, anti-LGBTQIA+, the rejection of science (including climate change and fresh water), anti-Government, anti-establishment, anti-Māori, anti-co-governance, and anti-immigration rhetoric. This has significant cause and effect here in Aotearoa New Zealand, and is located within a system of global trends, themes, narratives, actors (including state or state-adjacent actors) that drives destabilisation of social cohesion.

⁵ ‘Un-words and Policy’, Daniel Monaghan, *The New York Times*, November 21, 1978.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1978/11/21/archives/unwords-and-policy.html> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁶ ‘The Narrative Turn in Social Research’, Ivor F. Goodson and Scherto R. Gill, *Counterpoints*, 2011, Vol. 386, NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY: LIFE HISTORY AND LEARNING (2011), pp. 17-33, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/42981362.pdf>.

⁷ *Mis- and Disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand from 17 August to 5 November 2021*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor, <https://thedisinforproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2021-11-Understanding-mis-and-disinformation.pdf> Accessed 18 April 2023.

Context

In March 2023, the British anti-transgender activist Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull aka Posie Parker⁸ embarked on a tour of Australia and New Zealand. In Melbourne, Australia, on 18 March 2023, a rally held by Parker and her supporters was attended by a group of Australian neo-Nazis, from the National Socialist Network, led by Thomas Sewell. Sewell is notorious in Aotearoa New Zealand for his efforts to recruit to his organisation the individual who went on to kill 51 people at prayer at two Christchurch mosques on 15 March 2019.⁹ Sewell and the National Socialist Network neo-Nazis performed the Nazi salute at the Melbourne event and paraded with a banner which read ‘*destroy paedo freaks*’. The neo-Nazis in attendance were not decried by Parker or other organisers during the event, though Parker later claimed no association with them.

Parker was scheduled to arrive in New Zealand on Friday 24 March 2023 and appear at two consecutive rallies – 25 March in Auckland at Albert Park and 26 March in Wellington in Civic Square. After an attempt to revoke her immigration status failed, the Auckland rally went ahead. Thousands of counter-protestors in attendance, and an incident in which Parker had tomato juice poured on her by an activist saw Parker leave the event under a police escort prior to speaking. The event was attended by a small group wearing international far-right insignia, at least one member of the local white nationalist group Action Zealanda, and members of a range of right-wing groups including the New Conservatives, Voices for Freedom, and Counterspin Media. Parker cancelled her Wellington event, and left the country the evening of 25 March.

Green Party co-leader and Member of Parliament, the Honourable Marama Davidson, who attended the Auckland counter-protest, was injured after being hit by a motorcycle at a pedestrian crossing. Davidson stated she was “really clear” the motorcyclist was part of a Destiny Church-organised side event protesting gender education in Aotea Square¹⁰. Davidson subsequently made statements regarding cis white men when interviewed by individuals from Counterspin Media. These statements were promulgated all over both disinformation and mainstream media ecologies, and led to a clarification of her statements¹¹. A further useful summary of events is found on the Wikipedia entry on Davidson¹².

⁸ In a video broadcast on Twitter, Parker voiced her outrage about being contacted by Sussex Police and claimed that she was being “persecuted” for “trying to stand up for women and girls”. She voiced her anger that the police officer involved was a woman. “Men don’t have to march upon our necks, they don’t have to put their hands around our throats, they get women to do it,” she said. “If women aren’t doing it directly, they’re strangling us in other ways... they’re trying to silence us [for] not quite the right message, not working with the right people. “Each and every one of you women who stand in my way... will be annihilated.”, *Anti-trans activist Posie Parker says women who stand in her way will be ‘annihilated’*, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/02/04/posie-parker-trans-women-annihilated/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁹ *Ko Tō Tātou Kāinga Tēnei: Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019*. Published 26 November 2020, embargoed until 2 pm 8 December 2020. Part Four: The Terrorist, number 4, general life in New Zealand, parts 4-7. Accessed 26 April 2023: <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/firearms-licensing/general-life-in-new-zealand/> Accessed 18 April 2023. ‘Threats from White Extremist Group that tried to recruit Tarrant’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 2, 2019. Accessed 26 April 2023: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/threats-from-white-extremist-group-that-tried-to-recruit-tarrant-20190501-p51j5w.html> Accessed 18/04/2023.

¹⁰ Bike assailant ‘identity known’, says Green Party co-leader, <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2023/03/30/bike-assailant-identity-known-says-green-party-co-leader/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

¹¹ Marama Davidson clarifies violence comments from Posie Parker protest after calls to resign, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/486817/marama-davidson-clarifies-violence-comments-from-posie-parker-protest-after-calls-to-resign> Accessed 18 April 2023.

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marama_Davidson#White_Cis_Men_Comment Accessed 18 April 2023.

Methods

In our work, we use the following definitions:

- Misinformation: “false information that people didn’t create with the intent to hurt others”
- Disinformation: “false information created with the intention of harming a person, group, or organisation, or even a company”
- Malinformation: “true information used with ill intent”¹³

These provide framing tools through which we code and analyse material, provenance, propagation, engagement, and potential offline impacts. In this paper and our other work, we refer to these inter-related, socio-technological, and inextricably entwined phenomena as mis- and disinformation, with the resulting impact on socio-political landscapes as information disorders. Mis- and disinformation are transmitted within and across platforms to far-reaching audiences. Producers of mis- and disinformation are often closely connected, or act in concert, cross-promoting material, and content from common sources to reach wider audiences. We describe these complex phenomena as ‘ecologies’ – systems and networks that mirror and migrate content, discourses, language, beliefs, perceptions, and values across different platforms to audiences.

In line with the increasing spread of mis- and disinformation, the number of product and platform surfaces studied by The Disinformation Project has continued to expand. We gather, collate, and analyse data from Telegram, public Facebook Pages, and Groups, public posts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and any sign-posted content on .nz ccTLD sites, other websites, and content on platforms like Rumble, Odysee, Gab, and Gettr.

The study of mis- and disinformation provenance, production and propagation across these platform and product ecologies has been conducted daily since September 2021. We use a range of academic tools to gather, and analyse public domain content, including, but not limited to platform APIs. For data that enables the analysis of Meta’s product and platform surfaces, we use CrowdTangle¹⁴, a tool that enables access for open-source independent research on those product and platform surfaces that are open to study. We do not have insights into content product, diffusion, and engagement over Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, other encrypted instant messaging (IM) apps, and dyadic, triadic, or larger group communication vectors like email, direct messages, phone calls, and SMS.

¹³ *Misinformation and Covid-19: A Briefing for Media*, Jess Berentson-Shaw and Marianne Elliot, <https://www.theworkshop.org.nz/publications/misinformation-and-covid-19-a-briefing-for-media>. Accessed 18 April 2023.

¹⁴ <https://www.crowdtangle.com/features> Accessed 18 April 2023.

Methodological considerations

This working paper does not consider Twitter ecologies, which also featured, and amplified many of the harms studied on Telegram. Our ability to comprehensively map, and study Twitter trends at the time of Posie Parker's visit was hampered by the revision of Twitter public, and academic API access¹⁵, which a statement by the Coalition for Independent Technology noted would "devastate public interest research"¹⁶.

However, deterioration of trust and safety on Twitter is well-documented, resulting in the dramatic increase of harms against, amongst others, transgender communities. In April, GLAAD – the world's largest LGBTQIA+ media advocacy organisation – noted that Twitter removed a transgender-specific protection from its Hateful Conduct Policy. GLAAD President and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis stated "Twitter's decision to covertly roll back its long time policy is the latest example of just how unsafe the company is for users and advertisers alike... at a time when anti-transgender rhetoric online is leading to real world discrimination and violence."¹⁷ In February, a survey conducted by Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), GLAAD and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) found that 60% of survey respondents had experienced an increase in abusive and hateful speech on Twitter since Elon Musk took over as CEO¹⁸.

The deterioration of Twitter under Musk was feared when he first expressed interest in taking over the company, with particular note made of the potential for harms against transgender and queer communities¹⁹. The platform's US\$8 based subscription tier - Twitter Blue²⁰ - is significantly contributing to the seed and spread of harms on the platform²¹. Musk himself has contributed to the rapid erosion of platform integrity, including through engagement with, and consequent amplification of accounts associated with misinformation, and disinformation²².

The Disinformation Project has observed and described the rapid and sustained migration of violative discourse, including antisemitic, misogynistic, and even explicit neo-Nazi content from Telegram to Twitter. This now includes content published on a Twitter account officially run by Action Zealandia, created in November 2022 – replacing one which was deplatformed in 2021²³. This migration of violative content from lesser known, and used social media platforms to Twitter has been supported by Musk's own amplification of racism²⁴, and other harms, including by engaging with accounts on Twitter promoting QAnon conspiratorialism, anti- LGBTQIA+ content, disinformation, xenophobia, and far-right ideologies²⁵.

¹⁵ Twitter announces new API pricing, posing a challenge for small developers,

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/3/30/23662832/twitter-api-tiers-free-bot-novelty-accounts-basic-enterprice-monthly-price> Accessed 18/04/2023.

¹⁶ Letter: Twitter's New API Plans Will Devastate Public Interest Research, <https://independenttechresearch.org/letter-twitters-new-api-plans-will-devastate-public-interest-research/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

¹⁷ GLAAD RESPONDS TO TWITTER'S ROLL-BACK OF LONG-STANDING LGBTQ HATE SPEECH POLICY, <https://www.glaad.org/releases/glaad-responds-twitters-roll-back-long-standing-lgbtq-hate-speech-policy> Accessed 18 April 2023.

¹⁸ HATEFUL AND ABUSIVE SPEECH TOWARDS LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY SURGING ON TWITTER UNDER ELON MUSK, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/hateful-and-abusive-speech-towards-lgbtq-community-surginq-on-twitter-under-elon-musk/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

¹⁹ Some trans Twitter users say platform under Elon Musk would be 'terrifying', <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/trans-twitter-users-say-platform-elon-musk-terrifying-rcna26085> Accessed 18 April 2023.

²⁰ <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/twitter-blue> Accessed 18 April 2023.

²¹ Verified Misinformation: 'Blue Check' Twitter Accounts are Flooding the Platform with False Claims, <https://www.newsquardtech.com/misinformation-monitor/april-2023/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

²² 'Stamp of approval': Twitter's Musk amplifies misinformation, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230419-stamp-of-approval-twitter-s-musk-amplifies-misinformation> Accessed 18 April 2023.

²³ Counter-terrorism hui: Twitter slammed for failing to act on neo-Nazi group, <https://www.odt.co.nz/star-news/star-christchurch/counter-terrorism-hui-twitter-slammed-failing-act-neo-nazi-group> Accessed 30 April 2023.

²⁴ 'From chaos to moments of irresponsibility': Top execs reportedly accused Elon Musk of 'perpetuating racism' on Twitter in leaked emails, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/chaos-moments-irresponsibility-top-exec-180000292.html> Accessed 18 April 2023.

²⁵ 'Stamp of approval': Twitter's Musk amplifies misinformation, <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.33DG9P3> Accessed 29 April 2023.

These observations are supported by research from the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), which in February this year revealed how Twitter has generated millions of dollars of profits from just ten accounts reinstated to the platform by Musk, belonging to neo-Nazi, antisemitic, anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-authority, anti-vaccine, and misogynistic individuals or disinformation platforms²⁶. These accounts are repeatedly retweeted, quote tweeted, or engaged with by leading disinformation producers in Aotearoa New Zealand on Twitter, exacerbating information disorders, and abetting the crossflow of hate and dangerous speech sourced from Telegram.

In sum, our observations on Twitter's deleterious role, and relevance in Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation ecologies after the platform's acquisition by Elon Musk supports research which found that "hateful users have become more hateful", and that "hate has increased overall"²⁷.

²⁶ TOXIC TWITTER: How Twitter generates millions in ad revenue by bringing back banned accounts, <https://counterhate.com/research/toxic-twitter/>, Accessed 18 April 2023.

²⁷ New Twitter, Now With More Hate, <https://scienceblog.com/537496/new-twitter-now-with-more-hate/>, Accessed 29 April 2023.

Telegram, and the networked normative discourse of genocide

Content warning: This section, and the analysis which is featured in this working paper includes examples from within the ecologies studied by The Disinformation Project. This includes highly violent language and dehumanising frames against LGBTQIA+, particularly transgender peoples. Comments from Telegram are posted as they were published, without edits to language or spelling.

Aotearoa New Zealand's Covid-19 denialism/anti-mandate communities shifted from using a range of mainstream social media platforms (Meta e.g., Facebook and Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) to the largely unregulated platform Telegram over the course of two weeks in September 2021.²⁸

Audiences and narrators, familiar with platform guidelines, particularly those related to Covid-19 mis- and disinformation, were used to temporary bans and other measures taken by mainstream platforms to mitigate against disinformation spread or to manage online social norms. Telegram's lack of platform guidelines saw a significant and immediate increase in the use of dangerous speech²⁹ which continues to proliferate on Telegram.

The recent restoration of many figurehead narrator accounts and groups to Meta³⁰ and Twitter,³¹ has seen a rise in hate and dangerous speech on those platforms too. Telegram channels administered from within Aotearoa New Zealand are key locations of the development of new social norms of language, image, threat, and behaviour, showing significant near real-time community bridging activity during the period of study, 22 March – 11 April 2023.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention has described the international 'gender critical movement' as genocidal: "the gender critical movement simultaneously denies that transgender identity is real and seeks to eradicate it completely from society."³² In this international context what took place over 26-31 March in Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation communities is what we now describe as *multipolar community bridging*, in which a fringe group with extant ideology was one of several narrators or groups who opportunistically responded to the spike in content about and engagement with anti-transgender content.

From 26 – 31 March, on both Twitter, and Telegram, the white nationalist group Action Zealandia published the greatest number of updates we have studied in any comparable period. For example, over February 2022, at the height of the Parliament Protest, Action Zealandia published 52 posts – the most number since the start of their Telegram channel. In comparison, by 29 March, Action Zealandia had posted 44 times to its Telegram channel. 42 of those 44 posts were from 19 March onwards.

²⁸ *Mis- and Disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand from 17 August to 5 November 2021*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, Kayli Taylor, <https://thedisinforproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2021-11-09-FINAL-working-paper-disinformation..pdf> Accessed 18 April 2023.

²⁹ *Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide*, The Dangerous Speech Project, <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

³⁰ Why Is Trump Allowed Back on Facebook and Will Meta's 'Guardrails' Contain Him?, Josh Taylor, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/26/why-is-donald-trump-being-allowed-back-on-facebook-instagram-ban-meta-guardrails>, Accessed 18 April 2023.

³¹ Hate Speech's Rise on Twitter Is Unprecedented, Researchers Find, Sheera Frenkel and Kate Conger, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/02/technology/twitter-hate-speech.html>, Accessed 18 April 2023.

³² The Lemkin Institute statement on the Genocidal Nature of the Gender Critical Movement's Ideology and Practice, November 29, 2022. Accessed May 1 2023 <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-on-the-genocidal-nature-of-the-gender-critical-movement%E2%80%99s-ideology-and-practice> Accessed 18 April 2023.

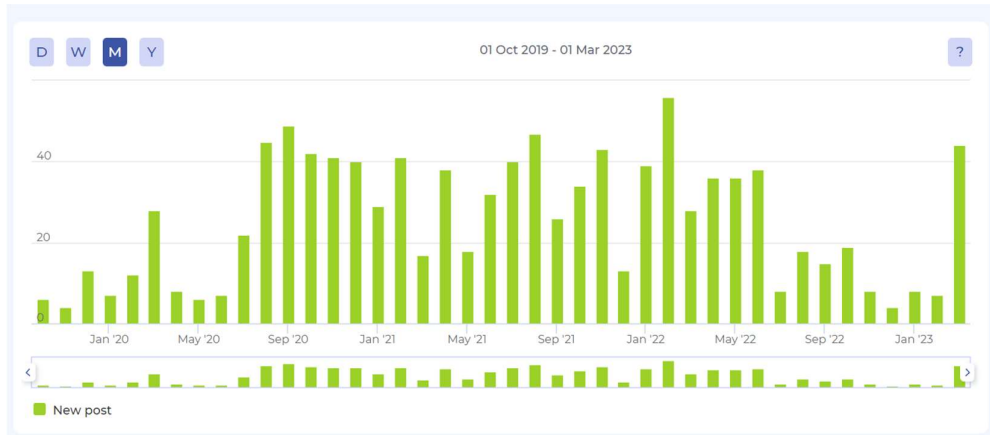


Figure 1. Output of Action Zealandia’s Telegram account from January 2020 onwards.

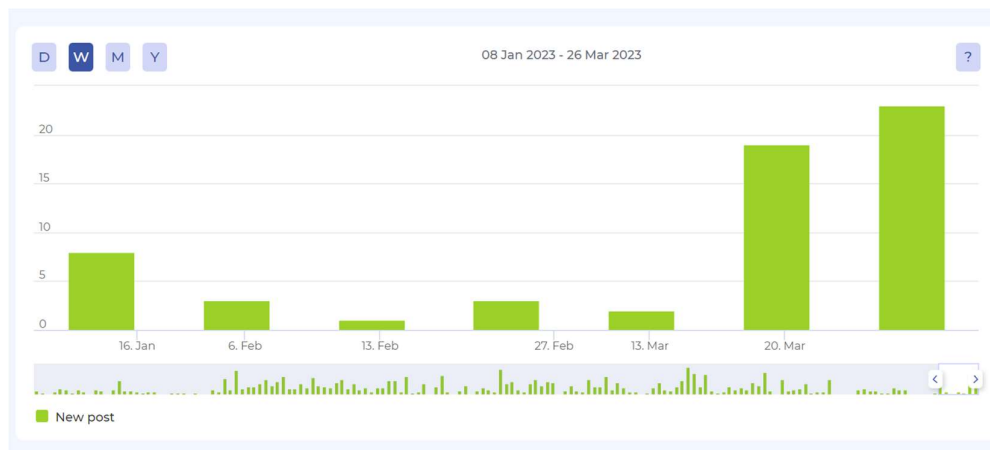


Figure 2. Output of Action Zealandia’s Telegram account from January to March 2023.

Action Zealandia’s content which targeted the Honourable Marama Davidson was reproduced and shared across platforms. The immediate effect was norm-setting, where the type of content normative on Telegram rapidly migrated to more mainstream platforms, including Twitter. The longer-term effect is *multipolar community bridging*, in which through their engagement with others on this theme, and their much engaged with narrative which used racist invective and misogyny to target Davidson, Action Zealandia are now effectively core members of a community that previously had seen little engagement with them or perceived them as fringe. Multipolar community bridging is reinforced through bonding activities, such as Action Zealandia encouraging their audience to help them identify counterprotest participants through slow harvesting of names and other identity details.

The content – text, commentary, image, meme, video – on Aotearoa New Zealand Telegram is more explicitly violent now than it has been since the mass migration to Telegram in September 2021. With restoration of access to more mainstream social media platforms, that discursive violence is now able to be shared across platforms. Now, with the advent of the *transphobic narrative turn* as motivational narrative for the disinformation community; this more widely shared, and more

explicitly violent content is almost entirely focused on the trans community and their allies³³. Along with Davidson, perceived leaders of the counter protest were repeatedly targeted with threat to life content, both open source and via direct and explicit death threats. The spiking of content related to the rally, counter protest and cancellation saw sharing and re-posting across and within platforms encourage engagement, including sharing of video and image-based content both within disinformation communities and by bystanders/digital bystanders.

Over the period 26-31 March, the Telegram-based targeting of Davidson spiked to unprecedented levels. No other individual has been the focus of so much content, and content of this nature except for former Prime Minister Right Honourable Jacinda Ardern at two key tipping points – her speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2022, and the announcement of her resignation in January 2023. The difference here is that Davidson, along with others, is also targeted on Telegram and mainstream social media platforms by neo-Nazi and far-right ideologies, accounts, and groups now *bridged* into Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation community.

Neo-Nazi and far-right content and narrators rapidly emerged as the dominant narrative signature across domestic Telegram discourse – with content imported from foreign neo-Nazi channels at a pace never before studied, which we can state, with a high level of confidence, did not previously exist to this extent within our location of study.

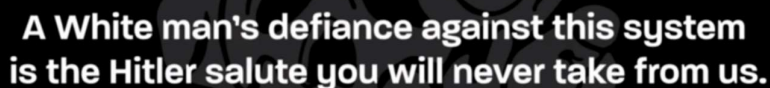
We suggest that community bridging is being tactically deployed to embed more extreme far-right and neo-Nazi content, producers, and ideologies into Aotearoa New Zealand-based disinformation channels and accounts. Thus, through shifts of platforms and norms, Covid-19 denialism and anti-mandate communities are now imbricated with far-right and neo-Nazi rhetoric, ideologies, groups, and individuals.

In the period between the Melbourne rally (which was dominated by visual imagery of neo-Nazi activities and subsequent discussion on social media and in mainstream journalism of the activities of neo-Nazis present in Melbourne) and Parker's arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand, domestic Telegram channels began to re-publish content from Australian-based neo-Nazi channels. Content re-published included video violence framed as morally motivated:³⁴

“Christians beating the hell out of tranny gay women and soy by faggets. listen to that connection at 48 seconds, absolutely beautiful and then the scream afterwards”

Other content promoted international antisemitic tropes, such as the acronym “Z.O.G.”³⁵. AI tools, and approaches to the study of disinformation primarily or solely based on, for example, machine learning, and natural language processing (NLP), which focus on text, are unable to accurately assess the multi-polar, and multi-genre presentation of hate our mixed methods approach can.

The data gathered from the manufacture, presentation, distribution, and diffusion of multi-media content related to the Melbourne rally was, in image, text and video form shared on Telegram, explicitly neo-Nazi.



**A White man's defiance against this system
is the Hitler salute you will never take from us.**

³³ We acknowledge that transphobia and anti-trans hate has been present within this community for some time. What we describe here is how anti-trans hate has become almost overnight the core shared belief.

³⁴ *Morally Motivated Networked Harassment as Normative Reinforcement*, Alice E. Marwick, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/20563051211021378> Accessed 18 April 2023.

³⁵ ZOG is a white supremacist acronym for "Zionist Occupied Government," which reflects the common white supremacist belief that the U.S. government is controlled by Jews. This has resulted in white supremacist slogans such as "Smash ZOG," "Kill ZOG, or "Death to ZOG." <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/zog> Accessed 18 April 2023.

Multiple references are made, in re-posts, shares, and comments, to the National Socialist Network³⁶, the European Australian Movement, and its leader, Thomas Sewell³⁷.



Destroy Paedo Freaks!!!

Australian National Socialist banner action against transvestite paedophiles.

18/03/23

[@nationalsocialistnetwork](#)
[@europeanaustralianmovement](#)
[@thomas_sewell](#)

Figure 3. Post on Telegram by Thomas Sewell

The video from which the screenshot above is taken was widely shared across Telegram. Its content, which is explicitly neo-Nazi, and its popularity and virality on Aotearoa New Zealand Telegram channels, was an emergent indicator of the ways in which community bridging, which had been building slowly over 2022/early 2023, was able over March-April 2023 to embed.

Neo-Nazi networks have been active in Australia's anti-vaccine movement,³⁸ and we saw indicative features of neo-Nazi and far-right involvement in the 2022 Parliament Protest.³⁹ The Disinformation Project has documented the role of individuals and groups with existing far-right or neo-Nazi ideologies within the disinformation community over 2022.⁴⁰ We have observed that over the period March-April 2023 the activity studied over 2022 accelerated due to community bridging, bonding, and diffusion dynamics, via a hitherto unprecedented import, and presentation of transphobic, anti-vaccine, anti-state narratives, and explicit Neo-Nazi ideology, and symbols.

This bridging has been multipolar: from 22 March 2023 onwards, Australian, and international far right and explicitly neo-Nazi content was shared and promoted on Aotearoa New Zealand Telegram channels at levels we had never previously observed. However, this also took place on Telegram channels where the influence of a small but prolific number of New Zealand's neo-Nazi and far-right community members has become significant. Over the course of 2022 and early 2023, they

³⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Socialist_Network Accessed 18 April 2023.

³⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Sewell_\(Australian_neo-Nazi\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Sewell_(Australian_neo-Nazi)) Accessed 18 April 2023.

³⁸ Madi Day and Bronwyn Carlson, "White Supremacist and Far Right Ideology Underpin Anti-Vax Movements," <https://theconversation.com/white-supremacist-and-far-right-ideology-underpin-anti-vax-movements-172289>. Accessed 18 April 2023.

³⁹ *The Murmuration of Information Disorders: Aotearoa New Zealand's Mis- and Disinformation Ecologies and the Parliament Protest*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor (2022), <https://thedisinproject.org/2022/05/18/working-paper-the-murmuration-of-information-disorders/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁴⁰ Much of The Disinformation Project's reporting is sensitive. This is explored within our public paper *Dangerous Speech, Misogyny, and Democracy: A Review of the Impacts of Dangerous Speech since the End of the Parliament Protest*, Kayli Taylor, Kate Hannah, and Sanjana Hattotuwa (2022), <https://thedisinproject.org/2022/11/29/dangerous-speech-misogyny-and-democracy/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

embedded in Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation community as fellow-travellers, community members, and, in some cases, heroic Ned Kelly-type figures.

In August 2022, in unpublished analysis which was shared with the Jewish community and other scholars, we noted that:

"[individuals] have been seen as playing different roles with and for different audiences. X, who is now ingratiated into the anti-vaccine, anti-mandate location of our study, extends his influence and networked effect on this community, beyond the Christchurch-based social network of far-right activists linked to groups like Fourth Reich and Right-Wing Resistance. In looping in Y (and the white nationalist group Action Zealandia), X signals outright dark web antisemitic content on a mainstream Telegram channel, platforming Y's pseudo-scientific analysis to a wider constituency, one which is already acclimatised to casual antisemitism, as seen in X's use of an antisemitic slur.

X thus successfully uses networked effects to both platform Y and normalise Action Zealandia as fellow travellers within a channel with nearly 2000 subscribers established after the Parliamentary protest which did not produce antisemitic content in its first fortnight, when it was focused on promoting ongoing action in and around Wellington. While we might have previously understood Y who Spoonley describes as keeping "traditional Nazi antisemitism alive in NZ over a 40+ year career"⁴¹, as closely linked to Action Zealandia, through his repeated interlocutions in commentary as well as articles and interviews, what these emergent signals within online networks reveal is closer semantic, narrative, and endgame alignment between the more visibly Islamophobic X and fellow Christchurch neo-Nazi Z."

Multipolar community bridging, in which members of a community formed around one set of ideas are compelled to take on another set of ideas and absorb and incorporate the new ideological standpoints into their existing shared identity, with the additionality that then those who share those new ideological standpoints are now incorporated into that shared identity and community,⁴² has been taking place for some time. March – April 2023 has seen an acceleration of those trends, and more overt tactics in use.

Immediately prior to the 25 March rally and counterprotest, wholesale transphobia was the normative discourse on Aotearoa New Zealand disinformation Telegram channels and groups. As an example, which captures the dominant themes:

The real issue is the normalisation of paedophilia. The globohomo elites need their favourite pastime to be normalised and of they can normalise women with balls and men getting pregnant they'll be able to normalise being a nonce. They'll fiddle with our kids while they keep us poor, sick and subjugated. We'll own nothing, walk everywhere and eat bugs but apparently we'll be happy.

We note specifically the continued and targeted use of the language of genocidality⁴³ which we described in *Dangerous Speech, Misogyny and Democracy: a review of the impacts of dangerous speech since the end of the Parliament Protest*, stating that:

Through the repeated use of dehumanising language ... we are studying the strategic shift of social perceptions, values, and attitudes, which is a dangerous speech hallmark. The violative

⁴¹ Personal correspondence, 15 August 2022.

⁴² 'Exploring social change through social media: The case of the Facebook group Indignant Citizens', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Volume 43, Issue 4, July 2019. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ijcs.12514>

⁴³ *Dangerous Speech, Misogyny, and Democracy: A Review of the Impacts of Dangerous Speech since the End of the Parliament Protest*, Taylor, Hannah, and Hattotuwa

language engenders and normalises the notion that targets must be killed, and often, urgently.

We further described how misogyny effects gender minorities:

*More than merely upsetting or distressing, misogynistic targeting of women in public life is in and of itself a form of hate speech which leads to violence – both so-called domestic violence and so-called terror are innately formed within language and images which reinforce binary ideas of gender, objectify women, and link women now to historic forms of violently expressed misogyny... it is 'dangerous', i.e. a form of expression (e.g. speech, text or images) that increases the risk that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group, that group being **women and girls, non-binary people, and those who are perceived as outside binary gender.***

Notably, comments made in public by then head of the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZ SIS), Rebecca Kitteridge signalled that violent misogyny and its burgeoning impacts on human security and safety are well-accounted for, with Kitteridge stating on 11 April 2022 that: " I can say is we are seeing an increase in violent language, and we are seeing the cherry-picking of a range of misogynist, racist, and xenophobic views being combined in a whole range of ways."⁴⁴

Setting aside the events of 25 March 25, in the immediate aftermath (26-27 March) of the rally, counter protest, and cancellation, we observed that content studied across social media ecologies was the most violent targeting of any community (including Māori, and Muslims) studied in a comparable period since mid-August 2021. Content studied targets the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly trans and intersex people, and their allies.

The vocabulary used in discourse studied on Telegram posts since March 25 forms yet another new normal.⁴⁵

- Dominant phrases, expressions, terms, and words in discourse included *sick fuck, fucking bitch, Country is fucked, Fuck off home, Fucking freak, Fucking n*ggers, Who the fuck are these freaks?, fucking imports.*
- The use of 'filth', and 'freaks' featured conjunctions including, but not limited to, *pedo freaks, pedo filth, filthy c*nts, freak show, faggots, and freaks.*
- Comments targeting a well-known transgender activist included "Tolerance is not a virtue, we can't even house our own people and we bring vile UN Baphomet agents like this faggot into our country?" Baphomet is an ancient slur which was first used during the First Crusade, to describe Muslims, as an Old French rendition of "Mohamet". The term is now used for a demonic figure with links to Gnostic and Templar traditions and has links to Aleister Crowley and modern satanism. The use of these historic narratives of hate, as in the use of witchcraft and other classical misogyny tropes to describe women⁴⁶ enables easy dehumanisation and invokes disgust and fear.

⁴⁴ Michelle Duff, "Violent Misogynistic Language 'Unthinkable' a Few Years, Nz Spy Boss Says," <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300562276/violent-misogynistic-language-unthinkable-a-few-years-ago-nz-spy-boss-says>, Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁴⁵ *Dangerous Speech, Misogyny, and Democracy: A Review of the Impacts of Dangerous Speech since the End of the Parliament Protest*, Kayli Taylor, Kate Hannah, Dr Sanjana Hattotuwa, <https://thedisinforproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Dangerous-speech-misogyny-and-democracy.pdf> Access 18 April 2023.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Overwhelmingly, content is thematically linked to ideas of harm to children, particularly sexual harm; harm to women; and language and imagery which equate people to things, animals, witches, or demons – all consistent with the hallmarks of dangerous speech⁴⁷.

- *There'll be NO MORE peaceful Pride Pedo Marches in this country again. Boycott all businesses who support this community. Tear down their propaganda posters. Paint over their symbolism. And always remember, you're dealing with the mentally deranged so do keep yourself safe when around them!*
- *Police literally protect and promote pedos*
- *They are supporting pedophilia and arguing for pedo rights. It's disgusting. Unfortunately I am just one person and the state has an entire army protecting these pedo freaks.. It's really frustrating and infuriating. I can't believe that our societal standards have gone so low that not only is pedo advocacy a thing that is allowed to exist but that pedos themselves are protected by the state.*
- *sex with kids is NOT ok & you need a public hanging*
- *Their views are nothing but pure satanism....I'm going to call it out for what it is....I don't care if I get locked up.... they're been calling our people terrorists for years....no we are going against they're Babylon bullshet!*
- *violent animals & child groomers*
- *These psycho weirdos attacking women is unacceptable. Very disappointing men did not show up in force to provide protection from these sick puppies. My grandfather taught me if you turn your cheek you will get hit hard, so face them and protect yourself.*
- *Story time with the crossdressing tranny goat Freemasonic faggot Baphomet*
- *When the NZ government is run by genocidal psychopathic homosexual communists and feminazis, they import cross dressing UN Baphomet faggots to attack and censor white women and femininity.*
- *These Transfuckers are inciting a war against us. Baphomet*
- *The mainstream media hatred for white folk in general makes it dangerous enough, just add Baphomet to the mix and they're literally bashing old women up publicly in broad daylight.*
- *....the UN Baphomet has already left the country?*
- *Is the UN Baphomet in Sydney?*

In addition to speech and image proliferation on Telegram, there was clear expansion of the use of stickers and other memes, including more explicitly neo-Nazi and far-right stickers and memes within the Aotearoa New Zealand disinformation communities which form our location of study. We have studied instrumentalization of stickers as a Telegram platform affordance since February 2022, noting how they enable visual and animated expression which cannot be studied computationally:

"[Telegram stickers are] a platform affordance (i.e., feature) which allows the use of end-user generated sticker packs on the app. This is a feature that's available on other instant messaging platforms too, like Facebook Messenger, Skype, and WhatsApp. However, on Telegram, the complete lack of any oversight around the harms generated as a consequence of anti-Semitism result in a sticker pack that explicitly targets Jews, and Judaism."⁴⁸

Stickers and sticker packs have been part of our disinformation landscape capture since that time. For example, in November 2022 stickers used in domestic Telegram ecologies included those signalling the Ku Klax Klan (KKK). Another sticker pack used, called 'madSGL', featured neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic frames, through animated GIFs, and memes. Used derogatively on Telegram and today,

⁴⁷ The Dangerous Speech Project, "Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide." <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

⁴⁸ Unpublished situation analysis, 22 February 2022.

the sticker pack's name very likely alludes to what was originally an affirmative identity amongst the Black community in the 1990s, called 'Same gender loving'⁴⁹.

Since the 18 March 2023 rally in Melbourne, we have studied a heightened use of trans- and queerphobic stickers, with some of the most extreme content we have observed to date. We observed the use of stickers from sticker packs called '*Faggot Hate*', and '*Soyjak Vids*'— depicting short GIF footage of extreme violence targeting the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly the trans community, with explicit methods of death and torture shown. *Soyjak* is a homophobic slur⁵⁰. These sticker packs are easily discoverable on Telegram, and the web. Sticker packs as a platform affordance on Telegram are free to use, and by design, of indeterminable provenance. Screenshots of the stickers sets used, and the stickers from these sets featured in the comments to a well-known disinformation organisation's post, are featured below. Also published below are screenshots of further sticker sets available via a website which states that it is "The world's largest catalogue" of Telegram stickers", with, at the time we accessed the website, 1,418,403 sticker sets catalogued.

The examples considered in this working paper also feature results for the terms '*jew*', '*faggot*', '*soyboy*', '*trans hate*', '*white power*', and '*tranny*'. Both our work on misogyny⁵¹ and work led by Nina Jankowicz on online misogyny⁵² have charted how the use of the slur '*tranny*' is a key term of malignant creativity used to target women and non-men online. The search results for the word '*tranny*' reveal sticker depicting former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Animated GIFs and their use as a tool on social media to encode, propagate and normalise hate and dangerous speech has been noted since at least 2018⁵³ with "...a swathe of offensive GIFs depicting everything from explicit racism and Nazi imagery to graphic violence and sexual assault that have been available at various times for users to post on Facebook and Twitter", and problematic moderation issues: the "lack of accountability when it comes to moderating GIFs raises further, troubling questions about how social media platforms choose to commission, market, and police third-party content. That's especially true for content that easily lends itself to manipulation and dissemination by trolls and hate groups whose proliferation online has swelled over the last few years into a massive existential crisis for social media platforms at large." GIF-based material related to the Christchurch terrorist, for example, has appeared on Facebook and Twitter repeatedly since the attack.

Telegram sticker sets include the ability to share animated GIFs, and content shared via these means now targets the LGBTQIA+ community. The GIF format is a powerful communication tool, since they are polysemic⁵⁴:

The animated Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) is a digital file format with a long history within internet cultures and digital content. Emblematic of the early Web, the GIF fell from favour in the late 1990s before experiencing a resurgence that has seen the format become ubiquitous within digital communication. While the GIF has certain technical affordances that make it highly versatile, this is not the sole reason for its ubiquity. Instead, GIFs have become a key communication tool in contemporary digital cultures thanks to a combination

⁴⁹ What is Same Gender Loving?, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131015005535/http://bmxnational.org/faqs/what-is-same-gender-loving/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵⁰ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Soyjak> with origins of the meme detailed in <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/wojak> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵¹ Dangerous speech, misogyny, and democracy, <https://thedisinforproject.org/2022/11/29/dangerous-speech-misogyny-and-democracy/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵² Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵³ Who is responsible for taking down Nazi GIFs? <https://www.theverge.com/2018/7/16/17560840/qiphy-nazi-gif-facebook-twitter> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵⁴ Never Gonna GIF You Up: Analysing the Cultural Significance of the Animated GIF, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305117725223> Accessed 18 April 2023.

of their features, constraints, and affordances. GIFs are polysemic, largely because they are isolated snippets of larger texts. This, combined with their endless, looping repetition, allows them to relay multiple levels of meaning in a single GIF. This symbolic complexity makes them an ideal tool for enhancing two core aspects of digital communication: the performance of affect and the demonstration of cultural knowledge.

GIFs, and memes via sticker packs formed a critical tool in communicating the *transphobic narrative turn* 18 March- mid April, allowing bridging communities to exchange and demonstrate cultural knowledge, and enact performative affect with visual content which embedded neo-Nazi and far right thematic features as central to a shared sense of identity.

Memes and GIFs serve as structural tools which helps producers and audiences to maintain plausible deniability of any responsibility around offline, kinetic consequences of online radicalisation, and instigation of hate. As tactics of malign creativity⁵⁵, sharing and re-sharing GIFs, stickers, and memes formulate a norm-setting exercise, expanding “the so-called Overton window of acceptable political discourse”⁵⁶.

Domestic Telegram ecologies studied by The Disinformation now feature, as a daily content signature, hundreds of violent or violative memes, GIFs and stickers grounded within the ‘for the lulz’ tactic which is innately associated with white supremacist discourses and ideologies⁵⁷. We must here in Aotearoa acknowledge that the Christchurch terrorist used memes to associate himself with both white supremacist ideologies, and the plausible deniability these tactics enable⁵⁸, and that his use of this known tactic of malign creativity is seen in the summary of events provided in *Ko Tō Tātou Kāinga Tēnei: Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019*⁵⁹. 18 March- mid April memes, GIFs and stickers on domestic Telegram channel and account constellations were hyper-fixated on the transgender community and identity.

Many were too violent, and feature harms too graphic, to feature in this working paper.

Those that are featured in this working paper (which we have included at the end) provide a small exemplar of what was studied, encoding, and promoting transphobia, homophobia, queerphobia, and white supremacy. Our landscape survey, even when limited to the period of study, both reflects, and supports what NZ SIS calls “the emergence of a new conspiracy theory-based violent extremist ideology” over 2021, and 2022⁶⁰.

Our critical appreciation of this content - as that which strategically induces disgust, and revulsion – is analysed in the context of in light of research⁶¹ which describes how “propagandists have fomented disgust to dehumanize Jewish people as vermin; Black people as subhuman apes;

⁵⁵ Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online,

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>
Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵⁶ Can The ‘Alt-Right’ Distance Itself From Neo-Nazis? <https://forward.com/news/348366/can-the-alt-right-distance-itself-from-neo-nazis/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵⁷ The Dangers of White Nationalism: The Rise and Normalization of Online Racism in the United States, <https://georgetowncitystudiesreview.org/2016/12/03/the-dangers-of-white-nationalism-the-rise-and-normalization-of-online-racism-in-the-united-states/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁵⁸ How the Christchurch shooter used memes to spread hate, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/3/16/18266930/christchurch-shooter-manifesto-memes-subscribe-to-pewdiepie> Accessed 18/04/2023.

⁵⁹ *Ko Tō Tātou Kāinga Tēnei: Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019*. Published 26 November 2020, embargoed until 2 pm 8 December 2020. We specifically note the description of some of his behaviour as “just trolling” in Part 4, Chapter 7, number 5, as well as several other instances which similarly describe the terrorist’s behaviour in his own terms.

⁶⁰ SIS identifies several spies in NZ, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/sis-identifies-several-spies-in-nz>

⁶¹ How Stochastic Terrorism Uses Disgust to Incite Violence, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-stochastic-terrorism-uses-disgust-to-ignite-violence/> Accessed 30 April 2023

Indigenous people as “savages”; immigrants as “animals” unworthy of protection; and members of the LGBTQ community as sexual deviants and “predators” who prey upon children.”

This work notes how “...people who are trying to outlaw gender-affirming care for transgender kids and purge pro-gay books from library shelves have stirred up disgust by invoking the spectre of sexual “grooming”; others have made the same accusations against those speaking out against such legislative efforts, and some have used the idea to fuel disinformation about the cause of scattered paediatric monkeypox cases. The manufactured grooming mythology has spurred another round of moral disgust and outrage.”⁶²

⁶² How Stochastic Terrorism Uses Disgust to Incite Violence, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-stochastic-terrorism-uses-disgust-to-incite-violence/> Accessed 30 April 2023.

Mainstreaming community bridging – Meta platforms and products

Facebook Pages, and Groups

The Disinformation Project studies, at present, 126 Facebook Pages associated with disinformation narrative production and promotion. For comparison purposes, we study 84 Pages from mainstream media, covering print, broadcast, and web platforms. These account ecologies on Meta reflect our location of study as one which covers both mainstream and sub-mainstream open-source social media, originating from accounts, pages, groups, or channels which over 2020-2021 were focused on promoting Covid-19 minimisation or denialism. They now represent a wide-ranging set of inter-related conspiratorial ideologies.⁶³

Additionally, for this working paper, we used a feature afforded by CrowdTangle to study Facebook Pages with admins primarily or solely based in Aotearoa New Zealand⁶⁴.

From 18 March to 10 April, there were 131 posts in the disinformation cluster featuring the term 'transgender', generating 10,595 interactions. Conversely, there were just 90 posts in the mainstream media cluster, generating 39,440 interactions.

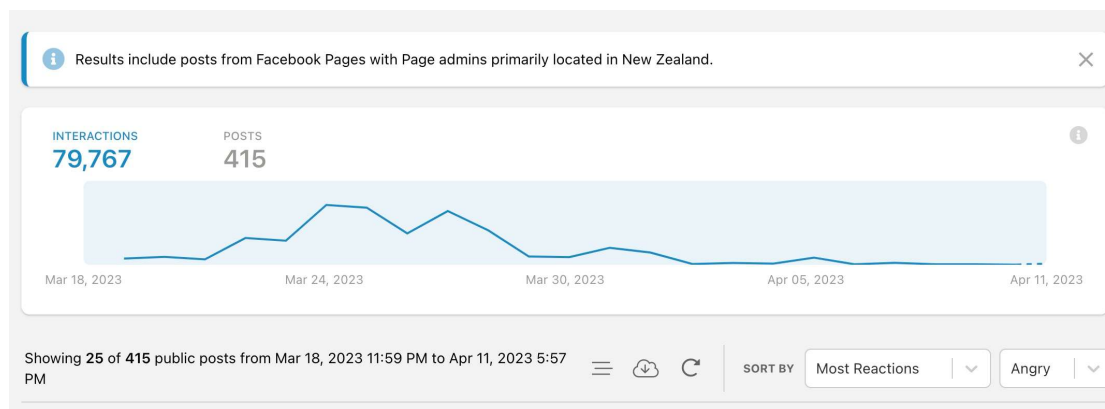


Figure 5. Posts on pages with admins based solely or primarily in Aotearoa New Zealand. Prevalence of anger in posts with the word 'transgender', limited to top 20 | 18 March to 10 April

⁶³ *The Murmuration of Information Disorders: Aotearoa New Zealand's Mis- and Disinformation Ecologies and the Parliament Protest*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor (2022), <https://thedisinproject.org/2022/05/18/working-paper-the-murmuration-of-information-disorders/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁶⁴ Page Admin Country Filters, <https://help.crowdtangle.com/en/articles/3311064-faq-page-admin-country-filters> Accessed 18/04/2023.

The *most shared* posts in the review period, across Facebook Pages with admins solely or primary based in the country were two posts made by the Christian lobby group, one on the Parker rally and counter protest, and the other about Green MP and co-leader, the Honourable Marama Davidson. Both posts questioned the existence of trans people, which as described by the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, is a feature of genocidality. Two very long posts by the first high-profile Pentecostal Christian pastor were the third, and fourth most shared posts respectively. The most widely shared posts are those published by lobby groups, and individuals or pages associated with the disinformation ecosystem. For example, the top-shared post published by the Christian lobby group was shared 3.2 times more than a post by 1News, in fifth place.

Video content follows a similar pattern: within the 20 most viewed videos featuring the term searched within the period studied, one posted by the Christian lobby group received nearly three times as many views as a post by Newshub. This particular video, which received over 10,000 views, provides a key example of the advantages to producers of community bridging⁶⁷, as the content saw a lesbian anti-trans activist in discussion with the leader of the Christian lobby group, enabling audience expansion for both speakers, and effectively bridging radical trans exclusionary women’s movements internationally into existing conservative Christian communities, and vice versa, focused on a common belief in the denial of transgender identities and the right to exist for transgender peoples.

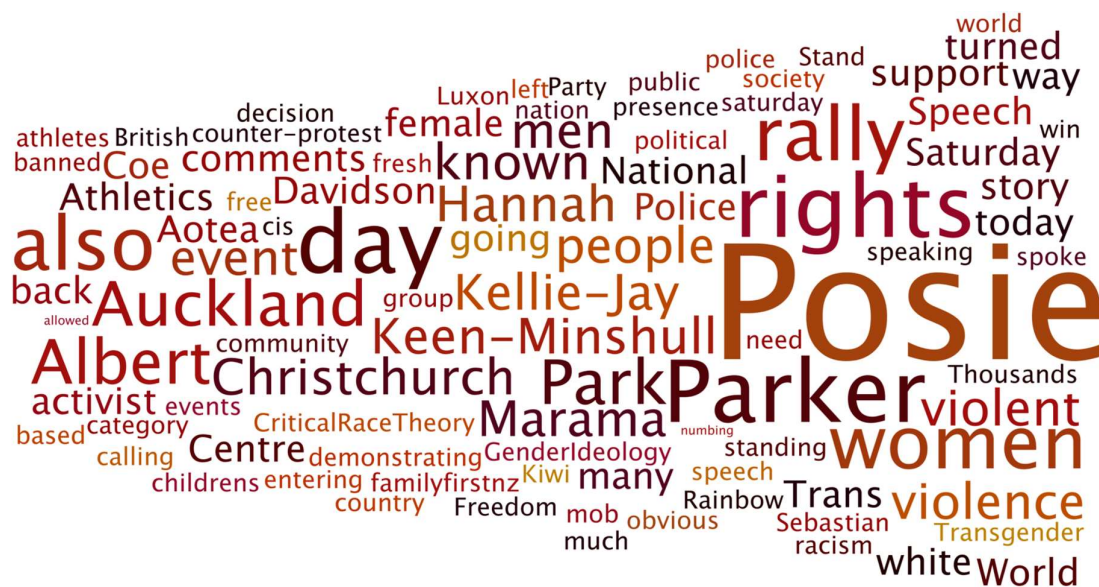


Figure 7: Posts on pages with admins based solely or primarily in Aotearoa New Zealand. Word cloud of posts with the most interactions, featuring the word ‘transgender’, limited to top 20 | 18 March to 10 April

Posts generating the *most interactions* featuring the word ‘transgender’ across Facebook Pages with admins solely or primarily in the country were mostly those posted by mainstream journalism. However, posts published by a Christian lobby group were in the top ten of interactions. The established and well-known Christian lobby group which had the most shared posts (see fig above) and the most viewed video content also benefited from large numbers of interaction, with three posts garnering over 9,000 interactions, the most for a single organisation or producer within the top 10 most interacted with posts.

⁶⁷ ‘Tweeting Alone? An Analysis of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital in Online Networks’, Javier Sajuria, Jennifer vanHeerde-Hudson, David Hudson, Niheer Dasandi, and Yannis Theocharis. *American Politics Research*, Volume 43, Issue 4. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1532673X14557942>.

There are noticeable *temporal* differences within these diverse information networks; when assessing the prevalence of ‘transgender’ as a topic over time, disinformation clusters and nodes continued to produce content for a much longer period whereas mainstream media content featuring the term slowed down from 25 March. A significant spike in the production and consumption of content by producers and audiences within the disinformation networks is shown around 31 March, days after Parker left the country. Where mainstream media moved on, conversations within disinformation ecologies about the protest and transgender people continued throughout the days and weeks that followed. This spike in production and interaction is driven by the sharing on Facebook of a video originally published by the British far-right group, Turning Point UK.⁶⁸ Turning Point UK is a youth-focused Far-Right offshoot of the US organisation Turning Point,⁶⁹ which was founded in 2012 by then 18-year-old Charlie Kirk. Turning Point and Kirk were both significantly involved in the January 6, 2021, Capitol Hill insurrection.⁷⁰ The re-publication of this content across Aotearoa New Zealand-administered Facebook groups and pages replicates the sharing of the video across Aotearoa NZ-administered Telegram channels over the same period.

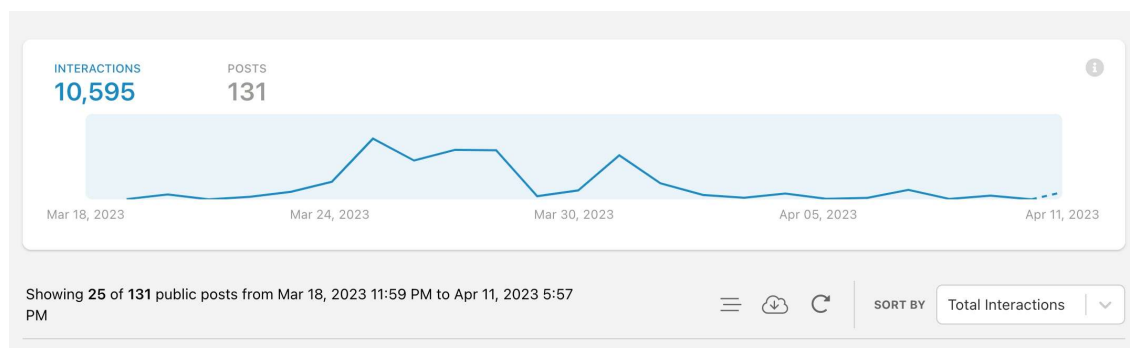


Figure 8: Posts, and interactions in disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 accounts) with ‘transgender’. 18 March to 10 April

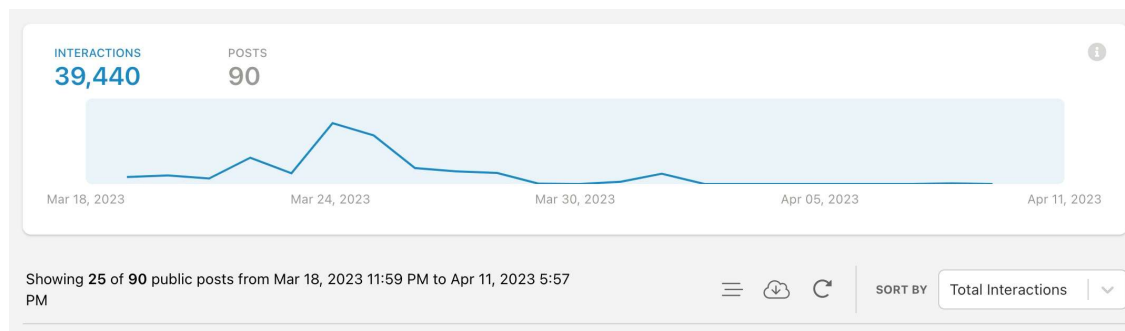


Figure 9: Posts, and interactions in New Zealand Mainstream Media Facebook page cluster (83 accounts) with ‘transgender’

Disinformation clusters and nodes continued to produce content with the topic focus ‘transgender’ as this topic drove audience engagement. Mainstream media moved onto other issues of national or regional interest, but the disinformation community’s production and consumption patterns remain anchored to content related to gender, gender identity, women, and the transgender community. From 18-31 March, 730 posts featuring one (or more) of the words ‘gender’, ‘woman’, ‘women’, and

⁶⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turning_Point_UK Accessed 18/04/2023.

⁶⁹ <https://www.politifact.com/personalities/turning-point-usa/> Accessed 18/04/2023.

⁷⁰ Money and misinformation: how Turning Point USA became a formidable pro-Trump force, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/23/turning-point-rightwing-youth-group-critics-tactics> Accessed 18/04/2023.

‘children’ within mainstream media content featured a diverse presentation of issue, with a variety of news articles pertaining to these topics.

However, qualitative analysis of the posts within the disinformation cluster featuring one or more of these terms showed a much more focussed narrative framing, related to gender and gender identity, with much more hostility and features of the international gender critical movement’s language and ideology.



Figure 10: Posts, and total interactions in disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 accounts) with ‘gender, woman, women, children’ (i.e., one of these words in the post) 18 March to 31 March

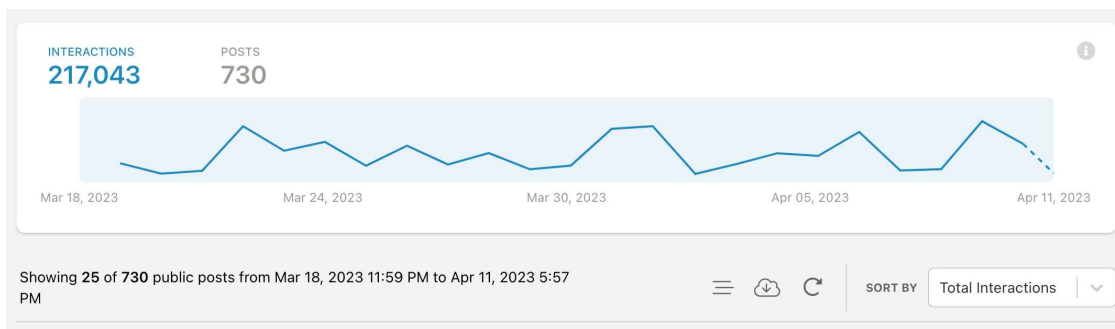


Figure 11: Posts, and total interactions in New Zealand Mainstream Media Facebook page cluster (83 accounts) with ‘gender, woman, women, children’ (i.e., one of these words in the post) 18 March to 31 March

In word cloud rendering of posts published by the mainstream media and disinformation clusters there are noticeable thematic differences. Disinformation content feature ‘violence’ and ‘speech’, evidence of the narrative frames prevalent within this community regarding events of 25 March and the counterprotest. Note also how this cluster emphasises ‘men’, representing a repeated frame that foregrounds men and their prescribed role as ‘protectors’ of women. In contrast, mainstream media commentary focuses on Parker, with a wider variety of related issues discussed.

presented by within the disinformation communities results in audience capture and retention within an alternative media ecology which presented and *continues to present* events before, during, and after the visit of Posie Parker to Aotearoa New Zealand in a manner which very different to mainstream media descriptions of events.

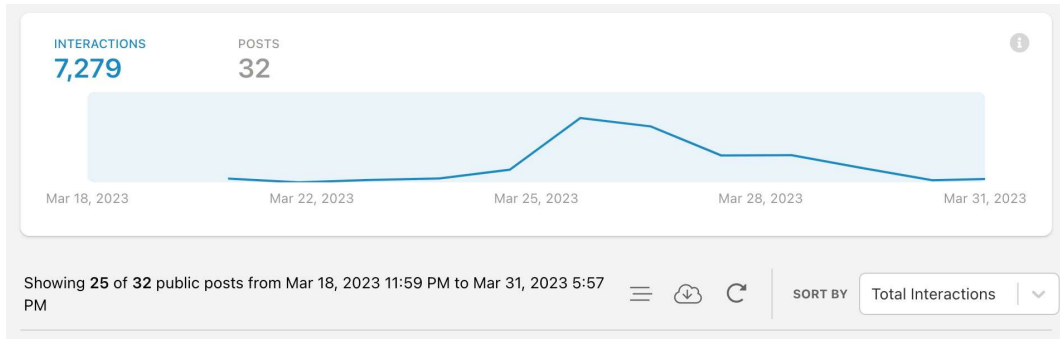


Figure 14: Posts and total interactions in disinformation Instagram account cluster (69 accounts) with 'gender, woman, women, children, trans, parker' (i.e., one of these words in the post) 18 March to 31 March

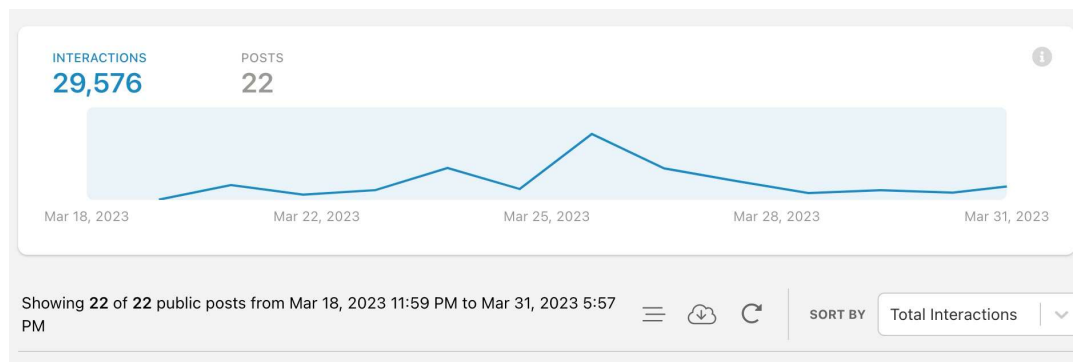


Figure 15: Posts and total interactions in New Zealand mainstream media Instagram account cluster (28 accounts) with 'gender, woman, women, children, trans, parker' (i.e., one of these words in the post)

Instagram

Instagram usage differs from Facebook⁷¹: “in many countries and contexts, Instagram is used by a much younger demographic than Facebook Pages and Groups who may not understand the harms they are exposed to because of following, trusting and sharing updates from mis- and disinformation accounts”. Our research showed that “...mis- and disinformation accounts studied on Instagram received higher engagement than accounts from mainstream media. This is important to consider given a younger demographic uses the app, including as a news and information vector.”

During the period of analysis 18-31 March, the Disinformation Project studied 28 mainstream media accounts on Instagram, and 69 accounts associated with disinformation producers and/or groups. Across both clusters, we searched for ‘gender’, ‘woman’, ‘women’, ‘children’, ‘trans’, or ‘parker’ as keywords.

Results mirror our findings related to content consumption during the Parliament Protest, with completely bifurcated narrative presentations from the two clusters studied, even though the most engaged with content in both clusters focused on the 25 March rally held by Posie Parker in Albert Park. Mainstream media posts framed the location and the abandonment of the event, alongside violence against MP the Honourable Marama Davidson, and the presence of neo-Nazis at the event in support of Parker.

The disinformation cluster has none of this emphasis, and instead present fear of the counter protest, violence against Parker, and a focus on frames which present harms against women and specifically pregnant women. Additional framing calls for sharing of content from the rally and counterprotest in a crowdsourced project to catalogue photos and identities of counter protest attendees, a phenomenon which was also promoted and more virally engaged with on Telegram ecologies studied. The doxing of counter-protestors is normalised and supported within disinformation ecologies on Instagram.

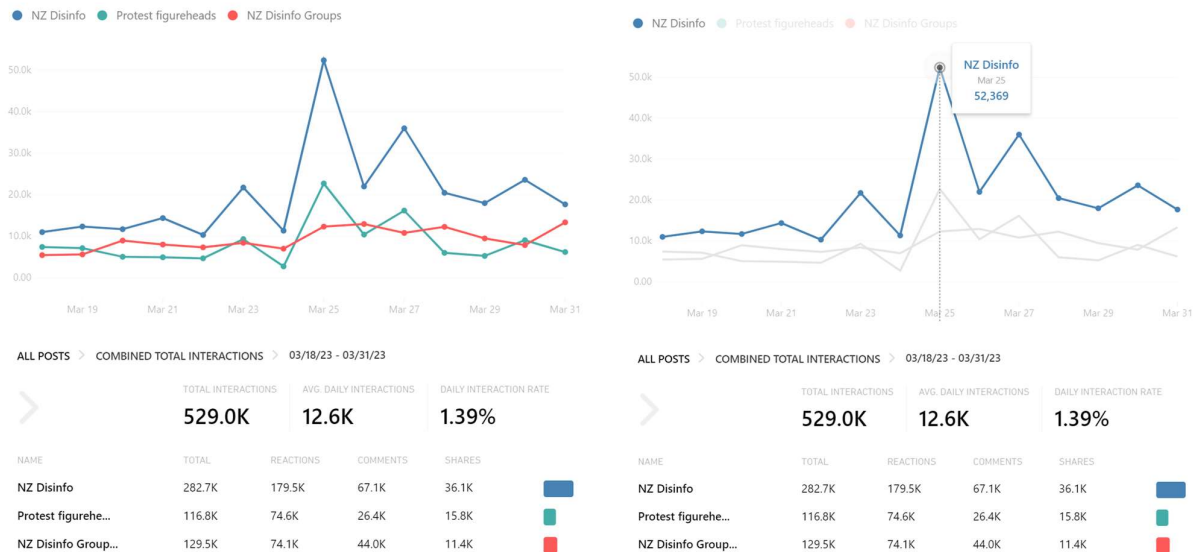
⁷¹ *The Murmuration of Information Disorders: Aotearoa New Zealand's Mis- and Disinformation Ecologies and the Parliament Protest*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor (2022), <https://thedisinfoproject.org/2022/05/18/working-paper-the-murmuration-of-information-disorders/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

‘The Parker Effect’: The narrators of the Parliament Protest, community-bridging, and the transphobic narrative turn

Within the 126 Facebook Pages and 77 Facebook Groups which form part of our location of study, we continue to collate data from, and analyse 15 Facebook pages linked to or administered by the Parliament Protest’s key figureheads, and factions, as described by Toby Manhire, Editor-at-large at The Spinoff.⁷² Analysis of these narrators’ contributions to content over the period of review reveals interesting emergent patterns, including a clear spike in content production, engagement, and sharing on 25 March, the day of the rally and counterprotest, that we term the ‘Parker Effect’.

The Parker Effect is most pronounced in the disinformation clusters on Facebook Pages, with a power law signature apparent in how these 15 accounts lead the interactions. On 25 March the 15 accounts associated with the Parliament Protest produced 43.3% of the total interactions recorded within the disinformation page cluster.

Notably, these results are similar to those found in our analysis over the course of the Parliamentary protest in 2022, and particularly our description of the bifurcated information ecologies on 2 March 2022 – the day the protest ended.⁷³ In the same manner that events, including the fire and riot, were captured and presented by disinformation superspreaders in March 2022, we now observe power law dynamics related to spikes in production and engagement on Meta platforms and products that indicate growing splintered realities.



⁷² Parliament grounds occupation of 2022: Figureheads and factions, one year on, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/02-03-2023/parliament-grounds-occupation-the-figureheads-and-factions-one-year-on> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁷³ *The Murmuration of Information Disorders: Aotearoa New Zealand’s Mis- and Disinformation Ecologies and the Parliament Protest*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor (2022), <https://thedisinforproject.org/2022/05/18/working-paper-the-murmuration-of-information-disorders/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

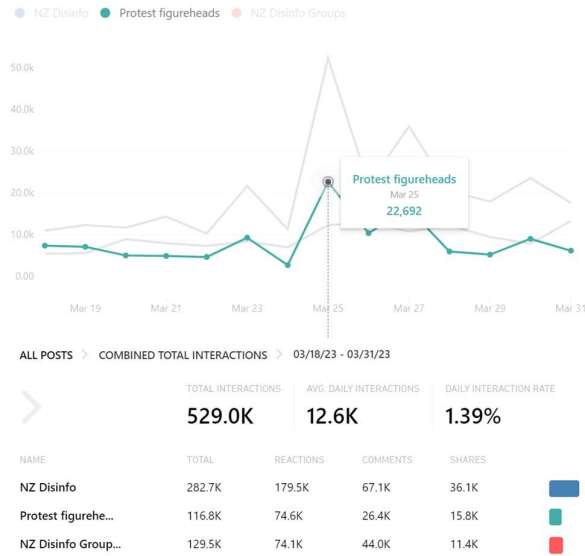


Figure 16: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), Facebook Group cluster (77 Groups), and parliament protest figureheads on Facebook (12 accounts) | Interactions from 18 March to 31 March

Engagement with mainstream media reporting on Meta platforms remains by order of magnitude greater than the engagement experienced by disinformation producers and groups.



Figure 17: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), Facebook Group cluster (77 Groups), and New Zealand mainstream media (83 accounts) | Interactions from 18 March to 31 March

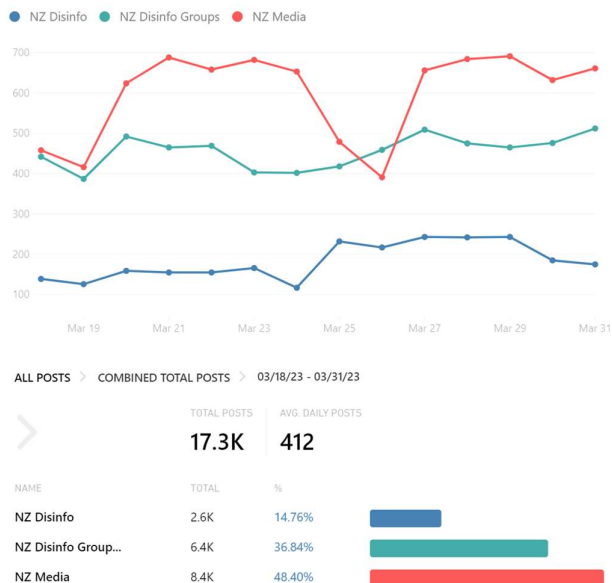


Figure 18: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), Facebook Group cluster (77 Groups), and parliament protest figureheads on Facebook (15 accounts) | Total posts from 18 March to 31 March

The enduring effects of splintered realities, and the network manoeuvres in play which see audiences grow and join up through an emergent unifying issue – transphobia – reflect recent work from the AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy which describes decreasing trust in the media in Aotearoa New Zealand⁷⁴.

This contextualises the enduring, and growing appeal of disinformation ecologies, as alternative news, media, and information sources which are trusted – while conterminously turning away from and tuning out of mainstream journalism. Consequently, there are significant and growing implications for democracy and social cohesion.

Splintering realities and growing constituencies for alternative media are reinforced via analysis of post-production in the period of review. A slight dip in the number of posts by mainstream media on 26 March is not mirrored amongst disinformation clusters on Facebook Pages, and Groups. Once the Facebook content – Pages and Groups – is collated, post-production consists of an alternative news, media, and information ecology characterised by identarian, transphobic, anti-LGBTQIA+, misogynistic, xenophobic, anti-vaccination/anti-mandate, and anti-state/authority views, with strong indicators of conspiratorial thinking. What is taking place is *community bridging*, with transphobia and related narratives of moral panic associated with purported harm to women and children⁷⁵ replacing or substituting for anti-mandate/anti-vaccine views as a unifying belief and motivating issue.

Disinformation frames on Meta’s product and platform surfaces continue to compete with mainstream journalism in the description of and framing of consequential developments – offline, online, domestic, and foreign. The “tectonic shift”⁷⁶ we described in 2022 following the Parliament

⁷⁴ Trust in news in Aotearoa New Zealand, AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD), Greg Treadwell and Merja Myllylahti, <https://www.jmadresearch.com/trust-in-news-in-new-zealand>, Accessed 30 April 2023.

⁷⁵ The Dangerous Speech Project, "Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide." <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/> Accessed May 1 2023

⁷⁶ *The Murmuration of Information Disorders: Aotearoa New Zealand’s Mis- and Disinformation Ecologies and the Parliament Protest*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor (2022), <https://thedisinproject.org/2022/05/18/working-paper-the-murmuration-of-information-disorders/> Accessed 18 April 2023.

Protest has continued to have aftershocks: the Parker Effect reveals again how shared realities are now splintered worldviews.

The Parker Effect – again, as was the case for production and consumption during the Parliament Protest – is linked to opportunistic gains in audience capture and retention by disinformation producers on Facebook and Instagram, and across other platforms, including YouTube, Twitter, and Telegram.

Utilising disinformation narrative techniques including, but not limited to rage-baiting, performative outrage, emotional contagions, inflammatory presentations, aggrieved frames, and dangerous speech, the rapid, continuous, and repetitive content production we observe in Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation ecologies mimics or is modelled on Russian propaganda techniques. The "firehose of falsehood"⁷⁷ model operates most successfully when disinformation presented "is consistent with narratives or preconceptions held by various audiences. Where evidence is presented or seemingly credible sources disseminate the falsehoods, the messages are even more likely to be accepted."⁷⁸

The narrators of the Parliament Protest, having established themselves as trusted sources regarding anti-vaccine, anti-mandate, and anti-state narratives which were the main motivating and organising issue in 2021 and 2022, can now successfully bridge their audiences into another almost universally accepted motivating narrative, and in doing so, further their impact, reach, and status.

Narrative frames which surround the Parker Effect within disinformation ecologies show how transphobia, like anti-vaccine sentiment and Covid-19 denial or minimisation, is now a key theme around which identity formation, community, and normative values are constructed and signalled.

Building from pre-existing sentiments which focus on vaccination as a tool of genocide, the transphobic narrative turn does not need to establish grounds for hate, incivility, vulgarity, racism, misogyny, rage, and the language of genocidality; instead, this turn can build on that which has strong foundations, including the indicators of widespread use of the language and visual imagery of genocide.⁷⁹ The growth in likes is a proxy indicator of the reach, resonance, and perceived relevance (within domestic disinformation landscapes) of these narrative frames.

⁷⁷ The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It, Paul Christopher and Miriam Matthews, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html> Accessed 18 April 2023.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Hannah, Hattotuwa, and Taylor, "Dangerous Speech, Misogyny, and Democracy: a review of the impacts of dangerous speech since the end of the Parliament Protest." The Disinformation Project Working Papers, August 2022. Accessed May 1 2023 <https://thedisinfoproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Dangerous-speech-misogyny-and-democracy.pdf>



Figure 19: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), Facebook Group cluster (77 Groups), and parliament protest figureheads on Facebook (15 accounts) | Growth rate of likes from 18 March to 31 March

This is also mirrored in follower growth. Nearly 15% of the growth in followers in the period reviewed was on a single disinformation producer’s Facebook Page. This producer “has turned the support generated [during the 2022 parliament protests] into a donation stream that has funded a new career”, and “has carved out a niche for herself pushing conservative and alt-right talking points from the United States”⁸⁰. Here too, power law dynamics are evident, with a few highly motivated, strategic, sophisticated, and influential disinformation producers benefitting from opportunistic, yet sustained representations of consequential, contemporary developments.



Figure 20: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), and parliament protest figureheads on Facebook (15 accounts) | Growth of followers from 18 March to 31 March

⁸⁰ Big read: The life and alternate realities of Chantelle Baker, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/chantelle-baker-profile-the-conspiracy-influencer-and-the-growth-of-an-alternate-reality-media/TLWHK766AZBTRK4T6KBQNJQ4C4/>, by David Fisher, NZ Herald, 9 April 2023

Evaluating engagement via the number of interactions per post provides a proxy indicator of the predictable impact of content related to the Parker Effect. The accounts of the 15 parliament protest narrative figureheads generated nearly 1.6X more engagement per post than content published by mainstream journalism.

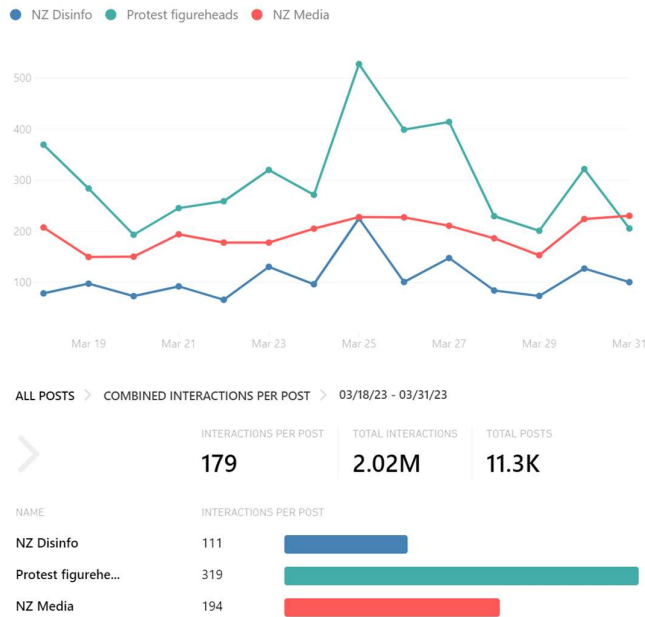
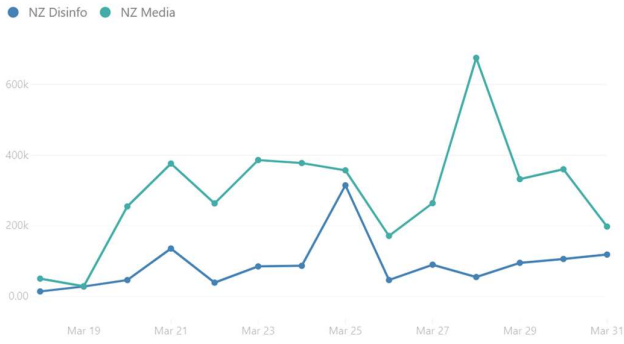


Figure 21: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), Parliament Protest figureheads on Facebook (15 accounts), and New Zealand mainstream media (83 accounts) | Interactions per post from 18 March to 31 March

Within disinformation ecologies, epistemic authority stems from and is constructed by protest figurehead individuals and groups, and their associates, typified by highly binarised gender representations, heteronormativity, and a range of other views which incorporate aspects of far-right and neo-Nazi ideologies. The continued ability of these disinformation producers to leverage consequential offline developments⁸¹ to increase audience and subscription is testament to sophistication and network effects.

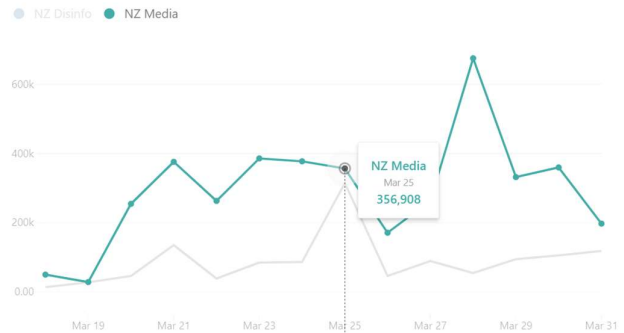
On March 25, disinformation accounts studied generated 314,417 views cumulatively for video content posted, while video content posted by mainstream media platforms generated 356,908 views.

⁸¹ *The Murmuration of Information Disorders: Aotearoa New Zealand's Mis- and Disinformation Ecologies and the Parliament Protest*, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor (2022), <https://thedisinproject.org/2022/05/18/working-paper-the-murmuration-of-information-disorders/> Accessed 18 April 2023.



ALL POSTS > OWNED VIDEOS > COMBINED TOTAL VIEWS > 03/18/23 - 03/31/23

	TOTAL VIEWS	FROM PAGE POSTS	FROM SHARES	TOTAL VIDEOS
	5.35M	4.85M	500.0K	752
NAME	# VIEWS	PAGE POSTS	SHARES	# VIDEOS
NZ Disinfo	1.26M	998.4K	260.0K	348
NZ Media	4.09M	3.85M	239.9K	404



ALL POSTS > OWNED VIDEOS > COMBINED TOTAL VIEWS > 03/18/23 - 03/31/23

	TOTAL VIEWS	FROM PAGE POSTS	FROM SHARES	TOTAL VIDEOS
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NZ Disinfo	1.26M	998.4K	260.0K	348
NZ Media	4.09M	3.85M	239.9K	404

Figure 22: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), parliament protest figureheads on Facebook (15 accounts), and New Zealand mainstream media (83 accounts) | Video views from 18 March to 31 March

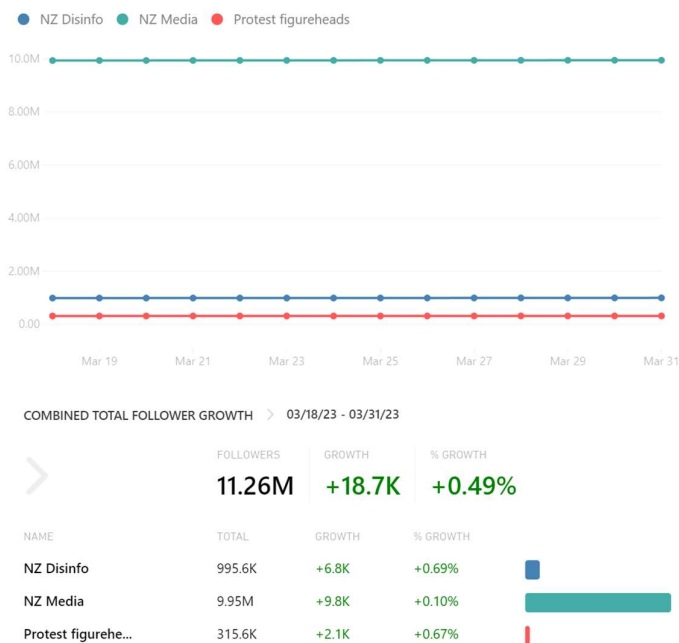


Figure 23: Disinformation Facebook page cluster (126 pages), parliament protest figureheads on Facebook (15 accounts), and New Zealand mainstream media (83 accounts) | Total followers from 18 March to 31 March

Mainstream journalism is followed by (i.e., subscribed to) by an order of magnitude more than disinformation ecologies on Facebook. Consequently, we would expect to find much higher engagement around video content produced by mainstream media. Here we observe similarities between features of video production and consumption on 2 March 2022, and 25 March 2023, surmising that the smaller audience within disinformation ecologies show a greater interest in video content framing consequential, contemporaneous developments, including in real time through livestreams on just Meta’s product, and platform surfaces (e.g., Facebook Pages, and Instagram).

It is notable that growing decline in trust in journalism domestically⁸², and globally⁸³ during the period 2022-2023 is not a trend present in data signatures within domestic disinformation ecologies, which are essentially parallel news, information, and media landscapes to mainstream journalism. It is possible that disinformation news, media, and information ecologies *benefit* from declining interest in mainstream journalism, and that subscriber strength is not anymore, a clear indication of active engagement, or trust in mainstream journalism accounts on Facebook.

More research is needed in this regard, but what we observe in relation to the capture, and framing of Parker’s visit to the country by disinformation narratives, and media production networks is in line with the production of, and engagement with content during the Parliamentary protest, across broadly the same set of accounts.

In sum, what we studied on Facebook in the period reviewed builds on the unprecedented media production, and engagement trends we flagged in our study of disinformation narratives around 2022’s parliament protest (called ‘tectonic shifts’), and highlight, *prima facie*, an even more splintered reality, and divided audiences in the country.

⁸² Trust in news in Aotearoa New Zealand, AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD), Greg Treadwell and Merja Myllylahti, <https://www.jmadresearch.com/trust-in-news-in-new-zealand>. Accessed 30 April 2023.

⁸³ Edelman Trust Barometer 2023, <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer> Accessed 25 April 2023.

Conclusion

Community bridging – including multipolar community bridging – is taking place in near real time. These are new and emergent phenomena, **qualitatively** in terms of the type of content shared and who it targets, and **quantitatively**, by way of the volume of content imported into domestic Telegram ecologies from abroad, including Australia.

For example, during the March-April 2023 period of study, content which claimed to show photos of the Christchurch terrorist training with the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in Ukraine were originally posted by a Telegram Channel with the description “*tracking Nazis and mercenaries in Ukraine and more...*” It is probable that this is a Russian propaganda Telegram channel, given its focus on the disinformation theme that Ukraine is filled with neo-Nazis, which justifies the Russian invasion.⁸⁴ The content which claimed to depict the Christchurch terrorist is posted in English and Russian, and within an hour was reposted by two different accounts to two different New Zealand-based Telegram channels which are part of the disinformation community. Further content is posted over both channels over the space of a few minutes in the middle of the night in Aotearoa New Zealand, soon after the original content was posted.

Only a few nodes (individuals/accounts) are necessary to successfully participate in the multipolar bridging taking place. This reveals clear promotion of Russian disinformation and influence into what we describe as mainstream disinformation communities. While there is forward-presentation of an account which claims to be tracking Nazis, this is not congruent with most of the content and commentary posted by the New Zealand-based accounts’ general activity on these two channels and elsewhere across disinformation communities, including significant posting of content targeting the trans community and their allies. This resembles the tactics known as ‘smoke-screening’⁸⁵ or ‘accusation in the mirror’.⁸⁶

Far Right and Neo-Nazi accounts and ideologies have been community bridged into channels and groups in domestic Telegram ecologies which were through nomenclature and original intent (i.e., anti-mandate, anti-government) previously further distanced from neo-Nazi content and accounts on Telegram. The domestic disinformation landscape is rapidly becoming increasingly complex, with emergent signals of further foreign influence campaigns and, importantly, **emergent signals of wholesale bridging into and from ideologically motivated violent extremist ideologies**. This is not a surprising development: it follows path dependencies flagged in our analysis going back to early 2022, soon after the Parliament Protest.

The Parker tour of Australia and New Zealand accelerated these trends, with the highly compelling transphobic narrative turn providing a new organisational and motivational network meta structure that supports a core sense of narrative belonging. This was amplified across all social media ecologies studied by a ‘collective narcissism’. Understood as “an exaggerated view of the importance, or ‘greatness,’ of the group to which the individual belongs” – and in the context of this working paper, defined as a cisgender or cissexual identity by accounts studied – collective narcissism “defines itself through its relationship to others—needing external validation and/or an external enemy”⁸⁷.

Given that The Disinformation Project’s genesis was around the study of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours during the Covid-19 pandemic informed by misleading, and false online content, it is not surprising that “collective narcissism was positively correlated with a tendency to believe and spread

⁸⁴ The facts on de-Nazifying Ukraine, <https://www.factcheck.org/2022/03/the-facts-on-de-nazifying-ukraine/> Accessed 1 May 2023.

⁸⁵ Cultural Violence and Peace in Social Media, Kaufhold, MA., Reuter, C. (2019) published in Information Technology for Peace and Security, Reuter, C. (eds). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-25652-4_17

⁸⁶ The Dangerous Speech Project, "Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide.", <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

⁸⁷ How to Spot Collective Narcissism in Social Media Posts, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/digital-world-real-world/202009/how-spot-collective-narcissism-in-social-media-posts> Accessed 1 May 2023.

COVID-19 conspiracy theories”⁸⁸. The Parker Effect rapidly shifted the focus of these group dynamics within, and between the social media platforms studied, enabling the transphobic narrative turn. With resultant impact on social cohesion, multipolar community bridging dynamics, inextricably entwined with collective narcissism, are now resulting in the normalisation of narrative frames which deny transgender identity and existence. These are genocidal frames: “there is no shutting the floodgates once states and societies acquiesce to the eradication of a specific people from the earth”⁸⁹.

We now bear witness in near real time to two varieties of social media network content diffusion—content-based, and reference-based⁹⁰. The Disinformation Project’s analysis of explicit violent extremist content, imported into domestic Telegram ecologies in particular, with diffusion linked to bridge accounts, is hitherto unprecedented. Similarly, we now study a hybridisation of conspiratorial narratives, where once anti-vaccine, anti-mandate, anti-government, and anti-authority spaces defined by content produced in large part domestically, are now bridged with content imported from violent extremism safe-harbours on Telegram present outside the country and diffused at pace once in domestic ecologies – to the extent that is observable through open-source analysis. This open-source qualification is critical since what we can observe is at best a conservative capture of what is likely taking place in other physical, digital, and personal spaces and modes of communication.

Our capture of ‘The Parker Effect’ revealed extensive and multipolar community bridging, embedded transphobia as a unifying ideological basis for identity formation and saw the expansion and inclusion of neo-Nazi and explicitly far-right content, narrators, and producers as fellow-travellers within the disinformation communities represented by the ecologies studied. Normative values include hate, incivility, outrage, transphobia, misogyny, slurs, and racism, including anti-Māori racism, Islamophobia, and antisemitism.

These top-level observations, which we have made drawing from Meta’s product, and platform surfaces, Telegram, and with some limited discussion of Twitter, are further complicated through the complex networked dynamics of an ecosystem undergirding disinformation’s seed, and spread, studied in Aotearoa New Zealand – increasing at pace. This now includes, but is not limited to Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Rumble, BitChute, TikTok, and associated websites. Our analysis in this working paper supports the need to continue to focus on communities and contexts in the study of conspiratorialism, and disinformation in landscapes featuring algorithmic amplification, as well as Telegram’s non-algorithmic, trans-national, rapid, and sustained cross-pollination of false and/or harmful content: “false news spreads more than the truth because humans, not robots, are more likely to spread it.”⁹¹

The observation of content and commentary signatures on Meta and Telegram that now regularly includes international content which shares features of Russian disinformation signatures, global far-right talking points, and explicitly neo-Nazi ideologies links what is taking place here in Aotearoa New Zealand with the effects of disinformation virality described in the USA Election Integrity Partnership’s Threat Framework⁹². This has significant implications for human and national security, including democratic institutions, elections, and social cohesion.

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ The Lemkin Institute statement on the Genocidal Nature of the Gender Critical Movement’s Ideology and Practice, November 29, 2022. Accessed May 1 2023 <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-on-the-genocidal-nature-of-the-gender-critical-movement%E2%80%99s-ideology-and-practice> Accessed May 1 2023

⁹⁰ Measuring the diffusion of conspiracy theories in digital information ecologies, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/13548565221091809> Accessed May 1 2023

⁹¹ The spread of true and false news online, by Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aap9559> Accessed May 1 2023

⁹² 10 Factors That Shape a Rumor’s Capacity for Online Virality, <https://www.eipartnership.net/blog/rumors-capacity-online-virality-factors> Accessed 1 May 2023

Finally, this working paper focussed on the representations, and re-presentations of violence, hate, and harm against the transgender and LGBTQIA+ communities on specific social media ecologies. We are conscious that individuals and identities targeted online in the manner studied, and in ways we noted at the outset are too violent to feature, also face similar harms offline. To acknowledge this, we want to end this working paper with the lived experience of Ross Palethorpe, and in their own words⁹³. Only the emphasis at the end, is ours.

In the week following Keen-Minshull's ignominious flight out of Auckland, the media discussion shifted on a dime and the backlash started. An overwhelming show of support for my community was painted as a riot by people who'd never lost a night's sleep in their lives. The usual talking heads asked why we wouldn't debate politely with people who shout for our extermination. Through it all, I did not hear a single trans voice.

The handwringing of the media and political organisations in power turned transphobic rhetoric into acceptable discourse in this country. I am a relatively public transgender person and I received more threats and open hostility in the last week of March than in the previous four years. The message was clear: we'd drowned out the fascists on the day and now we had to pay for our insolence. Columnists chin-stroked and said maybe this was our fault for not shutting up and taking hatred in good grace.

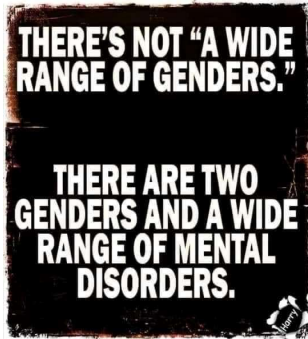
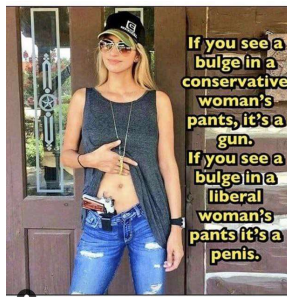
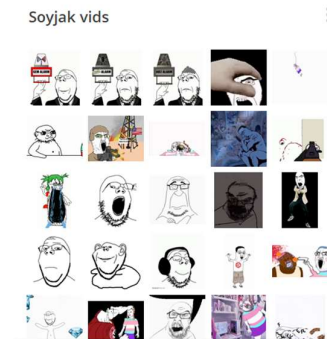
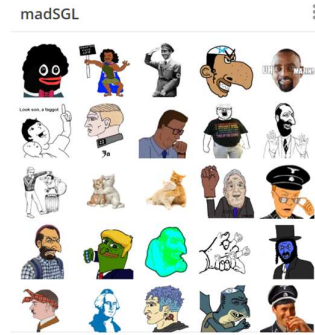
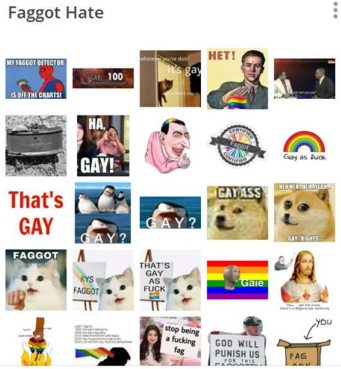
By the time April rolled around, the exhaustion and emotional toll left me feeling like a husk. I struggled to make even the most basic of decisions as my brain and nervous system, oversaturated with cortisol and adrenaline, struggled with any kind of executive function. The group chats went to single words as we struggled to describe how we felt, what had been taken out of us. **But we're still here. We exist and we have always existed.**

⁹³ The Sunday Essay: The longest month, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/the-sunday-essay/23-04-2023/the-sunday-essay-the-longest-month> Accessed 30 April 2023.

Content warning: Content below features harmful, violent depictions of violence, racism, transphobia, homophobia, queerphobia, and white supremacy

Mememes, animated GIFs, and Telegram Stickers

Content warning: Content below feature harmful, violent depictions of violence, racism, transphobia, homophobia, queerphobia, and white supremacy



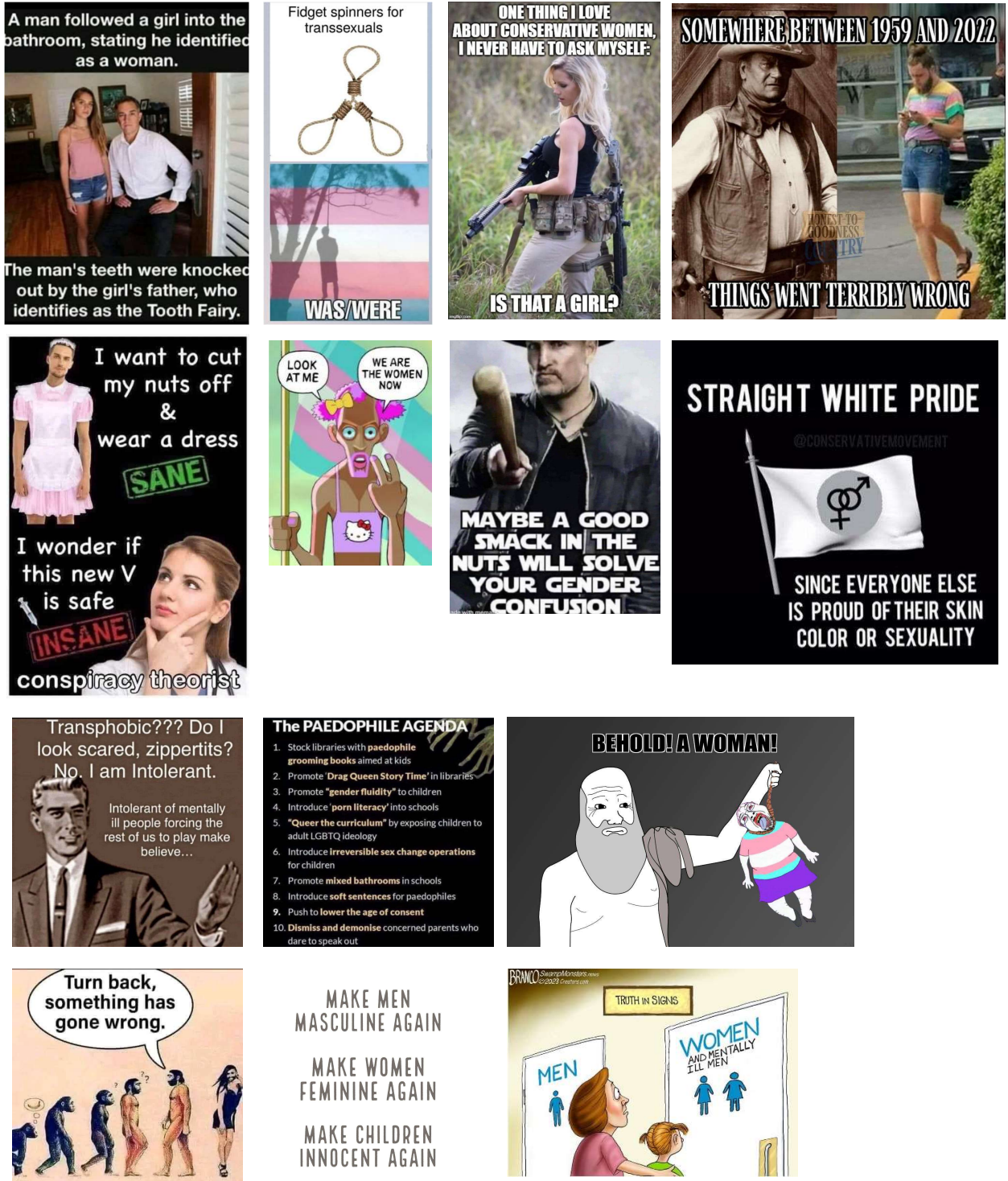


Figure 4. Memes, animated GIFs, and Telegram Stickers encoding, and promoting harms studied on domestic Telegram account constellations in the week before, and after 25 March.

Content warning: Content above features harmful, violent depictions of violence, racism, transphobia, homophobia, queerphobia, and white supremacy

About The Disinformation Project

The Disinformation Project is an independent research group studying misinformation and disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand. Since February 2020, we have used mixed methods approaches to analyse and review the seed and spread of information disorders – and their impact on the lives of New Zealanders.

For more information, visit our website www.thedisinfoproject.org.

To contact us, please email info@thedisinfoproject.org.

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