



The Disinformation  
Project

# ***RACE AND RAGE***

EXAMINING RISING ANTI-  
MĀORI RACISM AND WHITE  
SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGIES  
IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

A SNAPSHOT REPORT:  
JUNE - SEPTEMBER 2023

The Disinformation Project is an independent group that studies misinformation and disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We produce publicly available research, sensitive reporting, media commentary and resourcing for organisations seeking to respond to information disorders – and growing offline consequences – in their communities.

<https://thedisinfoproject.org>

# RACE AND RAGE: EXAMINING RISING ANTI-MĀORI RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGIES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

*A snapshot report: June-September 2023*

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## SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The Disinformation Project produced this snapshot report to help communities, and civil society organisations understand the significant rise of racist language, ideas, and imagery in Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation landscapes.

This snapshot outlines key themes captured in our research from June to September 2023 (inclusive), prior to the October 2023 General Election.

Where appropriate, we have provided context from prior to this period in order to better situate and explain our conclusions. However, this report is a high-level capture of far more complex and inter-connected dynamics, growing at pace.

## METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The Disinformation Project is an independent research group studying disinformation and its impacts in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our mixed-methods research methodology combines open-source, and quantitative data from a range of social media platforms, along with qualitative analysis of content, commentary, and engagement.

Our study includes cross-pollination patterns, network pathologies, super-spreader signatures, semantic study, and qualitative analysis of data, including discourse shifts over time, and around specific issues.

We verify information through expert knowledge of the Aotearoa New Zealand information ecosystem, and internationally recognised frameworks of dangerous speech<sup>1</sup>, and disinformation<sup>2</sup>.

Our analysis includes concepts and language pertaining to race, ethnicity, and related narratives. Our work is grounded in a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the realisation of Tiriti justice.

Our approach is one of partnership with impacted groups and communities, and information-sharing through networks of trust.

## DEFINITIONS

Disinformation can be defined as false or misleading information created or shared with the intent to cause harm, or which could reasonably be expected to harm an individual, group or community.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/459/24/PDF/N2245924.pdf?OpenElement>

## SUMMARY

Our research shows that Aotearoa New Zealand is experiencing rising anti-Māori racism, and growth in white supremacist ideologies.

Racism is being amplified, normalised, and spread through disinformation networks, as well as through mainstream groups and individuals, including politicians.

### **Specifically, the growth of anti-Māori racism is centred on:**

- The promotion of a possible ‘civil war’ in Aotearoa New Zealand, which disinformation promoters and producers present as the inevitable result of moves towards Te Tiriti justice, and co-governance.
- The converging, and linked narratives of anti-co-governance, ‘white genocide’, and ‘The Great Replacement’ which seek to drive division, radicalise individuals and communities, and harm Aotearoa New Zealand’s social cohesion.
- Disinformation used to justify the denial of Māori indigeneity, and Māori identity.
- Disinformation groups are emboldened by high-profile people such as Elon Musk and political leaders repeating or amplifying false, and revisionist ideas of history.
- A growing connection between targeted harassment, and abuse online, including presentations of or incitement to violence, and offline consequences which include stalking, abuse, and physical violence.
- The sustained, high-volume, networked targeting of high-profile wāhine Māori, including:
  - The threats of violence, sexual violence, and death.
  - Misogynistic harassment about their actions and appearance.
  - Offline instances of violence and stalking of wāhine Māori politicians.
  - Our research first captured targeted harassment aimed at Te Pāti Māori candidate Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke on 30 June. On 29 September it was reported that her home was invaded, and a threatening letter was left on the premises. Conservatively, it took only 90 days for racist dangerous speech to inform offline violence in this instance.
  - The significant prevalence, and persistence of harms, including instigation of violence against wāhine Māori, on Twitter/X.

Our research also found that anti-co-governance rhetoric in Aotearoa New Zealand has cross-over with the highly active campaign in Australia to discredit the ‘Voice to Parliament’ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Parliament of Australia.

**In addition to anti-Māori racism, Muslim, and Jewish communities are experiencing a rise in racism. Our research has shown:**

- A higher prevalence of anti-Muslim rhetoric, including the distribution of footage of the Christchurch Masjidain Attacks, is far more evident in 2023, than it was in 2019 immediately after the attacks.
- The discoverability of footage, and related content, much of which is classified as objectionable in Aotearoa New Zealand, and is therefore illegal to access, possess or engage with, has increased year-on-year around the time of the anniversary of the attacks.
- The promotion of ideas that the Christchurch Masjidain Attacks were part of a government ‘false flag’ event. This idea has been amplified by mainstream disinformation producers, their influential networks, and other organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- ‘White genocide’, and ‘The Great Replacement’ theories, which also target Māori, are actively used to target the country’s Muslim and Jewish communities.
- A significant rise in anti-Jewish rhetoric through a growth of Holocaust denial, the use of slurs, and overt antisemitism, which had previously been implied or coded. Public and explicit harms have grown, with producers emboldened by a culture of impunity on social media platforms.
- Muslim, and Jewish communities in Aotearoa New Zealand have felt the impacts of this rise in hatred.
- Measurable harm is likely to continue and worsen at pace, especially in relation to upcoming inquiries/appeals relating to the Christchurch Masjidain Attacks.

## CONTENT NOTE

This report contains racist language and ideology, as well as references to the Christchurch Masjidain Attacks.

Readers are advised that should they search for more information on concepts outlined here, they may encounter further racist ideology. Please note that it is illegal to view, or be in possession of the Christchurch terrorist’s manifesto, and livestream.

## KEY NARRATIVES

### ANTI-CO-GOVERNANCE

#### Brief context and history

Discussion of co-governance has risen since 2022 and is a key social and political issue, with coverage and discussion of the topic seen across mainstream and social platforms.

In 2023, a series of in-person town hall meetings promoted anti-co-governance ideas widely. These ideas have included a rejection of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the denial of Māori as indigenous. On page 7 we expand on the denial of indigeneity.

These meetings have been met with counter-protest action, and some events or locations have experienced antagonism and sometimes violence<sup>3</sup>. The meetings and counter-protests are widely covered in mainstream media, and disinformation information environments, and media ecologies. The contention and violence are strategically presented to audiences in ways which drive division and raise antagonism, anxiety and fear.

#### Dangerous speech – a ‘civil war’

At the in-person town hall meetings, and in media appearances, the individual behind the Stop Co-Governance movement has repeatedly talked about civil war.

Carefully presented as hearsay, his language and ideas are now being widely discussed within disinformation media ecologies and information environments.

*“I’ve been told people are stock-piling guns”*

*“...people have told me they are preparing for war”*

These comments are a form of dangerous speech – which is defined as any form of expression that can increase the risk that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group<sup>4</sup>.

The individual is a high-profile, and influential speaker, who has frequently discussed his financial means, and commitment to the cause.<sup>5</sup> His discussion of a potential upcoming civil war has the impact of creating fear in his audience, developing an environment where radical views or measures might be seen as urgent, fair, or necessary.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.teaonews.co.nz/2023/07/25/fiery-scenes-arrests-at-heretaunga-anti-co-governance-meeting/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://dangerousspeech.org/faq/?faq=200>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300967320/anti-cogovernance-activists-legal-threats-against-tvnz>

References to citizens purchasing guns privately in response to a perceived threat can be interpreted as a thinly veiled incitement to violence. It is implied that people who have purchased guns are preparing for some form of physical conflict, which can serve to legitimise and normalise violent action in the minds of some audience members. For example, he has discussed in favourable terms the American Revolution and ordinary citizens taking up arms<sup>6</sup>.

The language of division and conflict is repeated at in-person meetings, and in interviews across mainstream media, and disinformation media landscapes.

This narrative is a powerful form of signalling. In one expression of it, a radio presenter asks if people discussing this potential conflict could be deluded, and the individual responds by describing them as "very stable, intelligent," minimising the potential harm or danger these individuals could pose<sup>7</sup>.

This can be seen as an attempt to legitimise the fears and concerns of Stop Co-Governance supporters, making them – and actions taken because of them – seem more reasonable or plausible to a wider audience.

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### **Emboldening anti-Māori groups and linking to global anti-indigenous disinformation**

This amplification of anti-co-governance rhetoric, along with spreading disinformation about the pre-colonial discovery, settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand<sup>8</sup>, has served to embolden existing anti-Māori disinformation communities.

Disinformation promoters, and producers embrace, and then re-present the 'civil war' narrative as an inevitable result of moves towards Te Tiriti justice, and co-governance. This is shown both the creation of new content, and the re-publication of material.

Few commentators say explicitly that this war will be between Māori, and Pākehā, but the originating rhetoric, which is repeated by others, is of farmers, and workers going to war in 1918 and 1939<sup>9</sup>; the use of 'farmers' is used as code for European New Zealanders and is linked to international rhetoric about white farmers in South Africa<sup>10</sup>.

Anti-co-governance in Aotearoa New Zealand has cross-over with the highly active campaign in Australia to discredit the 'Voice to Parliament' referendum on the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representational and law-making body incorporated into the Parliament of Australia.

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6 Reference available on request.

7 Reference available on request.

8 <https://www.thepress.co.nz/a/nz-news/350067961/julian-batchelor-and-apocalypse>

9 The symbolism here is a strong cultural trope – as in John Mulgan's *Man Alone* (1939), and repeated depictions in media and culture of the 'Southern Man.'

10 <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/racist-obsession-south-african-white-genocide>



The cross-over between anti-co-governance, and anti-Voice groups enables the greater sharing of divisive language, memes, tactics, and techniques between disinformation producers and networks in the two countries.

On specific social media platforms like Telegram, accessing anti co-governance content now provides a direct pathway to content in Australia discrediting the Voice referendum. Many of these channels or producers are connected to far-right, accelerationist, and neo-Nazi networks.

The scale and ease with which New Zealanders use apps like Telegram to explore local discussions of co-governance, which are now seamlessly linked to more extreme discourse, and communities in Australia, is an active radicalisation pathway which risks greater presentations of, and deeper engagement with white supremacist ideologies.

## DENIAL OF INDIGENEITY

### Brief context and history

Denial of Māori indigeneity and Māori identity has been a feature of anti-Māori racism since the time of colonisation and is now a key narrative in disinformation groups in Aotearoa New Zealand<sup>11</sup>.

The recent history of groups disputing Māori indigeneity includes white supremacists, neo-Nazi figures, and groups in Aotearoa New Zealand since the mid-1980s<sup>12</sup>.

Since 2020, disinformation media, and information networks have actively undermined Māori working towards mana motuhake (meaning self-determination, and sovereignty), and targeted specific Māori leaders, elders, activists, journalists, politicians, academics, journalists, and public figures.

### False evidence

Denial of Māori as indigenous peoples is rooted in false narratives which claim previous permanent settlements, and deliberately denigrate the seafaring, and navigational skills of ancient Māori, which saw connections across Te-Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, the Pacific Ocean.

People in Aotearoa New Zealand across different generations, and lived experiences are likely to have heard false claims about Celtic, Aryan, and Melanesian communities who are said to have existed prior to Māori. Historians have discredited these claims, with Michael King summarising in *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (2003):

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the writings of early colonial scientists such as Edward Treager, Elsdon Best, and Julius Von Haast.

<sup>12</sup> For example, a pamphlet text produced in 1987 by the then-leader of the National Front which falsely claimed there was evidence of a European i.e., white settlement prior to Māori.

*"Despite a plethora of amateur theories about Melanesian, South American, Egyptian, Phoenician and Celtic colonisation of New Zealand, there is not a shred of evidence that the first human settlers were anything other than Polynesian."*<sup>13</sup>

There is a significant publication industry producing texts supporting these false claims, and these texts are repeatedly referenced as evidence within anti-co-governance discourses<sup>14</sup>.

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## **Bridging these ideas into the mainstream**

During the period June-September 2023, denial of Māori indigeneity, and attacks on individual Māori identity (especially towards wāhine Māori leaders) were dominant content and commentary within disinformation and mainstream media landscapes, as well as the country's political discourse.

When narratives are shared between these fields, a bridging effect takes place, connecting mainstream political statements and content to commentary produced by and platformed on disinformation networks. This can expose mainstream audiences to more extreme ideas and more divisive framing of familiar ideas. One recent example of this is examined below.

In September 2023, a Māori political party leader told supporters at a public meeting that Māori are "not indigenous".

*"Here's the rub if you are Māori. We're not indigenous," Peters claimed, according to a report by Stuff. "We come from Hawai-iki. Where's our Hawai-iki? We think it is in the Cook Islands. We think it's in Rarotonga, but we're not from here. "And [if] you go back 5000 years, we came with our DNA from China."*<sup>15</sup>

These comments, and subsequent social media posts, resulted in significant engagement with ideas which deny Māori indigeneity, the existence of indigenous peoples more generally, and made conspiratorial links between indigenous identities and rights and social change.

Examples of comments we studied across both mainstream media, and disinformation media ecologies included:

*"Well according to a Google search to define the word indigenous... 2. (of people) inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times or from before the arrival of colonists. I guess it's up for debate. No mention of previous civilizations. There is still evidence, that has not been re-written, that indicate that the time of Maori of 800 years, was superseded by many visitors & tribes*

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13 Michael King (1994). The Penguin History of New Zealand. Penguin Books. p. 29. ISBN 978-0-14-301867-4.

14 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/300899633/racist-propaganda-the-undercover-campaign-to-infiltrate-school-libraries>; <https://www.1news.co.nz/2021/12/12/company-accused-of-anti-maori-publishing-promoting-books-at-schools/>

15 Election 2023: Winston Peters claims 'Māori are not indigenous' during Nelson meeting with NZ First supporters, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/election-2023-winston-peters-claims-maori-are-not-indigenous-during-nelson-meeting-with-nz-first-supporters/ZCEBFUUDZJGHXA2SY4KGOFETIQ/>

*that made these Islands their home well before then. Most of History is a lie & normally only told by the conquerors”*

*“Indigenous means... where you were born. We're all indigenous as we're all born somewhere. And we all have migrant ancestry.*

*Not indigenous, Indigenous means, originating from or naturally occurring. Maori in Aotearoa are anything but Indigenous. You can't just change language definitions by shouting louder to fit a chosen narrative.*

*The UN have conveniently changed the meaning of indigenous for their own agenda and millions of suckers have believed them...”*

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### **Revisionism and ‘white genocide’**

Commentary on this politician’s statement reveals a significant engagement with revisionist history, particularly concerning the colonial past of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Revisionist history, in this context, refers to the reinterpretation or re-framing of historical events. Here, denial of indigeneity is a key tool to delegitimise Te Tiriti, and Māori assertion of Tino Rangatiratanga.

In connecting the denial of Māori as indigenous to conspiratorial ideas about the United Nations, and other multilateral bodies, this narrative furthers ideas about a grand, nefarious scheme to destabilise countries through racial conflict through the fuller realisation of indigenous rights.

Key white supremacist, and neo-Nazi figures active in domestic disinformation landscapes posted their own content, and commentary supporting this politician’s claim. One even made explicit links to ‘white genocide’, as seen here:

*... correctly recognises that the concept of indigeneity, especially as it's pushed in the United Nations mindset. Is a threat to the New Zealand nation. In New Zealand, the concept of indigeneity sets Māoris and whites against each other at each other's throats, which is the plan. This is the case. Even if those Maoris and those whites have lived together next to each other in peace for seven or eight generations. Globalists need to destroy nations. In order to get them to accept mass immigration... And that the whites being non indigenous are just people who are here temporarily, essentially tourists, and not proper citizens. In Europe, they say that the Sami are the only indigenous people. The Swedes and the Finns. The Danes, everybody else, the French are not indigenous white people cannot be indigenous because the whole purpose of the term indigenous was invented specifically to disenfranchise white people.*

## MISOGYNY AND THE TARGETING OF WĀHINE

Our research shows clearly that Māori, and non-Māori women of colour are primary targets of sustained, high-volume, networked targeting, with content and commentary instigating hate, harassment, and harm.

This includes intense and misogynistic media and social media commentary on the actions, appearance, and integrity of high-profile leaders including politicians.

Slurs, threats of death, violence, and sexual violence are normalised towards a group of specific women with intersectional identities who have a high or public profile in Aotearoa New Zealand. These slurs, and threats target them as individuals, and as representatives of a community or a type of person who is framed as harmful or evil.

For example, Nanaia Mahuta, the Labour MP for Hauraki-Waikato, and current Foreign Minister was repeatedly targeted in public posts on X (formerly Twitter) over September 26-27 with tweets predominantly featuring dehumanising, denigrating, body-shaming, and vulgar slurs. Memes, doctored images, and other visual content including emojis are used, as well as text. This kind of content has multiple meanings, with symbols and repeated visual concepts used to communicate to an in-group audience.

A key feature of targeted harassment for high-profile women is public stalking, where members of the public will take photographs and post to social media or post the location of the individual targeted. This tactic serves to intimidate, and presents risks given the increase in offline violence and targeting of particularly women politicians and candidates<sup>16</sup>.

International research on technology-facilitated gender-based violence shows that:

*“Women in public and political life, including journalists, politicians and parliamentarians, and women and LGBTQIA+ human rights defenders and activists, are more likely to experience TFGVB due to their roles and public visibility. A recent global survey with women journalists found that the majority of respondents (73%) had experienced online violence in the course of their work”.<sup>17</sup>*

The Disinformation Project specifically notes that of those women journalists who experienced online violence in the course of their work, one in five reported offline abuse or attacks.<sup>18</sup> The chilling effect – which sees women increasingly excluded from or opting out of public roles and public life – is a documented feature of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Additionally, our research shows increasing connection between being a target for online harassment and abuse and

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/499100/green-party-and-te-pati-maori-call-out-harmful-emboldening-of-extremism-after-incidents>

<sup>17</sup> Global Partnership TFGVB Preliminary Landscape Analysis, July 2023 <https://www.sddirect.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/Global%20Partnership%20TFGBV%20Preliminary%20Landscape%20Analysis.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> The Chilling: A Global Study on Online Violence Against Women Journalists <https://www.icfi.org/our-work/chilling-global-study-online-violence-against-women-journalists>

becoming targeted by offline stalking, abuse, and harassment. This is causing individual harm to wellbeing and safety, as well as collective social, political, and cultural harm.

Our research shows that in Aotearoa New Zealand today, X (formerly Twitter) significantly contributes to harms against wāhine Māori, including the instigation of hate and violence. For example, in the instance of Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke (discussed further below), we found more targeted harassment on X, than within our Telegram location of study. This is a significant change from just a year ago.

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## Offline impacts

Online discourse impacts the well-being, and safety of wāhine Māori, and contribute to offline violence, and stalking.

For example, it was recently reported that Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke, a Te Pāti Māori candidate, was targeted by a home invasion<sup>19</sup>.

*“The father of Te Pāti Māori candidate Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke said that a man yelled racial slurs while attempting to break down a fence at their family home in the early hours of yesterday morning. Potaka Maipi said that there have been three other recent incidents at the house: two break-ins while the family was out and a threatening letter left in the mailbox. “The first time we were shocked, the second time we thought ‘what the hell is going on’, by the fourth time we’d had enough,” he said. “We’ve spoken to the police, the police said this is the first time they’ve ever seen anything like it. We should have come to them earlier.” He believes the attacks are coming from those who are angry his daughter is standing up against poverty and racism. “For a young woman to call that out, some people are finding it highly offensive, like ‘how dare you challenge me?’”*

A news report on Stuff noted, “To our knowledge, this is the first time in our history that a politician’s home and personal property has been invaded to this extent.”<sup>20</sup>

The home invasions and threatening letter reported by Maipi-Clarke<sup>21</sup> is informed by, and an offline expression of online targeted harassment The Disinformation Project documented since her candidacy was announced in late June.

In 90 days, themes of racism, and misogyny we observed as social media responses to Maipi-Clarke’s political aspirations have now manifested in both offline violence – home invasion, and stalking – and in online discussions on across all platforms, and product surfaces studied by The Disinformation Project, including Twitter/ X, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube comments.

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19 'Racial slurs shouted' during invasion of Te Pāti Māori candidate's home, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2023/09/30/racial-slurs-shouted-during-invasion-of-te-pati-maori-candidates-home/>

20 Te Pāti Māori candidate's home invaded, threatening letter left, party says, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/300980315/te-pti-mori-candidates-home-invaded-threatening-letter-left-party-says>

21 <https://www.teaonews.co.nz/2023/09/29/te-pati-maori-candidate-targeted-in-home-invasion/>

We note that reports of the violence towards Maipi-Clarke have been met in these communities without compassion or empathy and used as a way to further target her. Maipi-Clarke's experience of offline violence is dismissed, questioned, and minimised. Her ethnicity, and gender are targeted as reasons she should be used to, and should expect to experience, violence. Her act of publicly disclosing her experiences of offline violence have drawn further expressions of potential offline violence.

Other women politicians have reported offline violence, and abuse, seen through the recent slapping, and shaking of Labour MP Angela Roberts<sup>22</sup> and Labour MP Willow-Jean Prime's statement that she has experienced the worst racism of her career during this election campaign<sup>23</sup>.

We are studying in Aotearoa New Zealand a growing connection between targeted harassment, and abuse online, including presentations of or incitement to violence, and offline consequences which include stalking, abuse, and physical violence.

The increasing amount of content, and amplification of content, which uses false and misleading information to harass and target individuals and communities has real-world impacts, online and offline. The Disinformation Project has documented this over time, and has noted the predictable impact of increasingly misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and anti-LGBTQIA+ slurs as normal discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand's social media.

## **'THE GREAT REPLACEMENT'**

### **Brief context and history**

'The Great Replacement' is the false, white supremacist idea that motivated, and inspired the Christchurch terrorist.

The term is used by white supremacists, and those subscribing to violent extremist ideologies, to describe a viewpoint that white people in Europe and settler states such as Aotearoa New Zealand, are being 'replaced' by immigrants. In particular, Muslim, and other non-Christian migrants.

The "Great Replacement" theory has its roots in early 20th-century French nationalism and books by French nationalist and author Maurice Barres. However, it was French white supremacist Renaud Camus whose 2011 text "Le Grand Remplacement," or "The Great Replacement," made the phrase, and associated concepts accessible to international white supremacist movements.

The "Great Replacement" ideology was quickly adopted and promoted by the white supremacist movement, in part because it connected so well with other ideologies such as a 'white genocide'<sup>24</sup> which is described later in this report.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.1news.co.nz/2023/09/30/police-making-inquiries-after-labour-candidate-slapped-at-event/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.teaonews.co.nz/2023/09/20/unhinged-willow-jean-prime-facing-worst-racism-of-her-political-career/>

<sup>24</sup> "The Great Replacement:" An Explainer, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgroundunder/great-replacement-explainer>

Since 2017, when rioting white supremacists chanting “*Jews will not replace us*” killed a person in Charlottesville, U.S, ‘The Great Replacement’ ideology has been responsible for a large number of mass killing terrorist events, including the Christchurch mosque attack<sup>25</sup>.

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### **Use by the Christchurch terrorist**

The manifesto that the Christchurch terrorist wrote and posted online was titled ‘The Great Replacement’.

The Christchurch terrorist emailed a copy of the manifesto to then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, the Leader of the Opposition, the Speaker of the House of Parliament, and approximately 70 mainstream media outlets<sup>26</sup>.

Despite its status as illegal to obtain or distribute in Aotearoa New Zealand, it continues to be widely circulated online, including specifically across the domestic, and transnational disinformation ecologies studied by us. It has also been used as a recruitment tool by white supremacist groups<sup>27</sup> and is part of a growing trend of similar white supremacist manifestos used to spread extremist ideologies, instigate hate and incite violence<sup>28</sup>.

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### **Use in Europe**

‘The Great Replacement’ ideology in Europe is usually expressed through antisemitism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia.

Jewish communities, and groups who are described as ‘elites’ are blamed for their commitment to diversity and inclusion, including the responsibilities of states to take in refugees.

This has seen advocates of ‘The Great Replacement’ ideology also promote agitation about, and resistance to, the United Nations, and the European Union. In particular, this resistance targets the Global Migration Compact<sup>29</sup> which seeks to provide international agreement and human rights protections for migrants, and refugees in the face of growing social, political and environmental events which cause displacement.

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25 108 people have been killed in mass shooting or terrorist events between 2017-2022 which have been ascribed to ‘The Great Replacement.’ These include Charlottesville; Tree of Life Synagogue, Pittsburgh; El Paso; Poway; Buffalo; all in the United States; Ōtautahi/Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand; Halle and Hanau, Germany.

26 The Christchurch Attacks: Livestream Terror in the Viral Video Age, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/christchurch-attacks-livestream-terror-viral-video-age/>

27 The “Great Replacement” conspiracy: How the perceived ousting of Whites can evoke violent extremism and Islamophobia, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/13684302211028293>

28 Testament to Murder: The Violent Far-Right’s Increasing Use of Terrorist Manifestos, <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/import/publication/Jacob-Ware-Terrorist-Manifestos2.pdf>

29 <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact>

While ‘The Great Replacement’ is antisemitic, it also targets people of colour, particularly non-Christian people of colour.

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## Use in Aotearoa New Zealand

‘The Great Replacement’ ideologies are a dominant content, and commentary characteristic in Aotearoa New Zealand’s disinformation ecologies, and information environments.

Critically, our research has found that explicit publication and implicit or encoded references to ‘The Great Replacement’ are far more prevalent in 2023 than in 2022.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, ‘The Great Replacement’ has taken on some specific characteristics which allow the ideas and related beliefs to be presented in both explicit and implicit ways.

For example, over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly during the implementation of the Covid-19 Protection Framework, the idea of ‘The Great Replacement’ was conflated or mixed with ‘The Great Reset’, the World Economic Forum’s language for the changes to society instigated by Covid-19<sup>30</sup>.

This mixing of meanings, and metaphors has resulted in people connecting their fear, and hatred of Covid-19 mitigations, with ideologies claiming there is a grand conspiracy to remove white people from the planet. As noted earlier, this often manifests as a belief that Covid-19 vaccination was a tool to bring about this replacement/reset.

These connections, once made, are highly resistant to change<sup>31</sup>. The mixing of far-right ideas about ethnicity, religion, and birth rates with conspiratorialism about secretive global elites and public health interventions are also present internationally, most notably through QAnon<sup>32</sup>.

Both overt, and coded use of the language from ‘The Great Replacement’ is present in Aotearoa New Zealand on all social media platforms we study.

For example, the following screenshot is from a post on X (formerly Twitter) in September 2023 by a leading disinformation account in the country, whose account is defined by misogyny, racism, and anti-LGBTQ+ harms:

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/focus/the-great-reset>

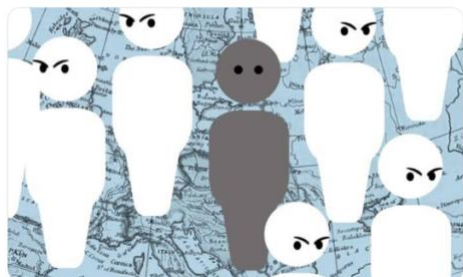
<sup>31</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s44159-021-00006-y>

<sup>32</sup> Willaert, T., Peeters, S., Seijbel, J., & Van Raemdonck, N. (2022). Disinformation networks: A quali-quantitative investigation of antagonistic Dutch-speaking Telegram channels. *First Monday*, 27(5). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i5.12533>



## Race and Rage: Examining Rising Anti-Māori Racism and White Supremacist Ideologies in Aotearoa New Zealand

GREAT REPLACEMENT UPDATE - New Zealand had record net migration of 96,200 in the July 2023 year. This was made up of a net gain of 135,600 non-NZ citizens and a net loss of 39,400 NZ citizens. [stats.govt.nz/news/record-ne...](https://stats.govt.nz/news/record-net-migration)



Here we see migration patterns, returning to pre-Covid numbers, are framed as ‘The Great Replacement’, with the image used in the tweet, linking to Statistics NZ data on migration, taken from a *Guardian* article on ‘The Great Replacement’ theory in Europe<sup>33</sup>.

### ‘The Great Replacement’, and Te Tiriti justice

Another customisation of ‘The Great Replacement’ in an Aotearoa New Zealand context includes a focus on how realisations of Te Tiriti Justice and mana motuhake would impact the New Zealand European identity. This includes co-governance, the growing use of Te Reo Māori, and other indicators of social change such as the updated school history curriculum<sup>34</sup>.

These actions are framed as an over-prioritisation of the rights of Māori, and an erasure of New Zealand European identity. In this version of ‘The Great Replacement’, Māori are blamed, as are non-Māori who are leading, and implementing the perceived ‘replacement’.

In Australia, disinformation groups and individuals targeting The Voice referendum, described earlier in this report, use similar language to associate moves towards post-colonial justice with ‘The Great Replacement’<sup>35</sup>.

## ‘WHITE GENOCIDE’

### Brief context and history

The theory of ‘white genocide’ shares many similarities with ‘The Great Replacement’ theory. It is a white, Christian, identity-based form of violent extremism

33 A deadly ideology: how the ‘great replacement theory’ went mainstream, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/08/a-deadly-ideology-how-the-great-replacement-theory-went-mainstream>

34 <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/changes-in-education/aotearoa-new-zealands-histories-and-te-takanga-o-te-wa/>

35 ‘Disinformania’ has taken over the internet - can ‘no’ voice opportunists maintain control of an unleashed far right flank?, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/27/voice-to-parliament-referendum-disinformania-no-campaign-australia-far-right> and The right’s No campaign is a Trojan horse, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2023/09/19/no-campaign-trojan-horse-eugenics-thinking/>

based on the false idea that there is a plot to reduce white populations and destroy white civilisation<sup>36</sup>.

The ideology is antisemitic in origin and has been popularised in recent years by the American Neo-Nazi and convicted terrorist, David Lane<sup>37</sup>.

Like ‘The Great Replacement’s’ proponents, ‘white genocide’ believers seek to reduce migration. They also focus on reducing ethnic diversity and seek to ‘restore’ settler countries to ‘white ethnostates’.

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## Amplification by Elon Musk

While the theory itself, like ‘The Great Replacement’, is understood as a form of terrorist violent extremism, the language and imagery of ‘white genocide’ can operate as disinformation when used to spread false and/or misleading content about individuals, groups, and communities, or to promote harm.

For example, a post from Twitter/X owner Elon Musk describing an adjacent theory of [white genocide](#) was shared on Telegram in early August by a New Zealand-based disinformation-promoting account.

Musk was replying to a widely shared post which presented an anti-apartheid, political protest song, in existence for decades, as one which was a literal call for the murder, and execution of white farmers in South Africa<sup>38</sup>.



The screenshot of Musk’s post was shared widely across domestic Telegram accounts, and other social media platforms, including Facebook.

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<sup>36</sup> White Genocide, <https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/white-genocide-conspiracy/>

<sup>37</sup> White Genocide, <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/white-genocide/>

<sup>38</sup> ‘Kill the Boer’ Song Fuels Backlash in South Africa and U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/02/world/africa/south-africa-kill-boer-song.html>

Musk's post was used within Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation ecologies to make explicit links between the claim of 'white genocide', and conversations about co-governance. An example of this includes:

*"In South Africa, my 'white privilege' will get me killed by race obsessed political parties, fomenting hatred. NZ will do the same in the next 5yrs."*

Commentary on Telegram, and Facebook linked Musk's post to co-governance, and discussed a range of conspiracies about Covid-19, and vaccination as tools to bring about 'white genocide'.

Studying written commentary on local Telegram channels using Natural Language Processing (which cannot capture video, image, or memetic content) our research discovered over 100 mentions of 'white genocide', including the platforming of hidden video repositories which host 'white genocide', and other white supremacist content.

This included links to the livestream of the Christchurch terrorist, which is classified as objectionable in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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### **Misappropriation of South African land reform**

The way in which 'white genocide' has become a common frame for land reform in South Africa is a key context for Aotearoa New Zealand.

In September 2023, a leading disinformation news network hosted the South African commentator René van der Vyver.

Van der Vyver is an Afrikaners-rights activist who advocates that 'white genocide' is taking place in South Africa.

In the interview Van der Vyver was asked about an Afrikaners-only town in the Northern Cape of South Africa, named Orania<sup>39</sup>. Van der Vyver stated:

*"...in the rest of South Africa we are marginalised" and that their "heritage is being destroyed."*

The interviewer described the foundation of Orania as:

*"finding new ways... untethered from the state."*

A 2019, a Pulitzer Centre article describes how news about land reform in South Africa has been "refracted through the lens of a narrative promoted by white conservatives about a supposed 'white genocide' – killings of mostly Afrikaner farmers – equating land redistribution with race war."<sup>40</sup>

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39 Orania: The Little Town that Racism Built, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/8q7bnk/orania-the-little-town-that-racism-built>

40 <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/myth-white-genocide>

The idea of ‘white genocide’ in South Africa, which has been extensively refuted as false by fact-checkers, has been actively promoted by far-right groups in South Africa and the United States and is a common talking point for white/European nationalist groups worldwide.

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## **Misappropriation of language from South Africa and Zimbabwe**

‘Apartheid’ is a specific term that refers to the racially-based legal system of separation which operated in South Africa from 1948 to 1990.

Our research shows this term is misappropriated to falsely represent co-governance or Te Tiriti as a racially-based separate system in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In doing so, those who use the term are appropriating the suffering of Black and ethnic minority South Africans. This appropriation is similar to the ways we have seen the Holocaust appropriated by anti-vaccine, anti-mandate, and anti-mask groups during Covid-19 public health restrictions.

Another term which is used in a similar way is ‘Rhodesia’, the name for the racially separated state established by Ian Smith in 1965, which is now the state of Zimbabwe.

Rhodesia, like ‘white genocide’, ‘The Great Replacement’, and apartheid, is a term that has been used with symbolic power by white supremacist terrorists. The mass shooter who killed three Black people in Jacksonville, Florida on August 26 2023<sup>41</sup>, wore a Rhodesian army symbol and had scrawled words and symbols on his weapon, in a reference to the Christchurch terrorist.

The 2015 Charleston white supremacist mass killer, who also targeted the Black community, called his manifesto ‘The Last Rhodesian’.

The flag of Apartheid-era South Africa and military paraphernalia associated with the long war between the Rhodesian army and Zimbabwean independence groups are both widely used as white supremacist symbols in their countries of origin and elsewhere.

In Aotearoa New Zealand these are referenced and promoted in disinformation communities, often in ways that a highly creative or an ‘in-group’ joke, making detection of meaning more difficult.

In Tauranga Moana, a small private museum operates, called ‘The Lion and the Tusk – the Museum of the Rhodesian Services Association’<sup>42</sup>, with militaria from the Rhodesian army on display.

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/racist-jacksonville-shooter-wore-rhodesian-army-patch-symbol-white-sup-rcna102134>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/kahu/museum-given-public-money-despite-links-to-group-which-upholds-white-supremacy-narrative/AAUXSRFGNZWC5TIZL47HLURXY/>

Aotearoa New Zealand is seeing the amplification and promotion of ‘white genocide’, misappropriation of the term ‘apartheid’, and other emotive ideas about land, family, and ethnicity at a time when co-governance is a critical political and social topic of discussion.

These terms and ideas, which have been present within domestic disinformation networks since 2021, are now manifesting in more mainstream social and political conversations, including in some cases, within mainstream media or mainstream political parties.

## DENIALISM

### Brief history and context

Denialism has its roots in fake or flawed ‘scholarship’ which denies the events such as the Holocaust, climate change, and Covid-19.

Aotearoa New Zealand disinformation communities, initially formed around Covid-19 denialism, have also expressed denial of the Holocaust, and climate change for some time.

Critically, we are now seeing the denial of the official record of events of the Christchurch terrorist attack.

### Denial of the Christchurch Masjidain Attack

In August, an incident resulted in the widespread sharing of a link to a pseudo-documentary that contains the Christchurch terrorist’s livestream footage.

The pseudo-documentary is classified as objectionable in Aotearoa New Zealand, and is therefore illegal to possess or distribute. The premise of this pseudo-documentary is that the Christchurch Masjidain Attack was part of a ‘false flag’<sup>43</sup> event, with victims presented as ‘crisis actors’.

This is a key example of denialism<sup>44</sup> as an emergent theme which will have significant social, political, policymaking, and cultural repercussions.

Denialism labels the people victimised by an event as irrelevant – here the murder of 51 people - in order to pursue a specific goal. In the case of the denial of the Christchurch Masjidain Attack, the goal is to promote the idea of government censorship, and control (e.g., on the sale of guns) through a ‘false flag’ event.

The August incident mentioned above saw wide-ranging sharing of a link to the pseudo-documentary, with commentary around the ‘censorship’ of content.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.adl.org/glossary/false-flag>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/03/denialism-what-drives-people-to-reject-the-truth>

Critically, this was done by groups and organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand that have not previously engaged in public support for a ‘false flag’ interpretation of the events of the Christchurch Masjidain Attack. Disinformation groups, and individuals who had previously shared footage of the attacks also took the opportunity to share it again.

The Christchurch Masjidain Attack Coronial Inquiry<sup>45</sup> is due to start in October, and the judicial review of the terrorist’s application to appeal is likely to be scheduled for later this year.

Given that denialism about the attack is spreading beyond white supremacist networks, and into more mainstream spaces, this is likely to have significant impacts on the Muslim community, and beyond.

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## **Holocaust denial**

Holocaust denial and antisemitism are also increasing, with the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand reporting in mid-September an increase in antisemitism in New Zealand schools<sup>46</sup>.

Our research echoes this, and we have noted a significant, and continuous increase in the use of antisemitic slurs in social media posts since May 2022, as well as the increasing accessibility of content which denies the Holocaust.

Our research shows that where we previously observed implied antisemitism, we now additionally analyse explicit modern and historic antisemitism, and denial of the Holocaust.

Reporting on hate crime statistics earlier in 2023 saw that Jewish, and Muslim communities experienced disproportionate levels of hate crime, as did Asian, and South Asian communities, and noted that hate crimes against Māori are under-reported<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://coronialservices.justice.govt.nz/masjid-attacks-coronial-process>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/300963864/antisemitism-on-the-rise-in-kiwi-classrooms-it-made-me-ashamed>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/08/exclusive-racism-homophobia-fuelling-thousands-of-crimes-in-new-zealand-each-year-figures-show>

## CONCLUSION

Racism, supported by false and misleading content, is on the rise in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Disinformation which seeks to harm Māori, non-Māori people of colour, Jewish, and Muslim communities is growing in both volume, visibility, and violence.

This content is increasingly moving from Telegram to more mainstream platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Meta. We have found this content cross-pollination and migration to include explicitly and implicitly racist rhetoric, as well as extreme content previously only or mostly found on Telegram or 4Chan.

The lead-up to the 2023 General Election is characterised by increased antagonism and tension on issues of co-governance, resulting in offline violence which disproportionately impacts wāhine Māori.

There are clear international signals regarding the adoption of myths of 'The Great Replacement', 'white genocide', and the misappropriation of language, symbols, and events in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Additionally, there are parallels between the targeted use of disinformation to discredit 'The Voice' referendum in Australia<sup>48</sup>, and the use of false, and misleading information to discredit Māori identity, indigeneity, and policies which support co-governance<sup>49</sup> in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Alongside anti-Māori rhetoric, antisemitism and islamophobia is also growing in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is seen through the reproduction of international ideologies in local disinformation networks, and an increase in the use of slurs and extermination ideation towards Jewish and Muslim people.

Critically, the period covered in this report saw more sharing of content relating to the Christchurch Masjidain Attacks than was present immediately after the attacks in March 2019.

These high-level conclusions of more detailed research conducted by us, shows a clear and critical issue for Aotearoa New Zealand. During this pre-election period, the impacts of disinformation on our social cohesion are stark.

There is a clear call to action for communities and civil society organisations and groups to demand respectful interactions and responsible expression, as Aotearoa New Zealand continues to discuss important social and political ideas.

There is a critical need for the acknowledgement of the impact of online harassment and abuse, its differential impact for wāhine Māori, women of colour, and other

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/27/voice-to-parliament-referendum-disinformania-no-campaign-australia-far-right>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/aug/23/who-is-julian-batchellor-stop-co-governance-new-zealand-far-right-speaker-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-referendum-no-campaign>

intersectional identities, and the links from online to offline stalking, harassment, and expressions of violence.

The rise in sharing of content related to the Christchurch Masjidain attacks warrants specific pause; this causes harm for survivors, whānau of those killed, and the wider Muslim and Christchurch communities.

It also has significant wellbeing and safety impacts for those engaging with and sharing the content, some of whom will be children and young people.

Let this report be a starting point for respectful interactions and responsible expression about harm.