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## BRIEFING - BY INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC DIALOGUE (ISD)

### Storming of the US Capitol Building on 06 January 2021

29/01/2021

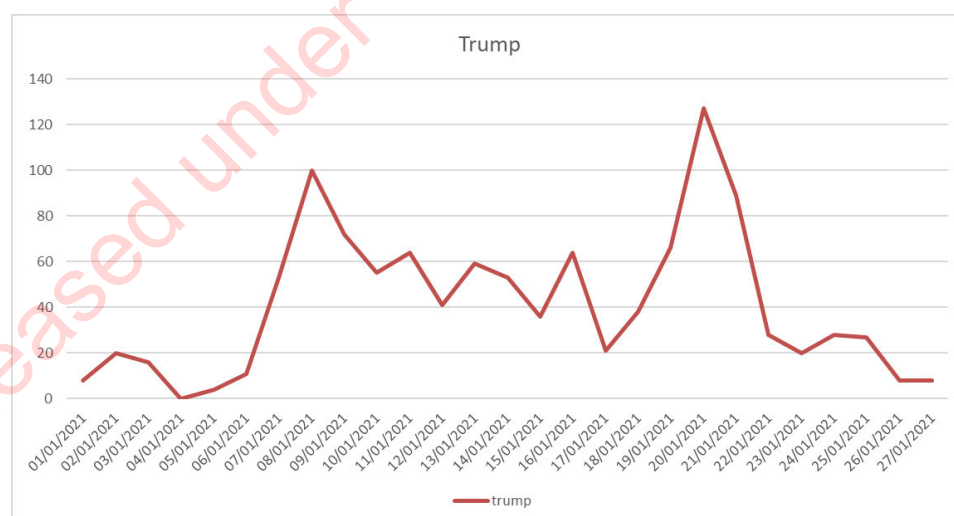
Previous research carried out by ISD for DIA has shown how online platforms facilitate cross-fertilisation between extremist communities in New Zealand and transnational dynamics and developments.

Our situation analysis found that New Zealand extremists had a particularly strong relationship with their American counterparts. By some margin, the United States was both the most frequently mentioned place by New Zealand extremists and also the place whose extremists mention New Zealand in greatest numbers. Indeed, the political context in the US is arguably even more closely followed by New Zealand extremists than domestic politics, with our 2020 data showing Donald Trump mentioned 23% more often than Jacinda Ardern by New Zealand-based extremists.

It is therefore perhaps unsurprising to see New Zealand extremists, and the far-right and conspiracy theorists in particular, actively engaging with the storming of the Capitol on the 6th January, as well as linking these developments to the current situation in New Zealand.

6(a), 6(c)

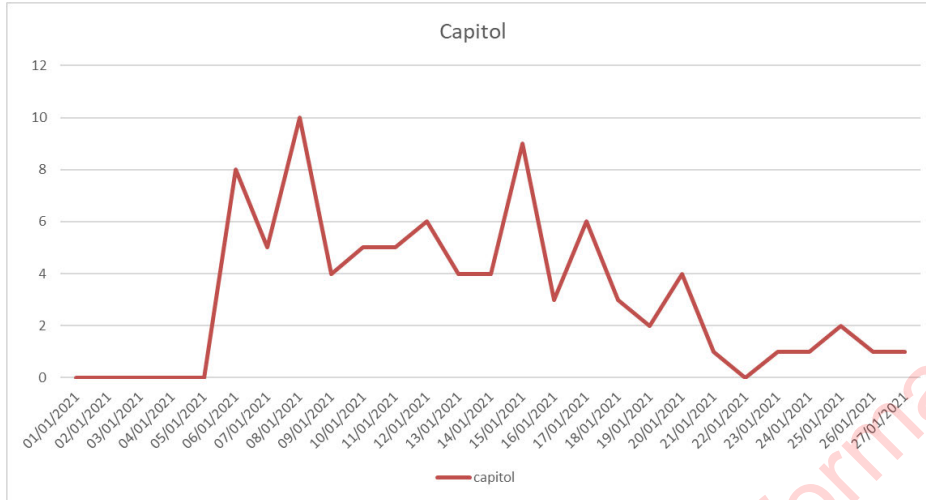
overall interest in Trump rose sharply in the wake of the attack, rising from no mentions of Trump across the dataset on the 4<sup>th</sup> January, to 100 references on the 8<sup>th</sup> January, surpassed only in January by 127 mentions on the day of Joe Biden's inauguration.



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Specific references to the Capitol attack were more limited, with data showing between four and ten records a day referencing the keyword ‘Capitol’ between the 6<sup>th</sup> January, the day of the attack, and the 15<sup>th</sup> January, before tailing off towards the end of the month.



In our qualitative analysis, ISD identified four key reactions to the storming of the Capitol by New Zealand extremists online:

- A number of New Zealand extremists expressed support for the storming of the Capitol, as well as calls for further action.
- New Zealand supporters of the QAnon conspiracy theory were attempting to integrate into the predictions of the QAnon movement about the imminent “great awakening” that would lead to the defeat of the paedophile cabal and the “deep state.”
- In the wake of the events at the Capitol, major grievances emerged among the New Zealand far-right about the subsequent de-platforming of Trump and like-minded accounts from mainstream social media, as well as the takedown of ‘alt-tech’ platforms such as Parler.
- Another key narrative was based around the idea that Antifa-activists had infiltrated the rioters during the storming of the Capitol in order to stir chaos and make the far-right look like a violent threat.

**Support for the storming of the Capitol**

ISD identified a number of New Zealand extremists expressing support for the storming of the Capitol, as well as calling for further action. 6(a), 6(c) reacted to the storming of the 6(a), 6(c)

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During 6(a), 6(c) express support for the actions of the protestors, although they are not supportive of Trump himself. 6(a), 6(c) used anti-Semitic tropes by celebrating the facts the events had successfully scared politicians, described as 6(a), 6(c) presented the law enforcement response to the events in racialized terms, claiming that Republicans were being "6(a), 6(c) , participants make explicitly antisemitic statements, arguing that the storming at the Capitol were a form of self-defence against the Jews. 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

**Integration of Capitol events into QAnon predictions**

New Zealand supporters of the QAnon conspiracy theory were watching the events at the Capitol unfold with great anticipation. 6(a), 6(c)

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6(a), 6(c)

Renowned conspiracy theorists 6(a), 6(c)

the events at the Capitol were linked to issues such as vaccines (they falsely argue that vaccines are in contravention of the Nuremberg Code which bans medical trials without consent of the research subjects) and 6(a), 6(c)

At these events, a number of attendees wore symbols or made references to QAnon. 6(a), 6(c)

During the speeches given, speakers expressed support for claims by the QAnon movement, such as the idea that harvesting children's blood is now one of the world's biggest industries, with satanists and free masons supposedly involved. 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

There were some dismissive messages about QAnon among New Zealand extremists as well. As many other extreme right 6(a), 6(c) expressed suspicion of the QAnon movement. On the 6th January, the day the Capitol was stormed, 6(a), 6(c)

### Discussion around subsequent social media crackdown

One of the major grievances of the New Zealand far-right following the events at the Capitol centred around the de-platforming of like-minded accounts under the platforms' terms of

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service. Following the storming of the Capitol, Twitter and Facebook took down the accounts of Donald Trump, and Amazon ceased providing web services to the social media platform Parler, which had become very popular with conservatives and far-right users over the course of 2020.

As part of a wider enforcement against extremists and conspiracy theorists in the aftermath of the 6th January, Twitter appeared to suspend the accounts of hundreds of New Zealand based users – many of whom frequently voiced right-wing political opinions. These included

6(a), 6(c)  
[Redacted]

These removals and the takedown of Trump’s accounts as well as Parler became a major topic of discussion among extremists in New Zealand, and conspiracy theorists in particular.

6(a), 6(c)  
[Redacted]

This line of argument situates the crackdown against Trump and Parler into a broader ideological frame: rather than merely representing a reaction to the violent uprising at the Capitol, it is described as a pretext to push through a more comprehensive political agenda, namely bringing down the west through demographic change via mass migration.

6(a), 6(c)  
[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)  
[Redacted] There were claims of growing

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ensorship and increasingly strict limits on acceptable discourse and political opinion, with claims this would eventually leading to law enforcement using repressive measures against conservatives: 6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

Some extremists did not merely restrict themselves to bemoaning the actions taken against Trump and Parler, but also recommended alternative platforms for mobilisation. We found evidence of a platform scramble, with many far-right personalities recommending a range of alternative platforms where they could be followed, including the encrypted messenger app Telegram.

Far-right 6(a), 6(c) [Redacted] to join Telegram, where had [become active](#) following the storming of the Capitol after what 6(a), 6(c) [Redacted] and Trump's Twitter ban. 6(a), 6(c) [Redacted]

[Redacted]

6(a) 6(c) [Redacted]

**False flag claims and supposed Antifa-involvement**

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Allegations that certain events are mere “false flags” are often found in the aftermath of events that backfire against the far-right. The storming of the Capitol was no exception. In a conversation 6(a), 6(c)

repeated the conspiracy theory that Antifa-activists had infiltrated the rioters which had gained some traction among right-wing audiences in the US following the storming of the Capitol. 6(a), 6(c)

theory that the events are actually linked to a Chinese plot to destabilise the United States.

The New Zealand disinformation 6(a), 6(c) also made a number of unverified claims about the events on the 6th January 6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)


6(a), 6(c) also made predictions about violence, claiming that 6(a), 6(c)

This content seems to have been popular with audiences online, 6(a), 6(c)

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6(a), 6(c)



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## BRIEFING – INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC DIALOGUE (ISD)

### Dominant Covid-19 Narratives Among New Zealand Extremists and Conspiracy Theorists

18<sup>th</sup> February 2021

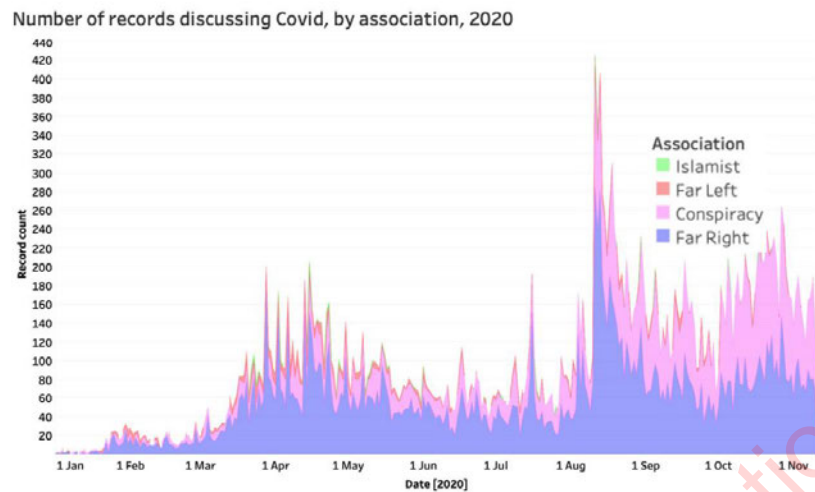
Over the past year we have seen extremists around the world [from across the ideological spectrum](#) seize on the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic to spread violent, supremacist and hateful rhetoric online. Extremist actors have been [using Covid-19](#) as a 'wedge issue' to promote conspiracy theories, target minority communities and outsider groups, contest government legitimacy and call for extreme violence. In particular, disaster scenarios like the pandemic play into an "accelerationist" tendency among violent extremists, which posits that the current order has failed and that one must accelerate its demise by stoking social division and violence.

Research carried out by ISD for DIA has shown how throughout 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has been seized on by extremist communities in New Zealand. Extremist responses to Covid-19 in the country ranged from far-right groups blaming minorities for the spread of the virus, to claims by Islamist groups that the virus was a punishment for the oppression of Muslims, and QAnon meta-conspiracies around Covid-19 leading to dozens of real-world arson attacks on 5G towers.

**Such attacks speak to an increasingly hybridised threat which has seen online extremism become intertwined with other potentially harmful phenomena including conspiracy theories and disinformation.**

Our research showed that an initial surge of extremist interest in the pandemic began in March, when New Zealand closed its borders and entry ports, and entered national lockdown. From May to July, this interest saw a relative decline as New Zealand returned to normal life. There was then a major 'second wave' of discussion around Covid-19 in August – considerably greater than the initial wave – corresponding with new cases in the country and the reintroduction of localised and national measures to curb the virus.

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In the second half of 2020, researchers began to see the evolution of Covid-19 conspiracy theories emerging among online New Zealand constituencies. These ranged from the questioning of scientific facts around the virus, to claims that Covid-19 is a hoax, to accusations that lockdowns would see the creation of Nazi-style concentration camps

6(a), 6(c)

However, since the 2021 global roll out of vaccines these theories have only escalated, as extremists seek to manipulate uncertainty around the vaccine to spread distrust and polarisation.

Online extremist narratives manipulate high levels of anxiety around the virus with a rich pool of [pre-existing conspiracies around vaccines](#) to create a hybrid threat, with serious implications for public health, community cohesion and even public safety.

In this briefing we analyse some of the most resonant narratives emerging online among New Zealand extremists and conspiracy theorists around Covid-19 vaccination including:

- Racialised discourse relating to prioritisation of Maori populations for vaccination mixed with overt antisemitic representations around Jewish control of the vaccine programme
- Anti-lockdown groups incorporating opposition to 'mandatory' Covid-19 vaccination
- The circulation of international anti-vax content, localised for New Zealand

### Racialised discourse relating to prioritisation of Maori populations for vaccination

There have been a number of examples of an explicitly racialised discourse within extremist discussions, related to the decision to prioritise Maori communities for vaccination. This includes both expressions of concern for Maori welfare, as well as statements condoning the assumed risk this creates for Maori people. In one case, this racialised discourse about Maori was also tied to an antisemitic conspiracy theory that alleged Jews were behind the malign plot to vaccinate Maori people first.

One narrative which is emerging is the idea that the vaccination roll out is a ploy to harm or to experiment on Maori people. 6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

After the announcement of the snap lockdown, 6(a), 6(c) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] about government targeting of Polynesian and Maori populations with the vaccine.  
Similarly, 6(a), 6(c) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

6(a), 6(c)

[REDACTED]

Conspiracy theories about Maori prioritisation have also been merged with antisemitic conspiracy theories. 6(a), 6(c) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] claims that prioritising Maori populations for vaccination is a Jewish plot within New Zealand, using explicitly antisemitic imagery and terminology.

6(a), 6(c)

[REDACTED]

The reaction from fringe far-right and white nationalist corners to these claims appears to be mixed. One reaction has been the suggestion that prioritising Maori populations for the vaccine is (anti-white) reverse racism. 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c) has previously described the vaccine as a 6(a), 6(c) intended to solidify control and reduce fertility, and that Maori and Pasifika people will likely be exempt from being required to take it.

6(a), 6(c)

On the other hand, 6(a), 6(c)

– 6(a), 6(c)

**It might seem counter-intuitive for Māori sovereignty to be weaponised by groups who, traditionally, have leant towards white supremacy. However, there are international precedents for groups with far-right ideologies seeking to hijack narratives around the protection of first-nations and minority communities.**

Historic examples include the Jamaican Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey embracing the Ku Klux Klan around a perceived shared interest in racial separatism, whilst more recently we saw support from alt-right ideologue Richard Spencer for the notion of the fictional African country of 'Wakanda' from the Marvel film Black Panther. These are often justified through the French New Right concept of 'ethnopluralism' (the belief that each people of different ethnicities should live strictly separated from each other to preserve 'pluralism'), which is theoretically compatible with the ethnonationalist belief that nations are tied together by a shared heritage and culture.

## Anti-lockdown groups incorporating opposition to 'mandatory' Covid-19 vaccination

A number of well-known conspiracy theorists who are opposing the lockdown policies of the New Zealand government have increasingly been focusing on spreading false and unproven claims about the alleged dangers of the Covid-19 vaccines and the secret agenda the vaccine roll out is supposedly driven by. This

Conspiracy theorists 6(a), 6(c)

implied that the recent discovery of new cases of community transmission was planned to help the government extend their emergency powers and to encourage people to take the vaccine.


6(a), 6(c) that he is opposed to vaccines being mandatory, but not to the vaccines themselves; however, 6(a), 6(c)

The statement that New Zealanders need to be 'woken up' to stop them from willingly lining up for the vaccine is obviously at odds with 6(a) 6(c) that he's only concerned about whether vaccinations are mandatory. 6(a), 6(c) talked at length about Bill Gates and Agenda 21 conspiracy theories (which posit that a decades-old non-binding UN resolution on sustainable development represent a plot to subjugate citizens' sovereignty), saying that 6(a), 6(c) would not be getting the vaccine and that those who do will be participating in an experiment with an unsafe vaccine.


6(a), 6(c) that he has been talking to Covid-19 conspiracy theorist 6(a), 6(c)

and has learned that the vaccine is fatal for elderly people.


6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c) spoke about the [Nuremburg Code conspiracy theory](#) (which alleges that vaccines contravene the 1947 Nuremberg code which outlawed medical experiments without consent), 6(a), 6(c)

6(a) 'Q-drops' – releases of supposedly secret information tied to the QAnon conspiracy – 6(a), 6(c)

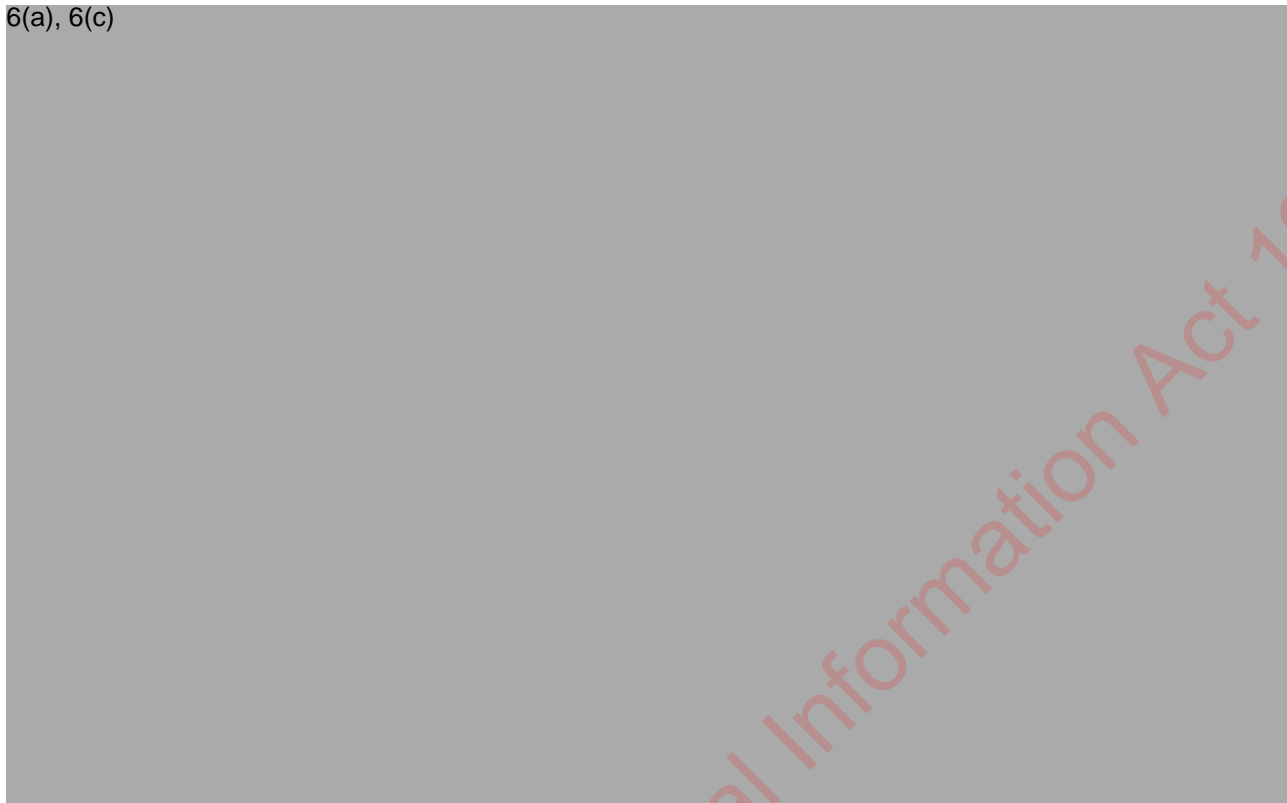
6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted] claiming that the lockdown was a ploy intended to encourage people to get the vaccine.


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6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




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6(a), 6(c)




There are future anti-vaccine protests planned for February 20<sup>th</sup>, in coordination with similar Millions March Against Mandatory Vaccines (MMAMV) protests planned in multiple locations around Australia. 6(a), 6(c)




### International anti-vax content


As with other conspiracy theories, a significant amount of anti-vax content washing into New Zealand conspiracy conversations originates from international sources. 6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



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## ISD ETHNOGRAPHIC BRIEFING

# TWO YEARS ON: UNDERSTANDING THE RESONANCE OF THE CHRISTCHURCH ATTACK AMONG ONLINE EXTREMISTS

*Content warning: Contains explicit content and direct references to the Christchurch attack*

### Introduction

In the two years since the Christchurch attack, the terrorist and his actions have become a part of the common cultural context shared by extremist communities across various platforms frequented by the digital far-right. While opinions of the attacker differ in these spaces, his actions remain a topic of regular discussion and debate within these communities.

In the weeks leading up to March 15<sup>th</sup>, two years on from the Christchurch attack, ISD researchers 6(a), 6(c) New Zealand extremists across social media platforms to investigate and document the discourse around the Christchurch attack and its enduring legacy across the online extremist ecosystem across varied platforms.

In the following briefing, we detail the level of discussion about the attack around March 15<sup>th</sup>, and provide a snapshot of the narratives that were most prominent across different platforms. 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

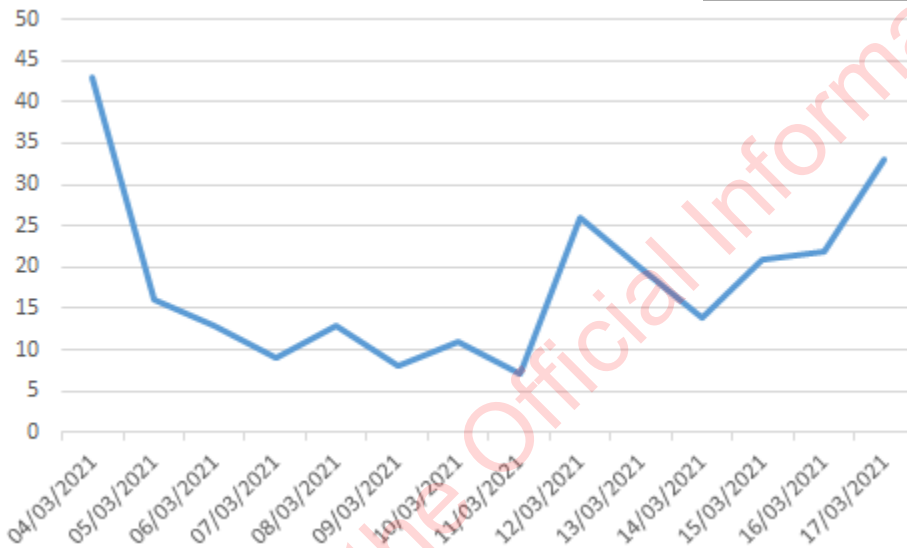
We find that both in terms of volume and nature of the content, 6(a), 6(c) saw a more dramatic rise in posts on March 15<sup>th</sup>, as well as hosting the more egregious pro-terrorist content. Despite the technological and legal actions taken by policymakers and tech platforms to limit the spread of the Christchurch attacker’s propaganda materials, the manifesto as well as the livestream, both in full and in edited versions, continue to be easily accessible on 6(a), 6(c)

Much of this online discussion was driven from international extremists, with limited evidence of New Zealanders engaging substantively in extremist discussion around Christchurch. However, 6(a), 6(c), we saw New Zealanders engaged in the proliferation of conspiracy narratives around the attacker, including accusations that the attack was a ‘false flag’ operation, or was being instrumentalised for political purposes.

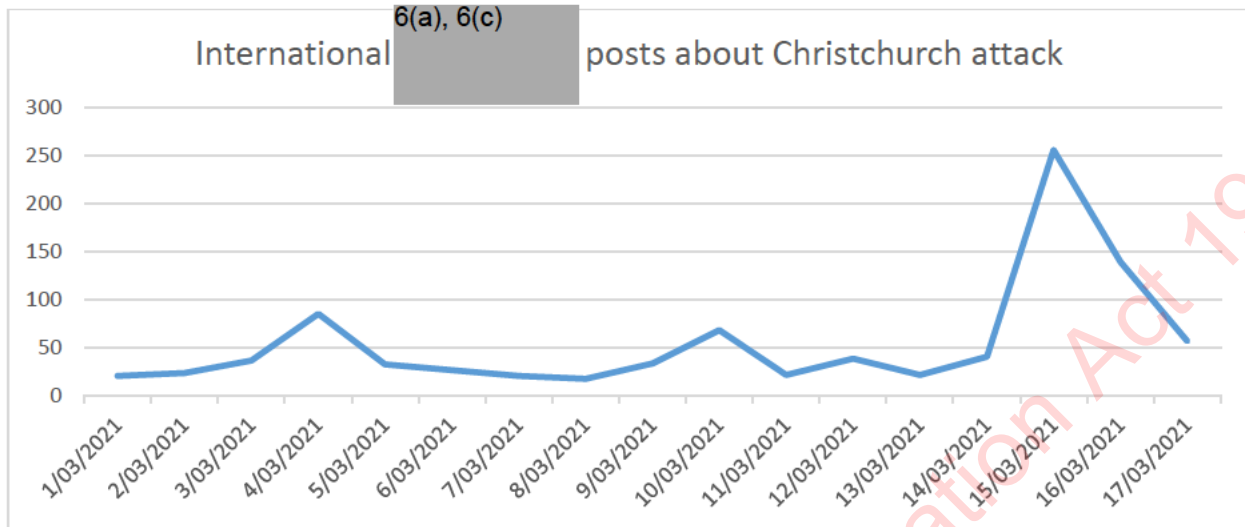
## LEVEL OF DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this research ISD researchers 6(c) . 6(a), 6(c) New Zealand extremists across platforms shows a slight increase in discussion around the attack during the week of March 15th when compared to the previous, notably there was considerably more Christchurch-linked conversation by New Zealand extremists around the 4th March arrest of two individuals for threats on 6(a), 6(c) against the Al Noor mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre (see below), than on March 15th itself.

### New Zealand Extremist Mentions of Christchurch 6(c)



However, international data 6(a), 6(c) paints a different picture, where we can see a notable spike in the number of Christchurch-related posts on March 15<sup>th</sup>, rising from a consistent hum of references, which have become endemic on the imageboard.



## THEMES OF DISCUSSION

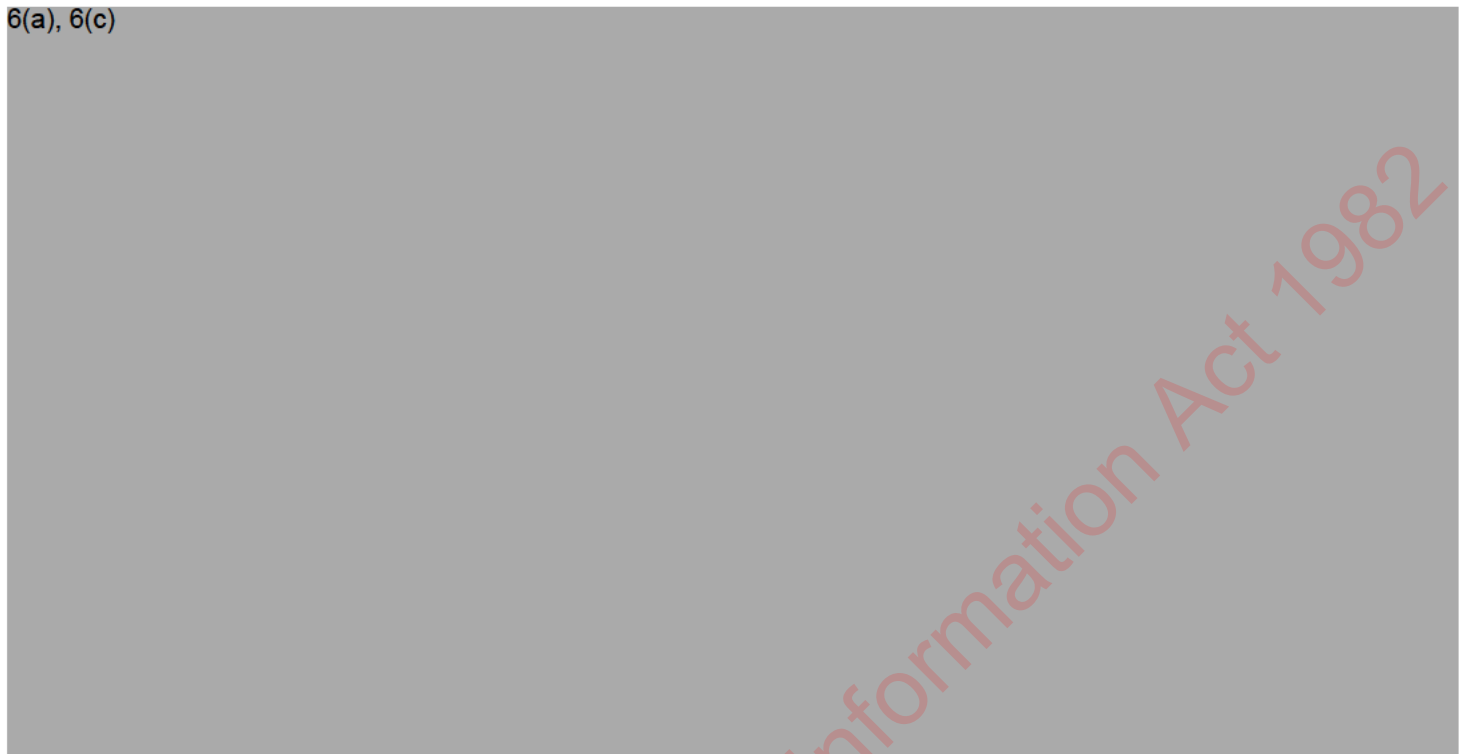
6(a), 6(c)

As mentioned above, references to Brenton Tarrant (named throughout this section due to the nature and predominance of discussion around him as a figure) and the Christchurch attack have become endemic 6(a), 6(c).

Notably, the treatment of Tarrant appears to differ in significant respects from how other mass shooters have been incorporated into the cultural context of the 6(a), 6(c) both in the frequency and type of representation. For example, while Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant are both sometimes referred to as 'Saints', Breivik is generally visually represented in ways which present him as intimidating. Representations of Tarrant, on the other hand, traverse a much broader spectrum from intimidating to ironically cartoonish representations. Representations of Tarrant are also significantly more frequent than those of Breivik or other mass shooters on most 6(a), 6(c).

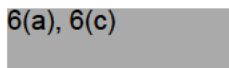
Memes, gifs, cartoons and other references to Tarrant and his attack in Christchurch are scattered through unrelated threads with no explanatory context, in a somewhat similar way that other cultural reference points and characters such as Honkler are used (see below). In other words, Tarrant has become a normalised part of both the visual language and the daily conversations of communities on 6(a), 6(c).

6(a), 6(c)



With this background in mind, the following section details the types of conversations of far-right actors 6(a), 6(c) two years on from the Christchurch attack, including the materials and memes created for this 'anniversary' (in the minds of online extremists).

6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



In discussions around the Christchurch attack two years on, ISD's analysis found three main themes present to varying degrees 6(a), 6(c) :

- Pro-Tarrant expressions
- Anti-Tarrant expressions
- False flag allegations

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

Research on comments from 6(a), 6(c) revealed that 48% of posts were explicitly pro-Tarrant, 14% were anti-Tarrant, 10% perpetuated conspiracy theories that the attack was a false flag or an operation by Mossad or the CIA, whilst 28% were miscellaneous comments, largely geared towards 'shitposting' around the attack. Multiple threads about Christchurch have been started on 6(a), 6(c) over the week leading up to March 15<sup>th</sup>. This was partially because of the emerging news of an arrest of a 6(a), 6(c) poster for making threats to the Al Noor mosque. The reaction thread contained a mix of responses, from support of the person's alleged plans to condemning violence against civilians to conspiracy theories about him being a 'glowie' (a law enforcement agent). However, the predominant response appeared to be suspicion and reminders to posters to be careful about what they post publicly.

6(a), 6(c)

In the run up to March 16<sup>th</sup> a number of threads were started ranging from discussions around the conspiracy theory that the Christchurch attacker was working with Mossad and the CIA to suggestions that the fact there have allegedly been 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

In general, March 15<sup>th</sup> itself was treated as an opportunity for reflection on the consequences and impacts of the attack. Analysts identified around a dozen 6(a), 6(c) threads dedicated to discussion of the Christchurch attacker, ranging from open discussions around the effect of the attack on the far right cause 6(a), 6(c)

Others openly lionised and celebrated the occasion, including international extremists 6(a), 6(c). One thread even focused on unpacking the findings of the Royal Commission report, seeking to understand the attacker's motivations.



6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c) where self-identifying New Zealanders were present. These constituted a small minority (5% of 6(a), 6(c) comments), with discussion very obviously led by international extremists. Comments from New Zealanders included complaints about takedowns of the video within New Zealand's jurisdiction, as well as one notable pushback on fellow 6(a), 6(c) celebrating of Tarrant: 6(a), 6(c)

95% of commenters 6(a), 6(c) were from outside New Zealand, with discussion dominated by self-identifying American, Australian, British, Canadian and German 6(a), 6(c). This international bias was also borne out in the timings of comments and threads across these 6(a), 6(c), with discussion about Christchurch really picking up after the end of March 15<sup>th</sup> New Zealand time, during the day time of March 15<sup>th</sup> in Europe and North America.

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c) is the successor of the notorious 6(a), 6(c) where Brenton Tarrant uploaded his manifesto and the link to the Facebook-livestream immediately before the March 15<sup>th</sup> attacks.

6(a), 6(c) comments related to the Christchurch attack around March 15<sup>th</sup> revealed that 24% of posts were pro-Tarrant, 28% were opposed to Tarrant for various reasons, 28% referred to the false flag conspiracy theory that the attack was directed by Mossad and 20% were miscellaneous comments or jokes about the attack that did not take a clear position either way.

6(a), 6(c)

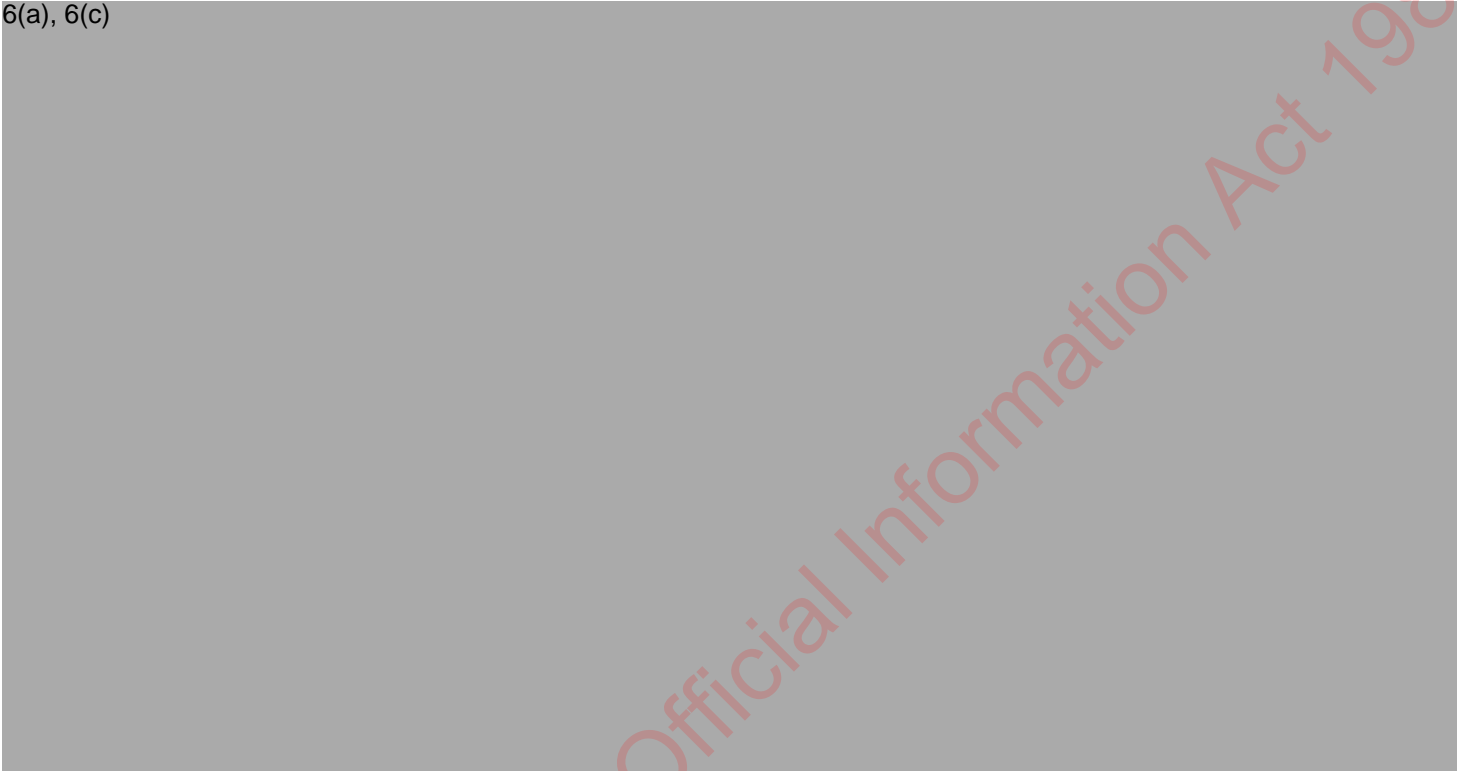
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6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




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6(c), 6(a)




6(a), 6(c)



Some individuals are also continuing to invest significant time and effort into creating new content relating to Tarrant 6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



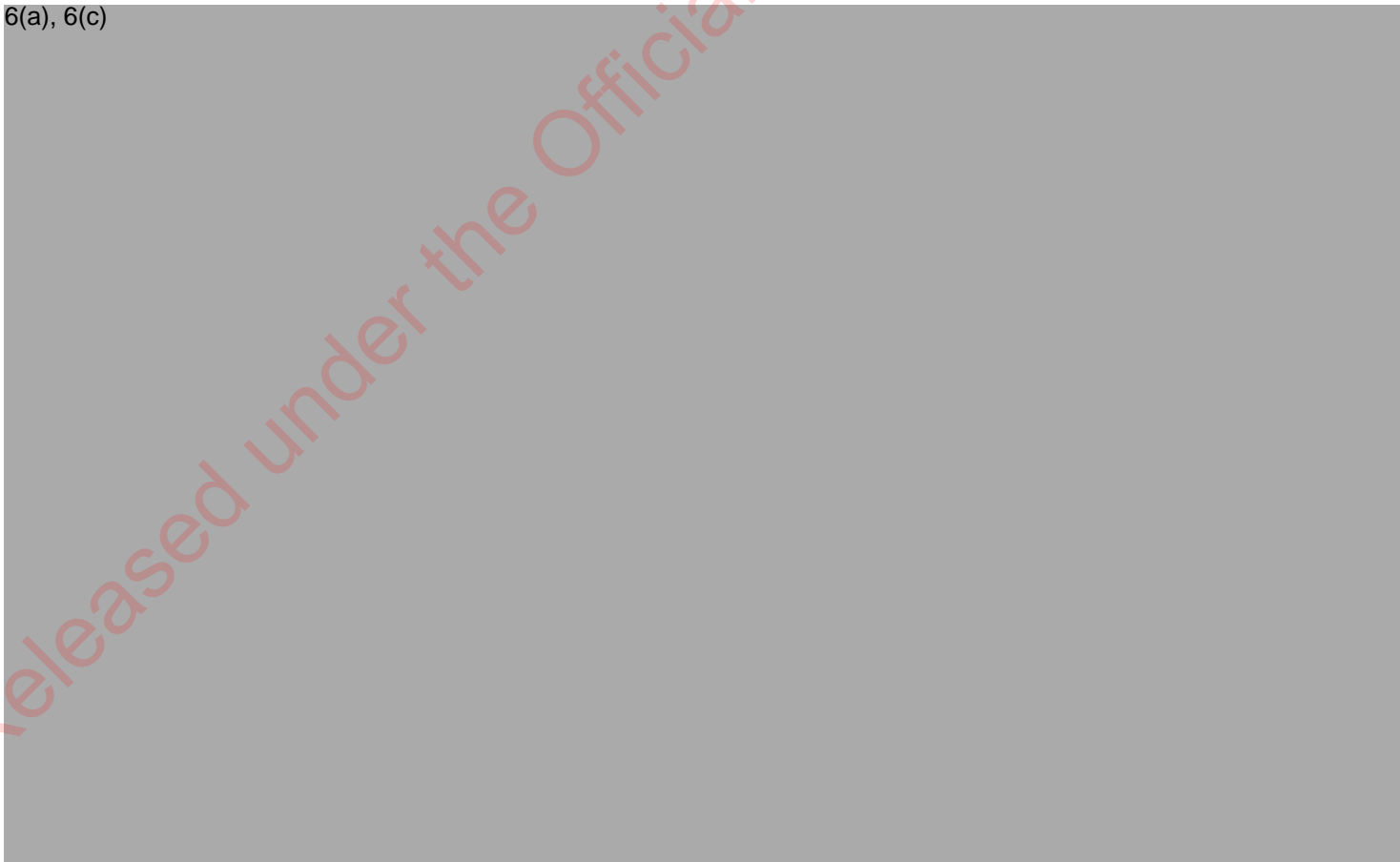
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6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




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6(a), 6(c)



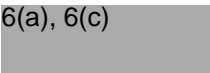
6(c), 6(a)



6(c), 6(a)



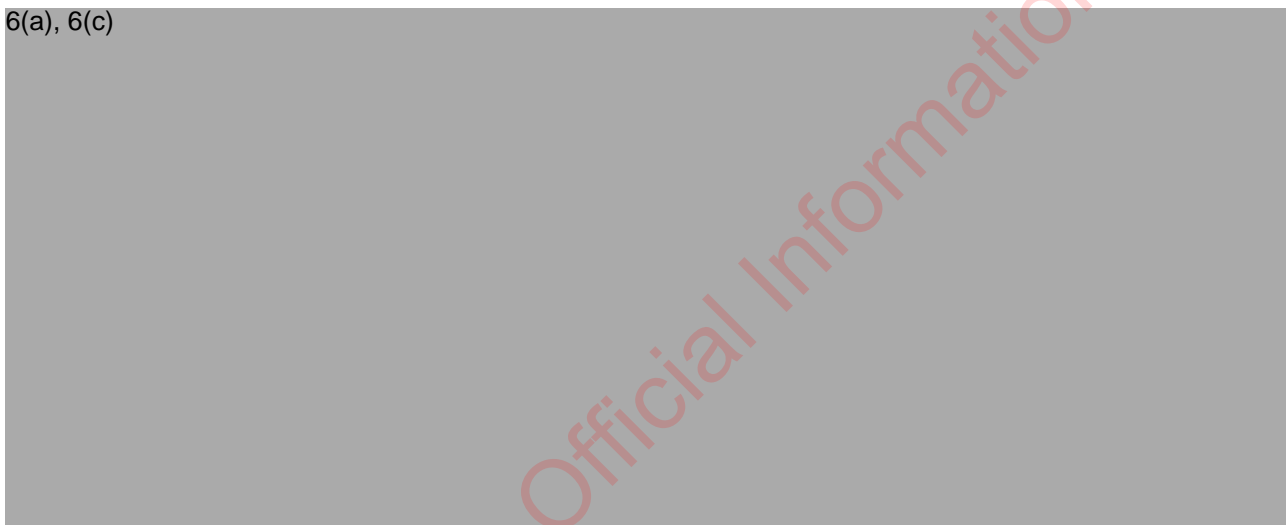
6(a), 6(c)



Previous ISD research has documented that Brenton Tarrant has not just come to be perceived as a hero or “Saint” on 6(a), 6(c) where he posted his manifesto and the link to the livestream of his attack, but also among white supremacist and pro-terrorist communities 6(a), 6(c).

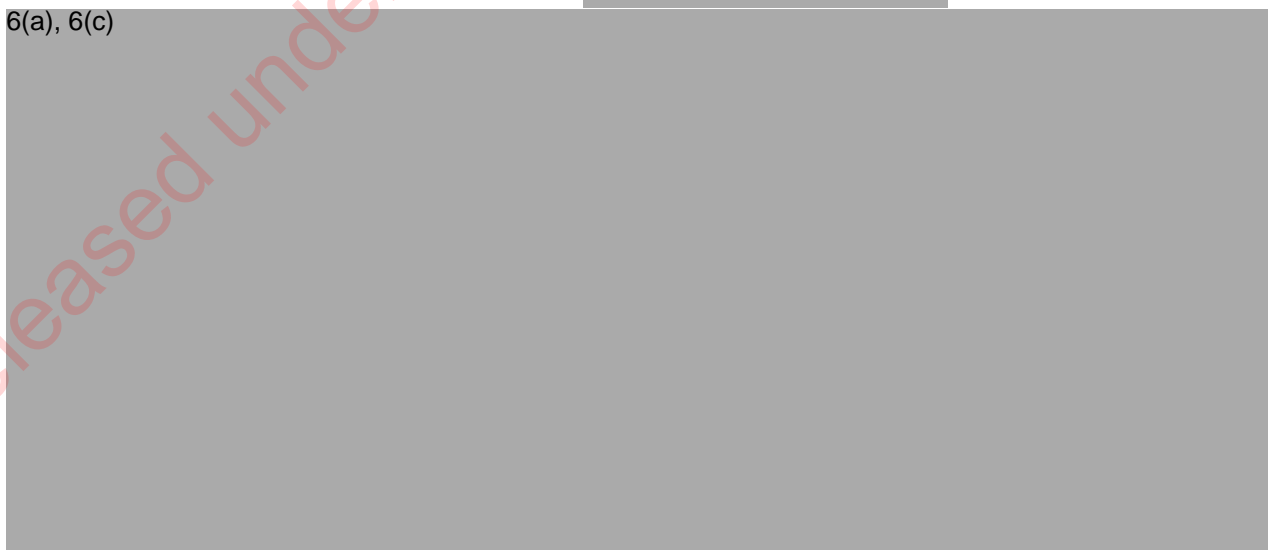
6(a), 6(c) international white supremacist channels unapologetically celebrated the second ‘anniversary’ of the March 15<sup>th</sup> attacks by sharing imagery supportive of Brenton Tarrant and his actions. This pro-Tarrant content came mostly in the form of images depicting Tarrant and his actions, with a smaller number of videos and music-clips making similar points.

6(a), 6(c)



Common elements found in the imagery celebrating Tarrant were quotes from his manifesto, with some implicitly urging followers to take action 6(c), 6(a) as well as others that drew from the online-subculture references from his manifesto 6(c), 6(a).

6(a), 6(c)



ISD also identified images mocking the victims or celebrating the high number of people that were killed in the Christchurch attacks. In some cases, white supremacist 6(a), 6(c) also packaged their support for Tarrant into a more humorous form: 6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c) ISD also identified more limited discussion about the Christchurch attack among New Zealand extremists 6(a), 6(c)


[Redacted]

While we did not identify outright support for the Christchurch attacker's actions, there were two prominent narratives among the far-right and conspiracy theorists on mainstream platforms: first, claims were repeated that the Christchurch attacks had been a false flag operation. Second, criticism of what is perceived as an instrumentalisation of the attack for political and propagandistic purposes.

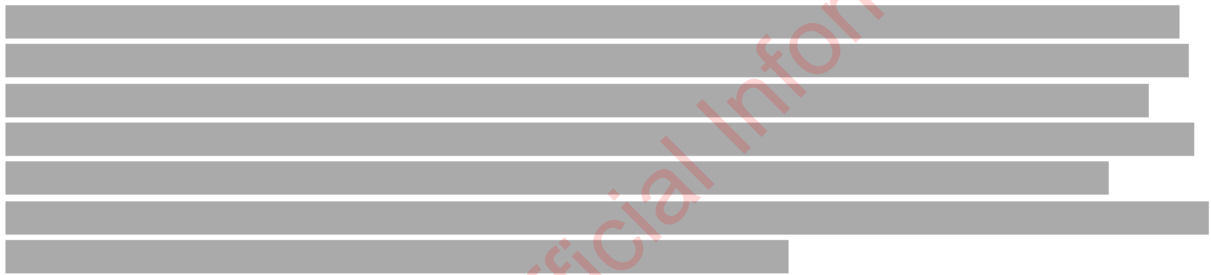
6(a), 6(c), the conspiracy theorist 6(a), 6(c) argued that the Christchurch attack had been a false flag attack, potentially orchestrated in order to tighten gun laws in New Zealand.

6(a), 6(c)


6(a), 6(c)



On the far-right, we identified content that argued that the Christchurch attack is being instrumentalised to advance a political agenda. 6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)





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6(a), 6(c)

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## GENDER IN THE NEW ZEALAND ONLINE EXTREMIST ECOSYSTEM

Gender and sexuality are influential in shaping the online extremist ecosystem in New Zealand. This briefing analyses several important communities and dynamics in relation to these factors. While this is by no means a comprehensive analysis of the role of gender within New Zealand extremism online, our findings show that dynamics of gender and sexuality operate in a broadly similar way in New Zealand's online extremist communities as they do in other similar communities internationally.

This reflects the wider trend observed throughout this briefing series in which narratives, ideologies and content flows from the international sphere, in particular the US, into New Zealand communities where it is adapted to the local context.

This briefing covers the following areas in which gender shapes the online-ecosystem of extremism in New Zealand:

- The way in which both far-right communities and conspiracy theorists portray feminism and LGBT rights as a malign plot aimed at undermining traditional gender norms and family structures.
- While we did not identify a New Zealand focussed Incel-community online, we examine several **6(a), 6(c)**  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
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- We examine gendered attacks by New Zealand extremists on high-profile individuals in New Zealand, such as Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. While attacks on politicians that extremists dislike are the norm, attacks on female politicians are often centred around gender-based stereotypes. At the same time, we found examples of gendered attacks against males that are portrayed as not conforming to traditional norms of masculinity and thereby supposedly pose a threat to the nation.
- Lastly, this briefing analyses the role that gender norms play within anti-vax and anti-lockdown conspiracy theorists in New Zealand. We find that discourse around motherhood is used to question the lockdown and vaccination programs.

### Feminism, LGBT rights as a plot aimed at the destruction of the family

In a column for The Atlantic, the British journalist and writer Helen Lewis pointed to the key role that opposition to female emancipation played within the thinking of the Christchurch attacker specifically, and the wider ethnonationalist movement in general. Lewis argued that:

*“The idea that feminism is decadent, and is destroying Western civilization; the idea that women’s natural role is to have children, and to be subservient to men; the idea*

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*that strong men are needed to save the world through violence—all of these arguments are found across extremist websites, and in the words of shooters themselves. Anti-feminist rhetoric is a powerful gateway to violent white nationalism, and it is calculated to appeal to the demographic overwhelmingly responsible for mass shootings: young white men... In all these strands of replacement theory, controlling white female sexuality and reproduction is vital. Women’s sexual and reproductive freedom are seen as threats to civilization itself.”<sup>1</sup>*

The depiction of feminism, but also sexual liberalisation more broadly, as a threat to the nation or the ethnic in-group is commonplace among New Zealand extremists. One of the interesting areas of overlap between far-right and conspiracy communities appears to be around the idea of the destruction of the traditional family through ‘gender ideologies’ such as feminism, LGBT rights and in particular transgender rights.

The following sections outline the discourse among these communities about the perceived threat that feminism and LGBT rights pose to traditional gender norms and the family.

**Far-Right**

Within the New Zealand far right, a rigidly binary conception of gender roles underpins the vision for society 6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted]

The broad takeaway from the discussion was that feminism is a capitalist trap designed to trick women into working outside the home as 6(a), 6(c) and that the welfare state is an effort to supplant the role of the father and accelerate the destruction of the family.

The discussion of gender roles concluded that femininity is about love, obedience and service to the husband within a traditional family unit, while masculinity includes both physical and moral elements. Men, 6(a), 6(c) need to be physically strong but also fiercely independent and proactive, should provide for their family, should embody various virtues like honesty and courage, and should live their life around virtues such as self-respect and self-discipline. It is notable that they spend more time discussing the meaning and purpose of masculinity than they spend on femininity.

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)


6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)


### Conspiracy theory communities

This idea of the destruction of the family as a result of shifting gender roles also arises in New Zealand conspiracy circles, in particular in connection with transphobia. This coincides with and is likely to be linked to a broader anti-trans wave throughout the international far-right and but also within some more mainstream right-wing audiences.<sup>iii</sup>


6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



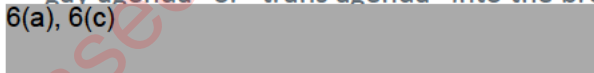
6(a), 6(c)




**It is worth noting that conspiracy communities tend to have significantly more active female members and in many cases female leaders and influencers, making overtly sexist or misogynistic narratives less common than in far-right circles. However, homophobia and transphobia are notably present in a number of ways.**

Often this appears to be in the form of wrapping LGBT issues, sometimes described as the “gay agenda” or “trans agenda” into the broader pantheon of conspiracy villainy alongside


6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)

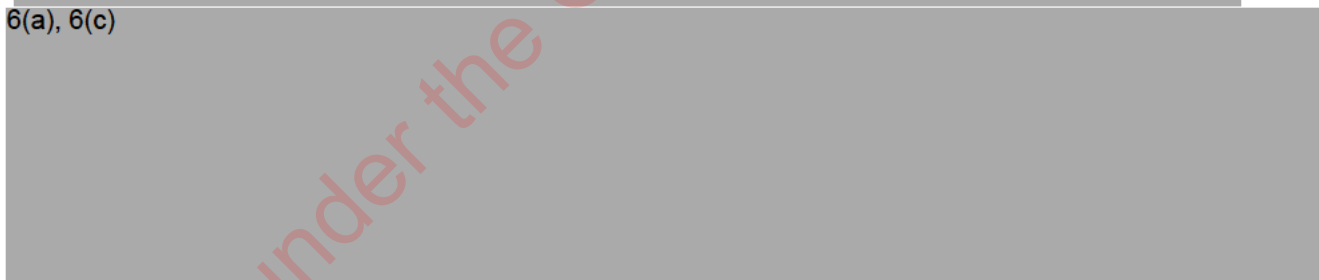


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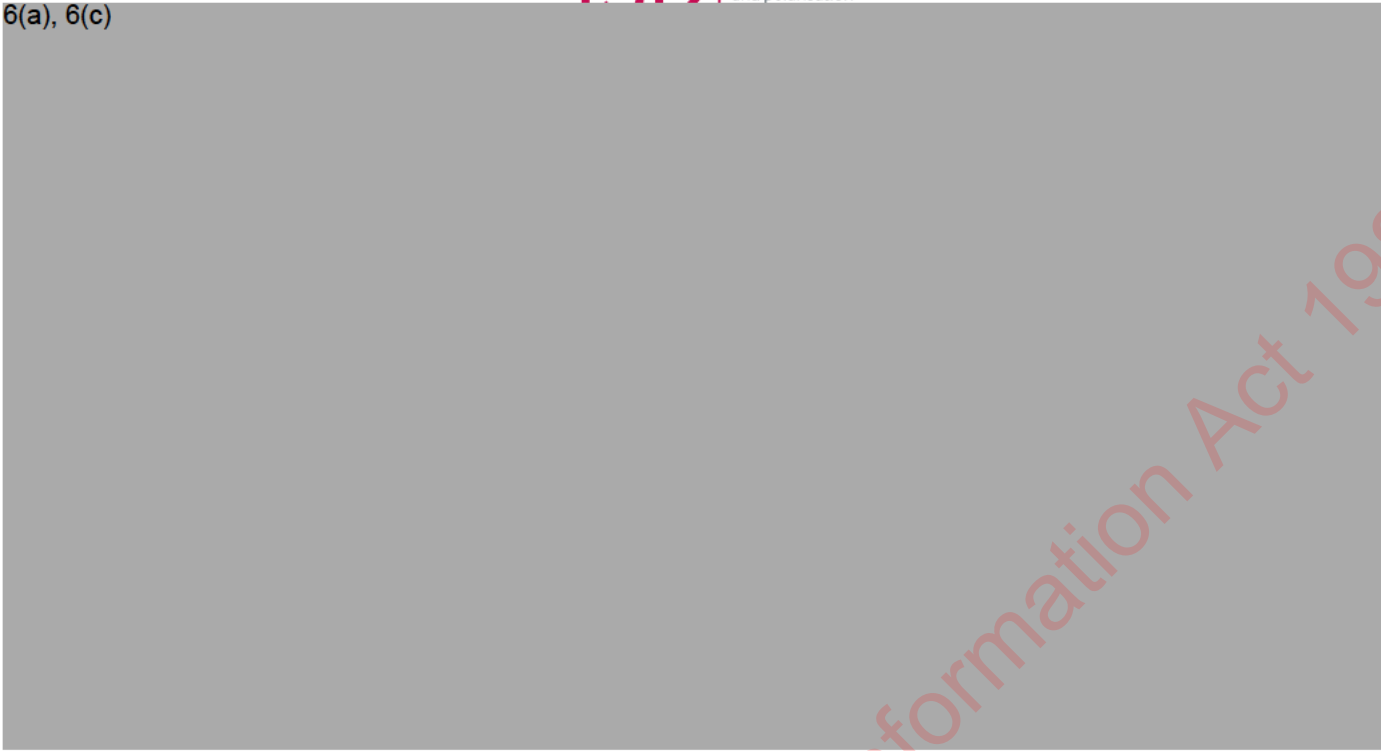
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6(a), 6(c)



**Incels**, 6(a), 6(c)



Over the past decade, we have seen the rise of the so-called 'Manosphere', a loose collection of overlapping online subcultures broadly concerned with supporting men, 'men's rights' and masculinity, which has grown increasingly misogynistic and hostile towards feminism. The 'Gamergate' controversy in 2014, during which the harassment of female video game journalists was organised 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c) became a significant rallying point for these sub-cultures. 'Gamergate' also resulted in an increasing proximity between the 'Manosphere' and the white nationalist 'Alt-Right'. So called 'incels' (involuntary celibates),

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6(a), 6(c) ) are some of the most prominent sub-groups within the 'Manosphere'. Incels in particular have received public attention following several attacks and murders committed by individuals who were affiliated with specific Incel communities online, or had expressed views in line with those of the 'Incel' subculture.

ISD's 2020 situation analysis on the New Zealand online extremism landscape notably did not discover cohesive New Zealand communities related to extremism-adjacent phenomena such as the Incel movement that were dedicated to New Zealand, although evidence of misogynistic narratives was present in the data.

This finding was borne out in further investigation for this briefing. We did not find evidence of significant New Zealand-focused communities of extreme misogynists, such as Incels, although of course there may be individual New Zealanders who participate or identify with the Incel sub-culture. **Our analysis identified few active online environments for New Zealand Incels, with one known Incel platform 6(a), 6(c) which was notable inactive, with one user posting new articles in the last 2 months and no comments on most of these threads.**

It is worth noting that internationally there appear to be fewer Incel communities in general which are currently active, as they are increasingly being deplatformed from mainstream social media and 6(a), 6(c)

Exploring the wider 'Manosphere', 6(a), 6(c) analysts found a constellation of Facebook groups which would likely not cross the threshold of extremism used to guide our research, but whose narratives are nonetheless relevant to - and cross-over with - far-right talking points.


These include pages associated with 6(a), 6(c). However, these on the whole had a marginal following and low levels of activity and engagement.

6(a), 6(c)






6(a), 6(c)



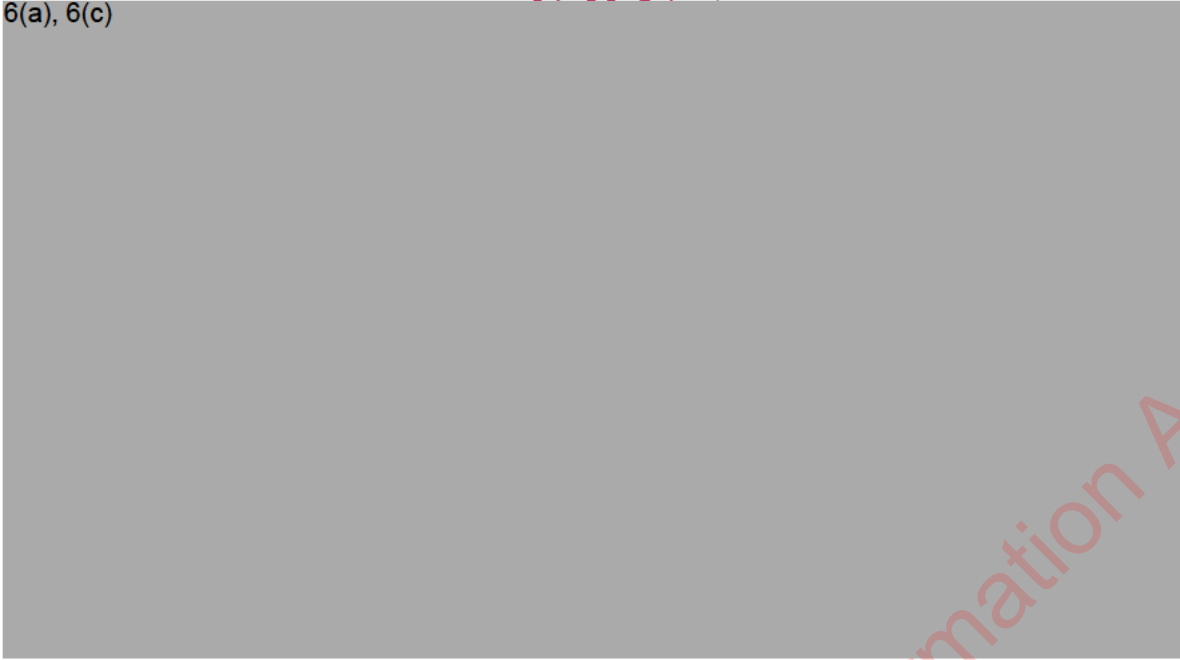
6(a), 6(c)



### **Gendered attacks on high-profile individuals by New Zealand extremists**


High-profile politicians, especially when they are perceived to be liberal or supportive of immigration, are a frequent target for the far-right online. In previous research, ISD had identified this pattern in Canada, where anti-Trudeau rhetoric was found to be one of the key themes among the far-right. In Germany, chancellor Merkel and others supportive of her 2015 refugee policies are often attacked online, and in some instances in the offline world. In 2019, a far-right extremist shot dead Walter Lübcke, a conservative politician from Hesse who had been viciously attacked online after voicing support for accepting refugees at a town-hall meeting in 2015. Similar patterns can be found in New Zealand, where attacks and derogatory references to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern were one of the key themes identified in ISD's earlier overview assessment of online extremism.

6(a), 6(c)



The fact that Ardern is female frequently results in a gendered framing of the attacks directed at her by extremists online. During the research for this briefing, ISD identified a notable amount of content relating to Ardern on 6(a), 6(c) based around the conspiracy theory that she is secretly transgender, or a man.

6(a), 6(c)



This is similar to the conspiracy theory that Michelle Obama is secretly a man, which are prominent among certain US far-right and conspiracy communities online. The belief that high profile women are secretly men obviously has multiple gendered dimensions, and also links into the broader transphobic movement discussed above. It should be noted that at times it is difficult to tell in some cases how serious the posters are about such claims.

6(a), 6(c)



Gendered attacks can also be levelled against men that are viewed as not conforming to the norms of masculinity supported by extremists. 6(a), 6(c)

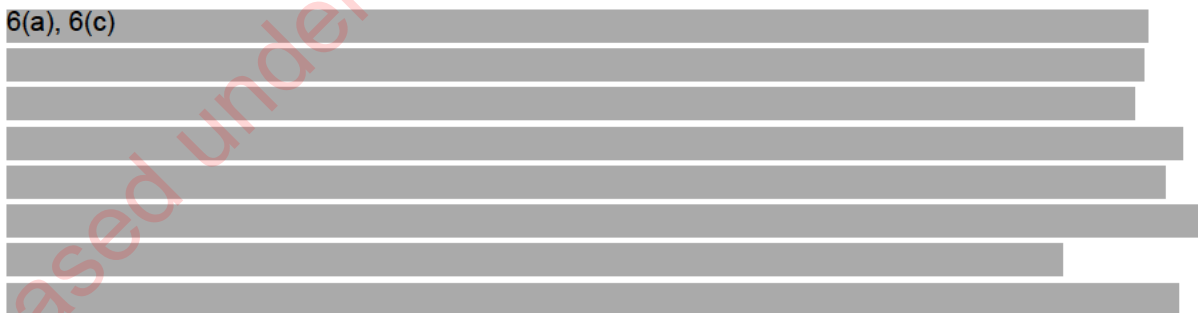


The rhetoric suggesting that certain males 6(a), 6(c) but is part of a wider discourse around the societal function of the supposed emasculation of men through non-traditional gender roles.

6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



Here we see how the concerns around traditional norms of masculinity are connected to anti-immigration sentiments as well as opposition to the perceived censorship of political speech.

## Gendered anti-vax and anti-lockdown movements

As has been documented internationally, conspiracy theories such as QAnon do not only have a significant number of influencers and interpreters that are female, but the messaging itself is often gendered to target specific audiences.<sup>xi</sup> During our research, ISD found that female anti-lockdown groups that are connected to wider conspiracy theorist space online are present in the New Zealand context as well.

An interesting example of gender dynamics within New Zealand’s anti-lockdown and anti vax movement is [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

[redacted] draws on the language of motherhood and a mother's love as motivating them to question the lockdown and vaccination programs, [redacted]

[redacted]


[redacted] appears to have links to the QAnon offshoot movements Save The Children and/or ‘pastel QAnon.’<sup>xii</sup> [redacted], members of the group have dropped sinister references to [redacted]

[redacted]<sup>xiv</sup> [redacted] the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory [redacted], calling it “thought-provoking.” [redacted]


[redacted] referencing child trafficking (a key component of the QAnon and Save the Children conspiracy theories) [redacted]

[redacted] They have also posted about the Great Reset and other conspiracy theories.




6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




While women play a more active and prominent role in the conspiracy community in comparison to far-right circles, they are still experiencing a level of sexism and having their efforts belittled. 6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



As with other aspects of this briefing, 6(a), 6(c) largely in line with the gendered dynamics we have seen in other places around the world linked to the fusing of QAnon, Save The Children and anti-vax/anti-lockdown/Covid-skeptic movements. It draws on the language of 6(a), 6(c) to present “just asking questions” as defending the rights of children now and in the future.<sup>xv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/08/anti-feminism-gateway-far-right/595642/>  
6(a), 6(c)

<sup>iii</sup> See for example Krishnakumar, Priya, 'This record-breaking year for anti-transgender legislation would affect minors the most', CNN, 15 April 2021. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/15/politics/anti-transgender-legislation-2021/index.html>

6(a), 6(c)

<sup>xi</sup> Argentino, Marc-André and Blyth Crawford. 'The WQmen of QAnon.' GNET, 12 March 2021. <https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/12/the-wqmen-of-qanon/>

6(a), 6(c)

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/08/how-instagram-aesthetics-repackage-qanon/615364/>

6(a), 6(c)



## ISD BRIEFING: QANON IN NEW ZEALAND

QAnon is a baseless conspiracy theory that originated on the imageboard site 4chan in October 2017. The QAnon movement claims that a secret cabal of liberal globalist paedophile elites has been abducting and abusing children to harvest a rejuvenation drug called adrenochrome. QAnon builds on the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory, which claimed leaked emails from Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager John Podesta contained coded references to a child trafficking ring operating out of the basement of a pizza restaurant in Washington DC.

Followers of the conspiracy believe that a White House insider who self-describes himself as “Q” (a high-level security level clearance within U.S. government) publishes classified government information online. Q’s followers attempt to decipher his purposefully cryptic messages, even though the predictions have generally turned out to be inaccurate.

In 2019, the FBI listed the fringe conspiracy community QAnon as a [domestic terror threat](#), demonstrating the grey area that exists between this conspiracy theory and violent extremism.

While QAnon is based around people, events and institutions related to American politics and culture, research has shown that QAnon also gained a major following internationally, including in New Zealand. The following briefing summarises the way QAnon has manifested itself within the online extremist ecosystem in New Zealand, covering the following areas:

- The rise of QAnon in New Zealand in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which we saw localised applications of international QAnon conspiracy narratives, incorporating local politics and domestic causes, as well as merging with other widespread conspiracy theories about COVID-19 and 5G towers, both online and during offline protests.
- The overall size of QAnon in New Zealand. ISD research in 2020 found that in terms of the size of its QAnon community, New Zealand came 11th when ranking countries by the absolute numbers of tweets sent about QAnon, but second when looking at tweets per capita, only surpassed by the US.
- The evolution of QAnon in New Zealand over the course of 2021 thus far, where we are seeing a gradual dilution of ‘pure’ QAnon communities into a more fragmented conspiracy scene in which QAnon content and narratives circulate alongside a host of other conspiracy theories. This is driven by the removal of QAnon communities by mainstream social media platforms following the storming of the United States Capitol and the apparent disappearance of ‘Q’ themselves.

### Part 1: The growth of QAnon in New Zealand

ISD’s 2020 situation analysis of New Zealand’s online extremist ecosystem explored the rise of the QAnon conspiracy theory in New Zealand, situating this in the context of global trends. Despite QAnon’s focus on American politics, our research showed the meta conspiracy theory also gained traction in New Zealand, including incorporating local politics and domestic causes, as well as merging with other widespread conspiracy theories about COVID-19 and 5G towers.



Discussion of QAnon 6(c), 6(a) among New Zealand extremists during 2020

Our data shows that QAnon's rise was precipitated by the COVID 19 pandemic, as across the world ISD researchers recorded a [doubling of users](#) engaging in discussion of QAnon 6(a), 6(c) during March 2020, with membership of QAnon groups 6(a), 6(c) increasing by 120% during this month. Much of this online community was geared towards conspiratorial discussion and mobilisation around COVID-19.

This trend is borne out in our New Zealand data, where we saw highly localised applications of international QAnon conspiracy narratives, connecting US-focused QAnon themes with local grievances and political opponents. 6(a), 6(c)

ISD's [2020 research](#) on international spread of the QAnon conspiracy theory online mapped the geographical reach of QAnon between October 2017 and June 2020. The analysis found that New Zealand came 11th when ranking countries by the absolute numbers of tweets sent about QAnon (64,000) during the most recent time-period (November 2019 to June 2020).

However, the picture changes when looking at tweets per capita. Here, when compared to other Five Eyes countries New Zealanders sent the second-most QAnon-related tweets per capita in 2020 (1,500 Tweets per 100,000 Internet users), only surpassed by the US (3,000) during the period analysed. This was almost twice as many QAnon-related tweets per capita than in Canada (899) and Australia (885), and about three times as many as in the UK (497).

### Online mobilisation

Among New Zealand extremists, we saw 6(c) of QAnon 6(c) rise throughout 2020. Three peaks are apparent in the data, one between the months of May/June, one in August and a final one in November. The first two peaks appear to coincide with news around COVID-19 infections in New Zealand, while the November peak coincides with the elections in the US. Unsurprisingly, posts from conspiracy theory accounts had the highest incidence of QAnon 6(c), twice that of the overall average.

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c) researchers saw a notable amount of activity from QAnon supporters during renewed lockdown measures in August 2020. 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c), explicitly violent rhetoric 6(a), 6(c)

Notably, Facebook's ban on QAnon introduced in October 2020 did appear to have led to a drop-off in activity on the platform, although New Zealand-based support for the conspiracy was still evident

### Offline impact

Despite representing a primarily online phenomenon in New Zealand, QAnon activity was not just confined to digital mobilisation, with references to the conspiracy theory being regularly spotted at anti-lockdown rallies in particular. Such rallies have attracted not only opponents of government lockdowns but also people calling for a ban of the 1080 poison and referencing QAnon-related conspiracy theories about child trafficking. Conspiracies around COVID-19 merging with discredited theories around 5G even resulted in criminal activities in New Zealand, including at least 14 arson attacks on 5G infrastructure across a span of six weeks.

During 2021, the global roll out of vaccines saw QAnon-inspired conspiracy theories continue to morph and develop, as proponents sought to take advantage of the uncertainty around the vaccine to spread distrust and polarisation. QAnon conspiracies in particular sought to manipulate high levels of anxiety around the virus with a rich pool of [pre-existing conspiracies around vaccines](#) to create a hybrid threat, with serious implications for public health, community cohesion and even public safety.

6(a), 6(c)

The QAnon phenomenon has seen a close relationship develop between online activity and offline mobilisation. 6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

This reflects two dynamics. One is the way in which QAnon is now woven into a much broader tapestry of conspiratorial beliefs, in which individuals can pick and choose which threads to pull. **This also demonstrates, however, a tendency within the media to label every case of conspiratorial beliefs as QAnon, even if identifiably QAnon content makes up only a fairly small proportion of the overall picture.** 'QAnon' is a label which is increasingly familiar to journalists and readers alike, and there may be a temptation to use it as a kind of shorthand for all sorts of conspiratorial thinking. If that is the case, a growth in news articles talking about 'QAnon' may reflect wider trends of conspiratorial thinking without necessarily reflecting a growth in QAnon specifically.

## Part 2: The fragmentation of QAnon

The events of January 6<sup>th</sup>, when pro Trump protesters stormed the US Capitol, were a major turning point for the QAnon movement. QAnon followers, who had been prominently represented during the riot, slowly began to realise that the core prophecies of the movement would not be coming true imminently, with Trump eventually leaving office without uncovering shadowy networks of liberal paedophiles. Cult-like movements such as QAnon can react to such disappointments in multiple ways, from disavowing previously held beliefs over re-interpreting them to blaming malign forces.

Over the course of 2021 thus far, QAnon in New Zealand appears to be evolving in a broadly similar way to what has been seen in other parts of the world: a gradual dilution of 'pure' QAnon communities into a more fragmented conspiracy landscape in which QAnon content and related narratives circulate alongside a host of other conspiracy theories including anti-vax, an alleged "New World Order", Agenda 21 and other conspiratorial beliefs.

There are two main factors which have been contributing to the disintegration of the QAnon community around the world: the crackdown by mainstream social media platforms following the storming of the Capitol in particular, and the apparent disappearance of 'Q' themselves.

New Zealand supporters of QAnon were monitoring the events at the Capitol closely and attempted to integrate them into their ongoing predictions of the QAnon movement. 6(a), 6(c)

[REDACTED]

6(a), 6(c)

The individual or group who posed as 'Q' on 6(a), 6(c) has not posted since 8th December 2020, leaving the movement without its figurehead and source of new conspiracy material, and the community without its raison d'être at the same moment when they have lost many of their main channels for communication and recruitment across Facebook and Twitter. The QAnon community is now scattered across a multitude of smaller platforms, while decontextualised QAnon content continues to wash across mainstream social media platforms in a variety of forms.

In the case of New Zealand conspiracy groups on 6(a), 6(c), much of the overt QAnon content – such as content with direct references to Q or to well-known Q slogans and phrases like WWG1WGA ('Where We Go One, We Go All') or the Great Awakening – seems to have originated internationally and are largely US-focused. Relatively little overt QAnon content appears to be being generated by New Zealand-based individuals or groups directly, although isolated examples exist.

6(a), 6(c)

As in other parts of the world, the **QAnon successor movement Save The Children/Save Our Children** also appears to have gained some traction in New Zealand, 6(a), 6(c)

as motivating them to question the lockdown and vaccination programmes 6(a), 6(c) and appears to have links to the QAnon offshoot movements Save The Children or the 6(a), 6(c). Additionally, 6(a), 6(c) has been involved in organising protests alongside other conspiracy groups 6(a), 6(c)

It does not appear that there is a strong causal link between QAnon and racial tensions in New Zealand conspiracy circles. Rather, the locus of recent racialised discussions and conspiracy narratives appears linked to the [He Puapua report](#) and subsequent controversies about 'Māori separatism'.

While rumours of QAnon's demise are greatly exaggerated, formal adherence to the movement will likely to continue to diminish in New Zealand and around the world. However, going forward it will

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be important for online analysis to stay abreast of how online communities previously associated with the movement continue to morph and evolve, as QAnon narratives become cross-pollinated and mainstreamed within other conspiracy theories with arguably greater traction and deeper roots in New Zealand, such as those surrounding 1080 poison and Agenda 21.

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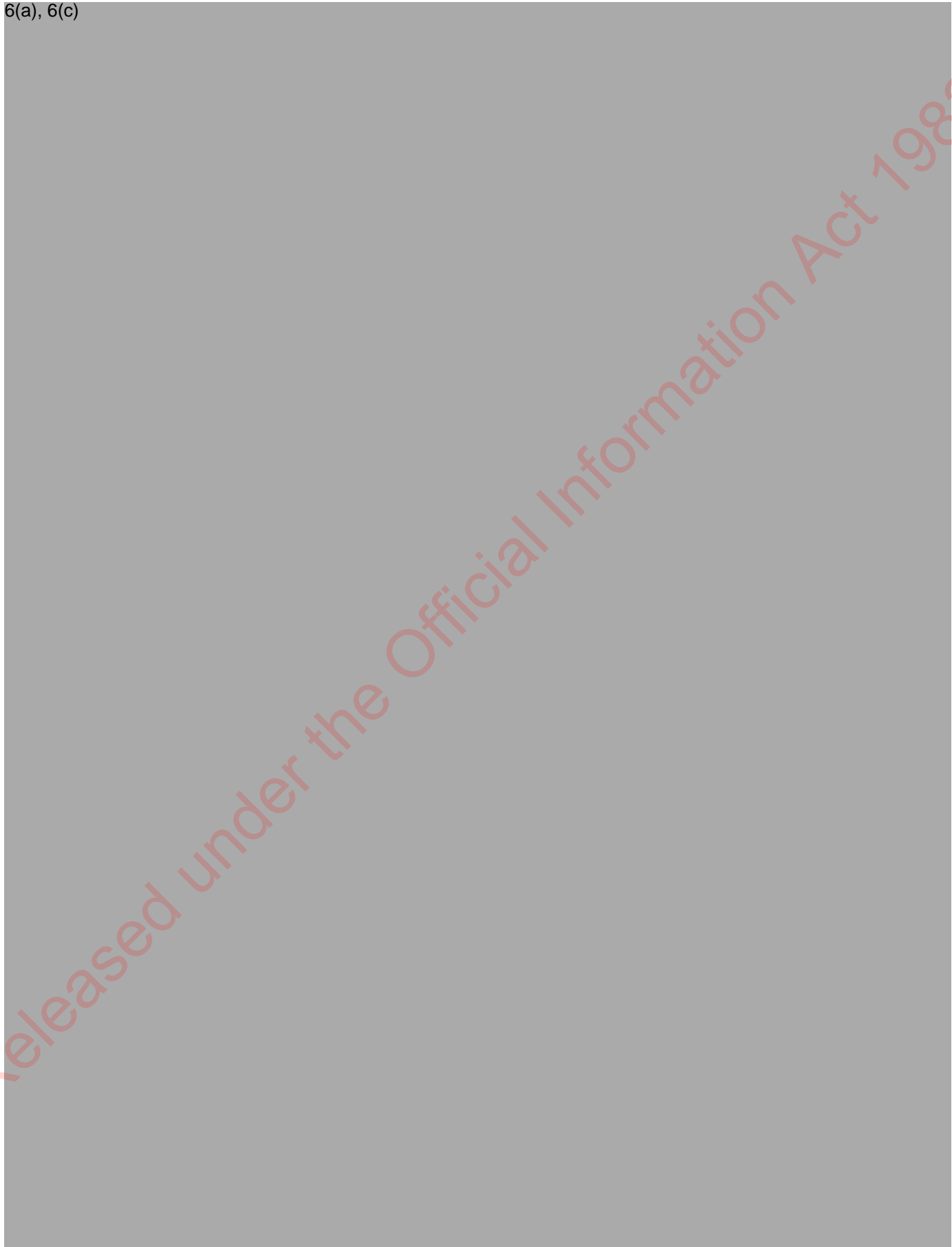
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## ISD BRIEFING: 1080 AND ONLINE EXTREMISM IN NEW ZEALAND

In recent years New Zealand has seen the rise of conspiracy theories, mis- and disinformation, and even abuse and harassment among a hardened core of online activists opposing the use of 1080 poison as a pest control method by the government.

Data from a [recent perceptions study](#) by the New Zealand Classification Office provides an insight into the small minority of New Zealanders who believe that the government's use of 1080 in fact forms part of a malign conspiracy. Survey data showed that 12% of respondents believed that 1080 was an urgent and serious threat to New Zealand society while 3% thought the poison was part of a global agenda to control the human population. Notably, around half of New Zealanders think that groups or organisations are intentionally spreading misinformation about 1080.

In this briefing drawing on ethnographic research and **6(a), 6(c)** on New Zealand online extremism we explore discussion around 1080 among online extremists in New Zealand, laying out the key themes, online constituencies and platforms that see an overlap between extremist and 1080 discussion in New Zealand.

This analysis allows us to assess what overlap – if any – exists between extremists online (most prominently far right and white supremacists) and online activists campaigning against 1080. It also allows us to better understand the ambivalent relationship between anti-1080 mobilisation and a wider set of online conspiracy communities, including anti-vaxx constituencies, anti-5G activists as well as QAnon-associated groups.

The briefing begins by laying out key data findings around how extremists have broached the topic of 1080 in their online discussions, including the trajectory of 1080-related discussion among extremists, **6(a), 6(c)**, and the key themes associated with extremist discussion around 1080. The second section then explores the ambivalent relationship between extremist communities and a much wider pool of non-extremist online activists perpetuating conspiratorial narratives around 1080. It ends by analysing some of the key extremist narratives around 1080, providing examples of salient discussion points around the poison among online extremist communities in New Zealand.

### Data Findings: 1080 and extremism

This briefing **6(a), 6(c)**

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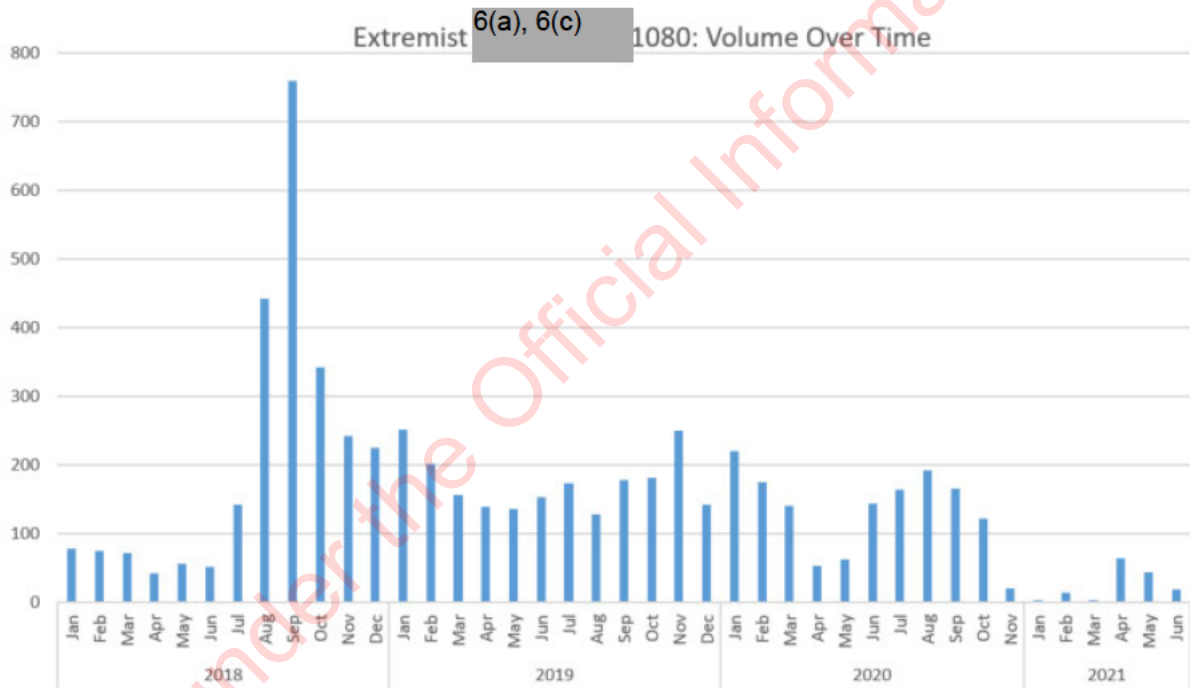
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Notably, our data showed that the vast majority of 1080-related posts came from harmful conspiracy communities, with a considerably smaller number from Far Right extremists and even fewer from the Far Left, with little to no discussion discernible among Islamist extremists. Notably, qualitative analysis showed that Far Left extremists were largely in favour of 1080 as a means of environmental protection. We will dig further into the salient 1080-related narratives propagated by Far Right and harmful conspiracists below.

### 1080 discussion over time

Exploring trends in extremist discussion since 2018, we see that mentions of 1080 start from a relatively low base in the first half of 2018, before escalating rapidly during August and September 2018.




Demonstrating a close connection between online activity and offline mobilisation, this spike notably corresponds with a sharp increase in incidents of threats, harassment and abuse recorded by the Department of Conservation towards staff, key suppliers, contractors during mid-to-late 2018. 6(a), 6(c)

[Redacted text block]


6(a), 6(c)  
[Redacted text block]

6(a), 6(c)




After this surge in 1080 discussion during the second half of 2018, our data shows extremist conversations about 1080 levelling out 6(a), 6(c) during 2019, before declining in relative terms during 2020. **Notably, we have seen relatively little discussion of 1080 by extremists during 2021 compared to recent years, however this likely corresponds with more pronounced social media company deplatforming efforts targeted at prominent New Zealand extremists this year.** These efforts potentially precipitated a general decline in posting activity by extremists across our dataset during this period of analysis, at least across mainstream social media platforms under study.

6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)

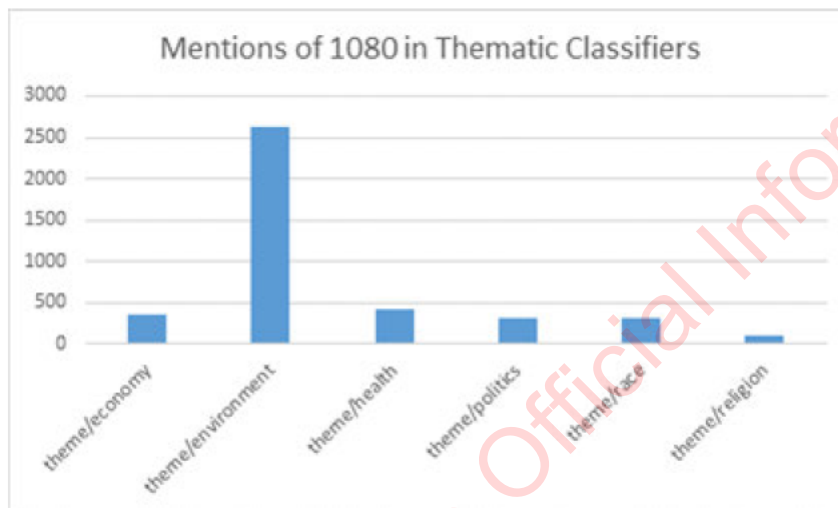


6(a), 6(c)

## Themes

As part of a [situation analysis](#) report on online extremism in New Zealand, 6(a), 6(c)

The most common identifiable topic categories amongst New Zealand extremists were the Economy, Environment, Health, Politics, Race and Religion.



As might be expected, discussion around 1080 was largely associated with discussion of the environment, which was explicitly discernible as a theme in around 40% of total posts that mentioned 1080. Health was the second most commonly associated theme, commanding just under 10 per cent of total discussion around 1080, with the alleged harms of 1080 often discussed alongside conspiracies about the alleged harms of 5G, for example.

Broader conversation around politics and economics as well as race, including racialized discussions about Maori communities and 1080 (example below), commanded a broadly similar share of discussion around 1080, each comprising around 6% of total 1080 discussion. There was relatively little discussion of 1080 in the context of religion. Qualitative analysis of the key narratives within these thematic categories is presented in the final section of this briefing.

## Overlap of extremist and anti-1080 online communities

One of the key findings of our 2020 situation analysis of online extremism in New Zealand was the notable presence of highly localised versions of international extremist trends

emerging in New Zealand. This included localised manifestations of QAnon conspiracies, claiming that cabals of paedophile elites were operating out of New Zealand cities. Meanwhile, our research found highly contextualised polarising topics, such as the 1080 poison, were being embroiled in broader international conspiratorial discussions around 5G towers and other vaccine conspiracies topics.

Analysis of the wider conspiracy ecosystem in New Zealand reveals a movement engaged with a range of internationally salient narratives, most notably around Covid-19, 5G and anti-vaccination conspiracies, but also issues specific to New Zealand, such as calls to ban the 1080 poison, fluoridation, and calls for the country's withdrawal from the United Nations. Our ethnographic research showed considerable cross-over between these communities, 6(a), 6(c)

Our research showed some evidence of people who already follow other conspiracy theories latching on to 1080 narratives and incorporating them into their own conspiratorial beliefs. This is a regular occurrence with conspiracy communities, particularly in the Covid era where we have seen cross-pollination of conspiracy tropes ranging from QAnon to 9/11 trutherism to Flat Eartherism to, in some cases, belief in aliens. It is therefore not surprising that local existing fringe movement would be appropriated to an extent.


However, ISD's research shows, for example, that 1080 appears to be only a fleeting reference point for the QAnon community, bundled in alongside a kaleidoscope of conspiracy theories about topics including fluoride in the water and the New World Order.

6(a), 6(c)


6(a), 6(c)

**But while there is some limited evidence that broader New Zealand conspiracy groups are referencing 1080, we also did not necessarily find the reverse to be true, as anti-1080 activists did not often frame their opposition to the poison in broader conspiratorial terms.** 6(a), 6(c)

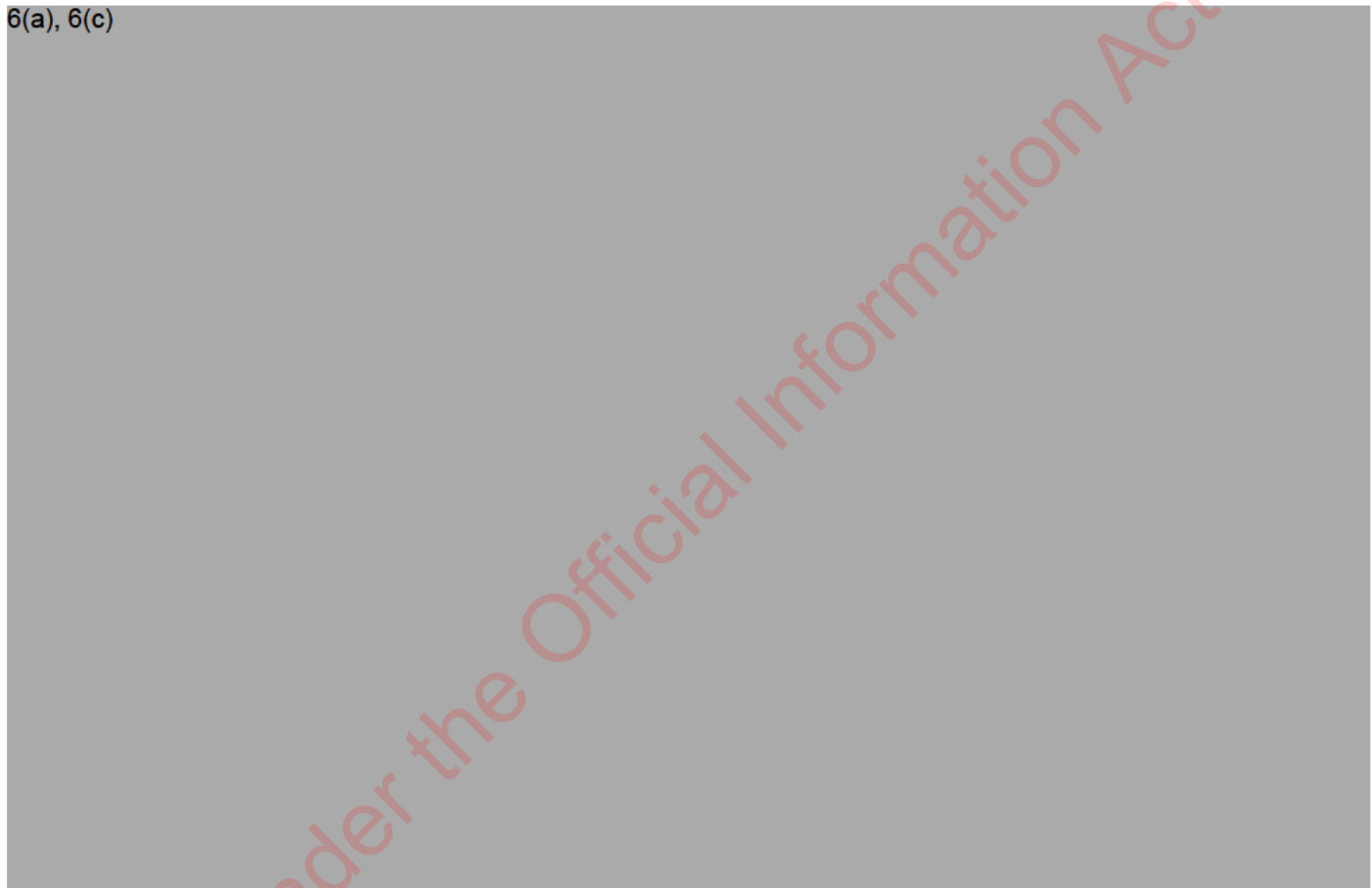
6(a), 6(c)









6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)



But outside of a small number of posts, there appears to be limited large-scale integration of anti-1080 online spaces with conspiracy communities such as QAnon. This supports the findings by the New Zealand Classification Office that only a very small proportion of New Zealanders believe outlandish conspiracy theories about 1080, and that this group are a minority even amongst those who are opposed to or concerned about the use of 1080.

### From online groups to offline protests

However, anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests have brought together strange bedfellows, with rallies in Auckland attracting not only opponents of government lockdowns but also people calling for a ban of the 1080 poison and referencing QAnon-related conspiracy theories about child trafficking.

Our research revealed some anecdotal overlap between extremist and 1080 conspiracy communities being translated offline. 6(a), 6(c)

[REDACTED]

However, despite limited evidence of crossover it is important to avoid 'guilt by association' and assume that attendees at such ideologically diverse events believe everything else that every other person present believes, or indeed that every conspiracy theorist is inherently vulnerable to extremist narratives. Rather we should instead recognise that extremists seek to instrumentalise polarising political topics like 1080 in their attempts to mainstream their supremacist ideologies.

### Key extremist narratives about 1080

As mentioned above, discussion around 1080 constituted less than 1% of New Zealand extremist posts 6(a), 6(c)

[REDACTED]


It is important to remember that this data represents an extremist subset of the broader online discussion relating to 1080, and therefore is not necessarily representative of the views of the majority of people engaging in anti-1080 discussions. While a quantitative breakdown of the most salient sub-themes is outside the scope of this briefing, below we present a qualitative assessment of some of the most prominent themes among extremists.

A considerable proportion of extremist posts about 1080 present the poison as part of a broader meta-conspiracy, contextualising New Zealand specific narratives with existing international conspiracy theories around a shadowy international agenda:

6(a), 6(c)

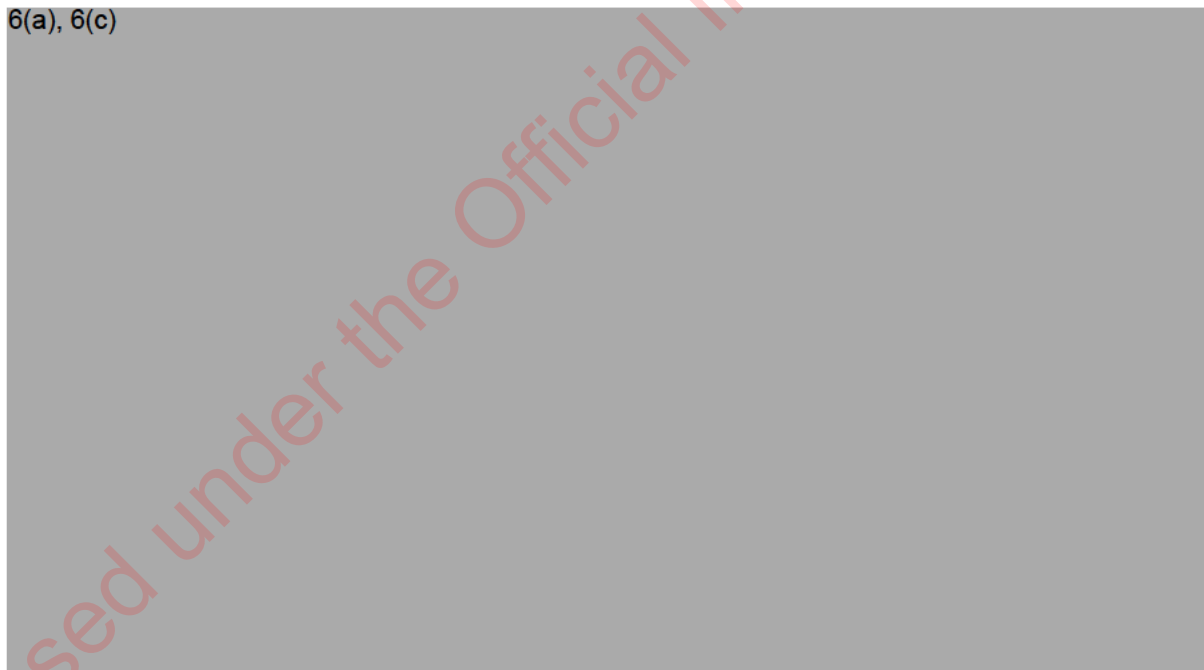
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6(a), 6(c)




A particularly salient trend during 2020 and 2021 has seen anti-1080 narratives become entwined with anti-vaccination conspiracy theories:

6(a), 6(c)




A subset of 1080-related posts from extremists suggest 1080 is part of a government plot to harm or kill the New Zealand population:

6(a), 6(c)






6(a), 6(c)




Some posts present 1080 as a key element of a campaign of mind control by the New Zealand government to control the population, often claiming that the poison is part of a communist takeover of New Zealand:

6(a), 6(c)



Our research also found some more alarming posts around 1080 containing threatening overtones against public figures, 6(a), 6(c) and calls to action within the dataset. Other posts name specific environmental researchers they perceive as culpable for 1080:


6(a), 6(c)



RESTRICTED






6(a), 6(c)




A number of posts in the dataset were in support of the conspiracy-based political agenda

6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)



Finally, one interesting overlap between 1080 and extremism was a suggestion that the poison *itself* constituted a form of terrorism, directed against New Zealand citizens:

6(a), 6(c)



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## ISD BRIEFING: GUN AMNESTY DISCUSSIONS AMONG NEW ZEALAND EXTREMISTS ONLINE

Following the March 2019 Christchurch attack, New Zealand passed legislation banning the purchase of semi-automatic guns and military-style firearms. Additionally, the government introduced a buyback scheme allowing owners of such guns to be financially compensated for turning in their firearms. The initial programme in 2019 saw around 56,000 guns handed in, while a subsequent buyback scheme between 1 February until 1 May 2021 resulted in over a thousand further weapons being turned over.<sup>1</sup> An amnesty ended on 1 Aug 2021, after which anyone with a prohibited firearm will be liable under new offences and penalties outlined in new firearms legislation.<sup>2</sup>

While a number of New Zealanders have expressed vocal opinions against the reform, ISD's situation analysis of online extremism in 2020 found specific discussions around the buyback scheme amongst online extremist communities, including references to gun rights drawing on US right-wing tropes and talking points.

In this briefing drawing on ethnographic research 6(a), 6(c) on New Zealand online extremism we explore discussion about the New Zealand government's gun buyback scheme and surrounding fears about gun confiscation among online extremists in New Zealand, laying out the key themes, 6(a), 6(c) that see an overlap between extremist and gun buyback discussion in New Zealand.

The briefing begins by laying out key data findings documenting the **overall volume of discussion** around buyback schemes and supposed gun confiscation over time, and provides a breakdown of the ideologies, themes and platforms that were most prominent within the data. The second section then **qualitatively analyses our ethnographic observations** about such discussions in New Zealand and related international extremist communities online.

### Quantitative Data Findings

#### Discussion of gun buyback over time

Exploring trends in extremist discussion 6(a), 6(c) shows that New Zealand and extremist discussion of gun buyback schemes and related discussions about potential weapons regulations starts to rise considerably in the aftermath of the March 2019 attack in Christchurch. Over the following nine months until December 2019, when the initial gun buyback scheme concluded, we saw the highest levels of discussion around gun confiscation during the analysis period. Throughout 2020 and 2021 discussions continued,

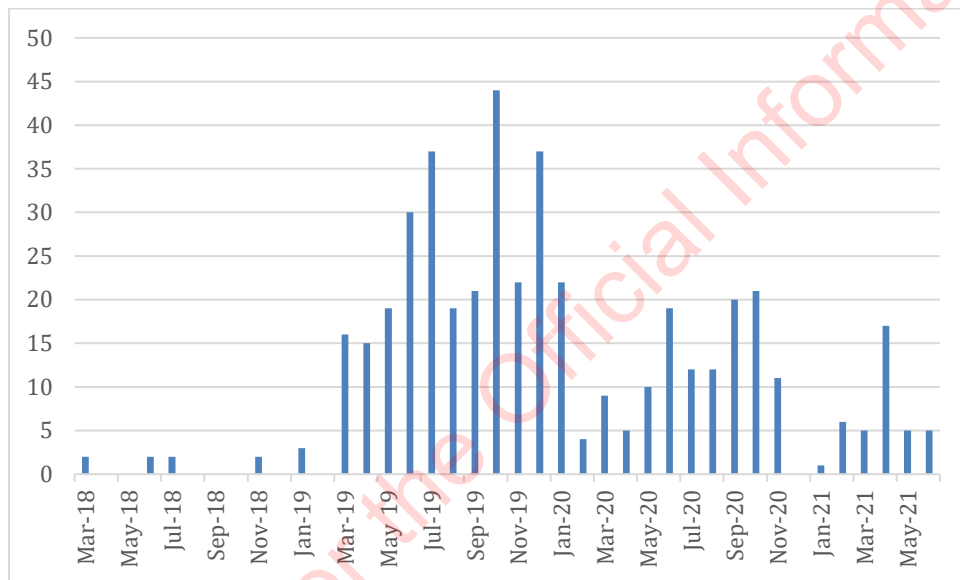
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-50878862>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/police-pay-24m-for-guns-handed-over-in-latest-buyback/2GUA44IGFK24AAEDTF36OWQO7Q/>

often rooted in conspiracy theories about the government’s supposed attempts to confiscate guns as part of a broader effort at disarming New Zealanders.

Our qualitative analysis below of extremist discussions of the gun buyback scheme and gun confiscation will dive into key themes more depth, and demonstrate that these discussions have become increasingly broad, and have attempted to connect the dots to wider conspiracies in relation to supposed authoritarianism in New Zealand, increased hostile foreign influence, the curtailing of civil liberties and a range of other counter-intuitive topics.

6(a), 6(c)



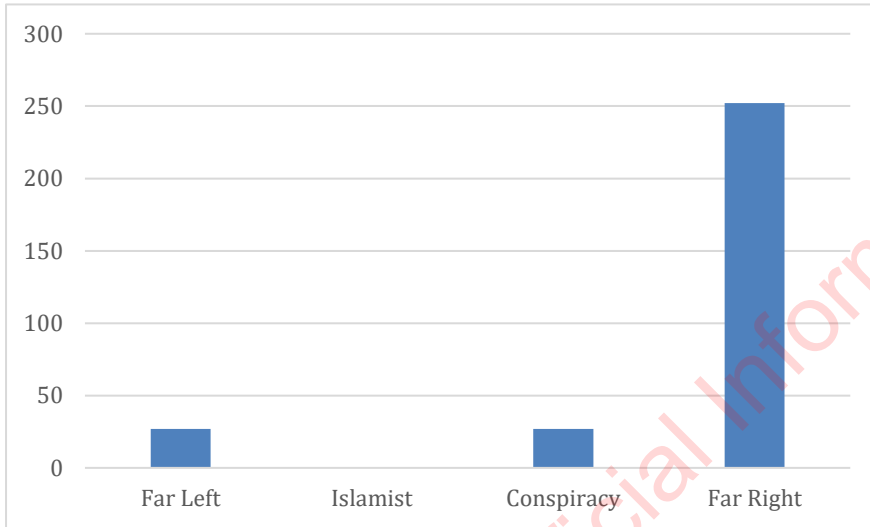
In the immediate aftermath of the Christchurch attack, we can identify posts in our dataset that spread conspiracy theories about the event being a false flag aimed to undermine the (far) right or limit gun rights. 6(a), 6(c)

Discussion by Ideology

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the major peaks in discussion about the New Zealand buyback scheme and fears about arms confiscation were triggered by the March 2019 Christchurch attacks, far-right accounts were responsible for the vast majority of posts in involved in extremist discussions (82%). These accounts frequently argued that the attack was a pretext or (less frequently) even a false flag in order to confiscate guns of law-abiding

New Zealand citizens. 6(a), 6(c)

. Far-Left accounts and conspiracy theorists accounted for 8.8% of the identified comments, while Islamist extremists did not express concern about gun buyback efforts.



6(a), 6(c)

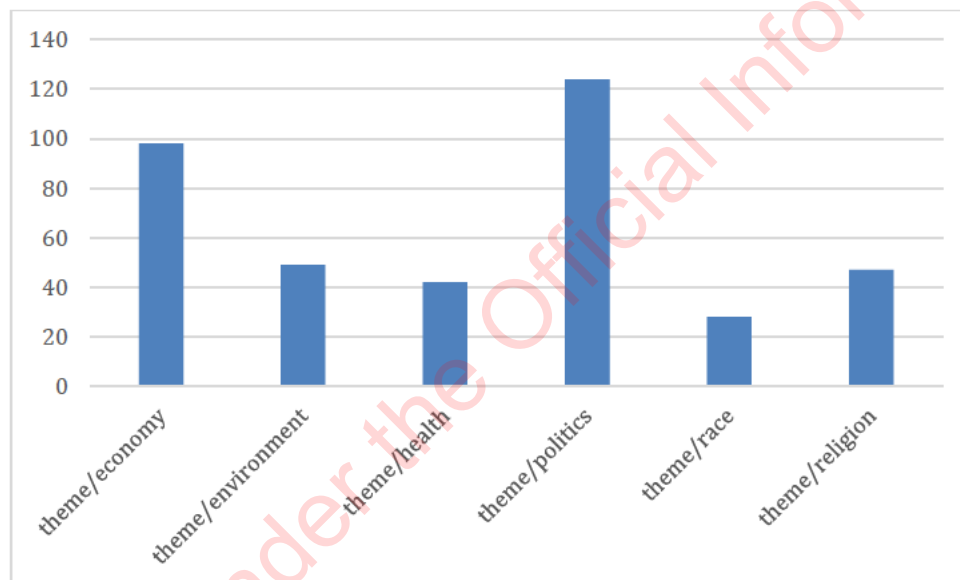
6(a), 6(c)

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The prominence of mainstream platforms within these discussions is likely a reflection of their nature: in principle, criticism of government policies is of course legitimate. While the actors involved in these discussions are extremist, they engage in a wide-range of entirely legitimate, if contentious, debates. It therefore seems unlikely that any accounts would have been banned in connection with these debates, unless they were specifically calling for armed insurrection. As extremists strive for maximum attention, utilising mainstream platforms with significant reach would always be the preference over using platforms like 6(a), 6(c) have a relatively small user base in New Zealand.

### Themes

As part of a [situation analysis](#) report on online extremism in New Zealand, 6(a), 6(c) in online discussion across the dataset. The most common identifiable topic categories amongst New Zealand extremists were the Economy, Environment, Health, Politics, Race and Religion.



Contrary to our previous briefing on 1080-related conspiracy theories, where the discussion of the environment was dominant, the relative share of the different themes identified during ISD's situation analysis was more equally split. Politics (32%) and the economy (25%) were the most prominent themes, but neither one represented close to a majority of the overall discussion around the gun buyback program and potential gun confiscation, demonstrating the range of thematic contexts in which these topics were discussed.

**Key Narratives: Ethnographic** 6(a), 6(c)

In addition to the quantitative data findings outlined above, ISD researchers also ethnographically analysed conspiracy theories about the buyback program and gun control measures within extremist and conspiracist online communities in New Zealand. Based on our qualitative analysis, the narratives in relation to the gun confiscation can be divided into several distinct clusters.


Prominent narratives found in relation to the buyback program and gun control more broadly include **conspiracy theories about New Zealand government overreach**, for example that the Christchurch attack was a false flag event as a pretext for taking guns away from the people; conspiracy theories about **shadowy global organisations** such as the New World Order or the United Nations (these fictional and real entities are often used interchangeably); and **survivalist or doomsday prepper** conspiracy theories. Among both New Zealand and international extremists weighing in on the buyback scheme, it was alleged that the program had resulted in **higher rates of crime**, as supposedly only law-abiding citizens returned their guns while criminal gangs held on to them. There do not appear to be hard dividing lines between these broad categories, and some conspiratorial social media posts contain elements of all three.

**Meta-conspiracies around government control of populations**


6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)


6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)

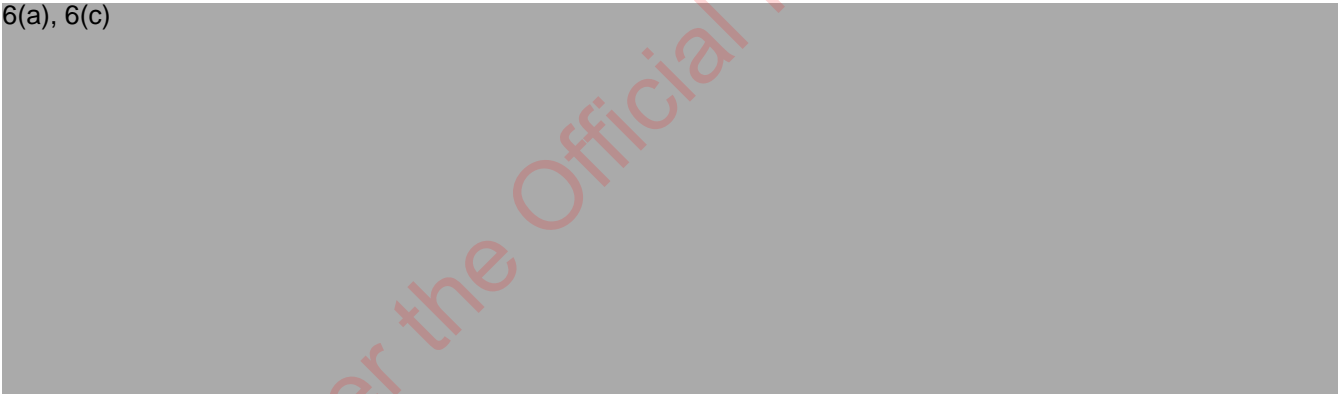





6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




## Conspiracies around foreign takeovers of New Zealand

A notable element present in this broad web of conspiracy theories is concern and suspicion relating to China and Chinese influence in New Zealand.


6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)







6(a), 6(c)




**QAnon-inspired narratives**

While the gun buyback scheme does not appear to be a prominent focus for New Zealand QAnon groups, there have been a small number of posts 6(a), 6(c)

reflecting opposition to the scheme. 6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)




In some extremist communities, users also drew historical analogies to the Australian gun buyback program after the Port Arthur massacre in April 1996. 6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)




Similar claims were also made in international white supremacist channels 6(a), 6(c) .  
One of them connected the idea that the Christchurch attack was a “false flag” to  
antisemitic conspiracy theories:


6(a), 6(c)



6(a), 6(c)




6(a), 6(c)



## New Zealand and United States gun rights discussions

ISD's 2020 situation analysis showed the dominance of US politics as a topic of discussion among New Zealand extremists and conspiracists, with Donald Trump mentioned 23% more often than Jacinda Ardern by New Zealand based extremists. This international interest also translates into discussions around gun buybacks, where we see comparisons made between New Zealand's programme, and the debate around gun rights and the second amendment in the United States.

6(a), 6(c)



Others urged New Zealand to learn from the US example, 6(a), 6(c)



Beyond specific comparisons, we also saw considerable sharing by New Zealanders of pro-gun stories from United States outlets making the case for gun ownership in the country, demonstrating the international news interests of New Zealand online extremists.

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# New Zealand *Extremism*

Quarterly report 1st April 2021 - 30th June 2021

6(a), 6(c)

6(a), 6(c)

## Extremism working definitions:

Working definitions subsequently updated.

- **Far-right** extremists:

- Constitute a constellation of groups presenting themselves as protecting New Zealand's cultural, racial and religious identity from perceived existential threats, ranging from anti-Muslim groups to ethnonationalists and white supremacists.

- **Far-left** extremists:

- Are characterised by an opposition to liberal democracy, conspiracy theories around shadowy elites controlling populations, calls for non-democratic struggles against capitalism, and sympathies for authoritarian regimes.

- **Islamist** extremists:

- Are dedicated to using violence or activism to systematically change society and in the long term create an exclusionary and totalitarian Islamic state.

- **Conspiracy** theorists:

- Believe that a group operating in secret is trying to control social or political processes. Here, we focus on conspiracy theories with the potential for real-world harm, and the potential to create fertile ground for extremist ideologies.

For information regarding methods and definitions, see the final page of this report.

6(a), 6(c)

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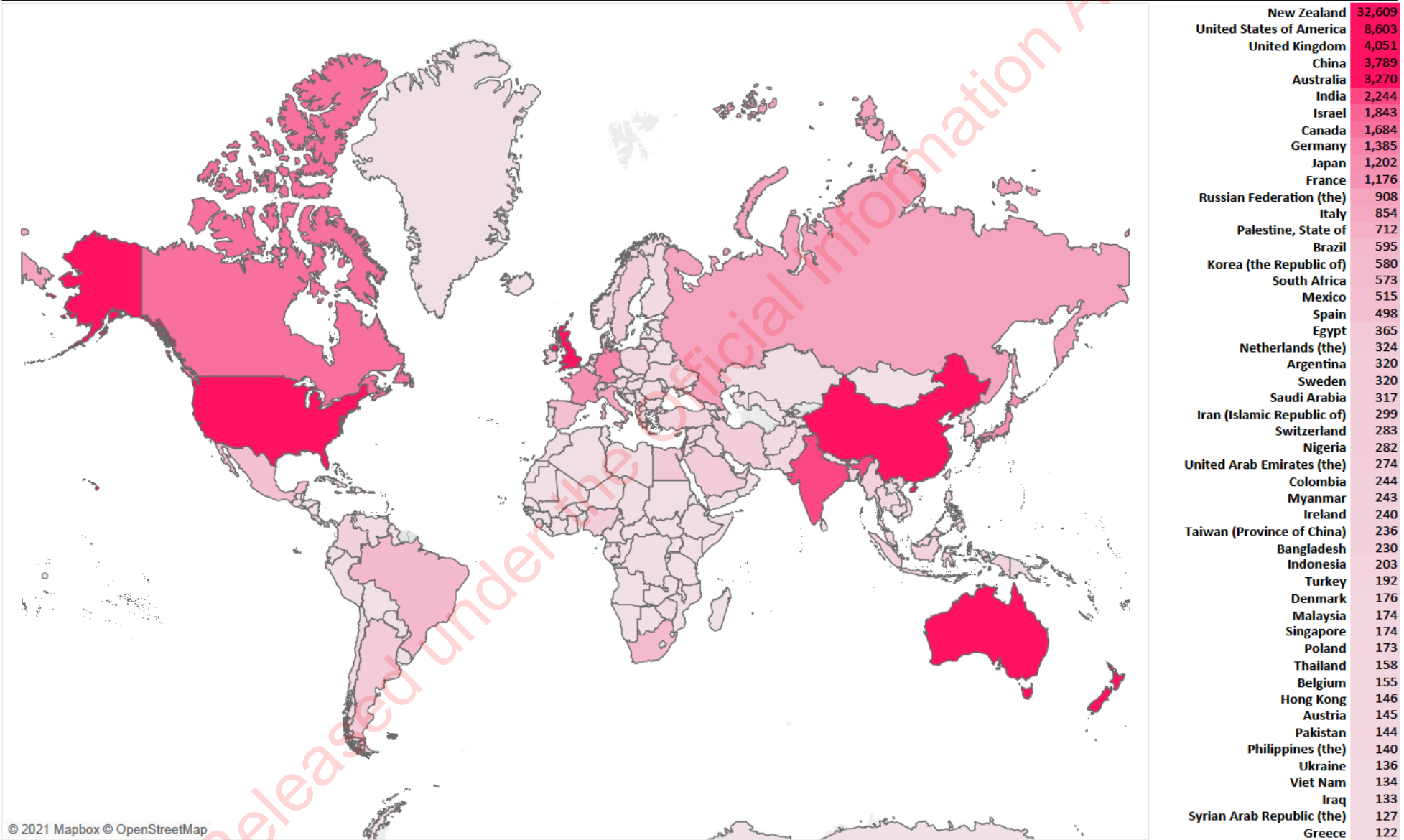
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# New Zealand *Extremism*

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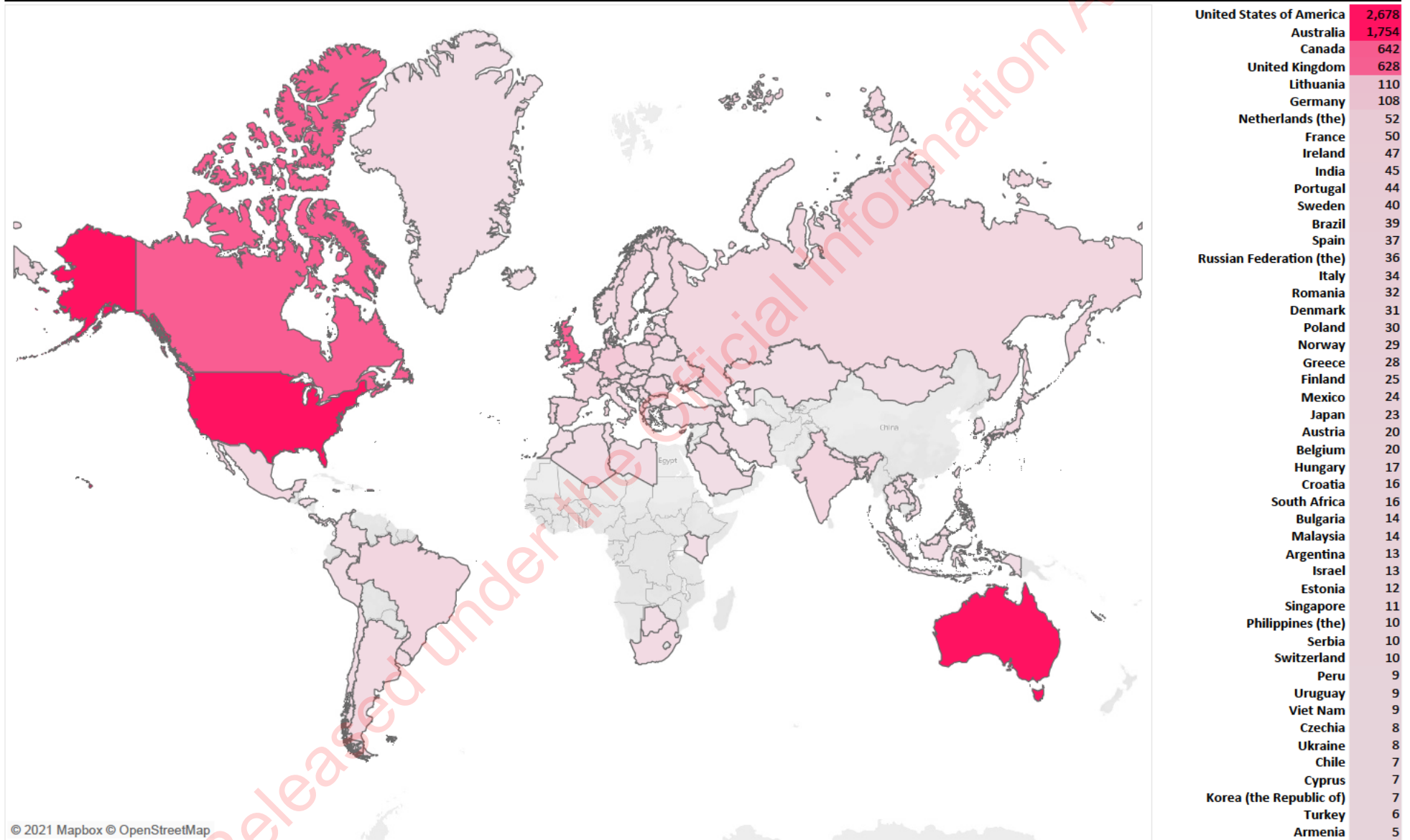
## Number of mentions of countries by New Zealand extremist accounts



# New Zealand *Extremism*

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## Number of mentions of New Zealand by extremists from other countries



6(a), 6(c)

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