

Far-Right Actors in Aotearoa New Zealand Anti-COVID Protections Protests



This booklet is a condensed overview to help readers understand the far right presence in the anti-COVID protections protests which took place in February and March 2022 and beyond. By looking at key figures and their influences we hope that people can better protect themselves and their communities.

Content warning: Explicit discussion of fascism and fascist symbols.

“Never believe that antisemites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. They know that their remarks are frivolous, open to challenge. But they are amusing themselves, for it is their adversary who is obliged to use words responsibly, since he believes in words. [...] They delight in acting in bad faith, since they seek not to persuade by sound argument but to intimidate and disconcert.” — Jean-Paul Sartre

About this booklet

The Far-Right Actors in Aotearoa New Zealand Anti-COVID Protections Protests was developed and written in March 2021 and is a follow-up to *Understanding the Far Right in Aotearoa New Zealand* written in 2021. Both zines are available at UnderstandingNZFarRight.com

The authors of this booklet, and the people who informed its contents, are academics, activists, community members, parents, teachers, tangata whenua, health care workers (including those dealing with COVID patients), and a wide variety of community members. We have knowledge of and expertise in human rights issues, cybersecurity, mis- and dis-information, te ao Māori, public policy, and combating online and offline extremism. *Further information about the process for developing this booklet is outlined in the appendix to this booklet.*

We are not including our names in this publication in the interest of our safety and wellbeing, and the safety of our families and communities. Far right groups have a history of identifying (or “doxxing”), targeting, and harassing people with opposing views or those who speak out against them. The information in this booklet is well-researched, with references included as needed so you can verify the sources we use and learn more. We hope you will find it useful and trustworthy.

While we have added links to some references throughout this document, a full list of the references can be found at the end.

You are welcome to make copies of this booklet and share with your communities.

May 2022. Cover art by retrorocket.

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Introduction

In February and March 2022, the New Zealand Parliament grounds and surrounding streets were occupied by protestors, and smaller protests occurred in other towns and cities around the country. While there were a variety of groups and individuals represented in these protests, the overall message was in [opposition to all of the Government's Covid-19 restrictions](#).

Within the protests, there were many people with legitimate concerns about and questions about the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the original and current ongoing protest organisers are adherents of far-right ideology, ranging from right-wing populism to fascism, and used the protest to spread harmful ideas, advocate for violence, and radicalise people into far-right ideologies. [Protest organisers](#) included people who openly espouse white supremacist and fascist ideals, people calling for the murder of people who support Covid-19 safety measures, and those intentionally sharing disinformation about Covid-19 and vaccinations. For these bad actors, the Covid-19 protections are a wedge issue — that is an issue they are using to cause division and start to radicalise people to their own ideologies.

Many Covid-19 protection measures implemented by the government, including lockdowns, vaccination requirements for certain workforces, and the Covid-19 Protection Framework, [have been divisive](#). The stated aim of most of these measures is to support public health, but they also have major impacts on people's day-to-day lives, and on human rights. The authors of this booklet ourselves have divided opinions on a number of COVID-19 protection measures and responses. Many of us have particular concerns about approaches that [breached Te Tiriti o Waitangi](#) and led to inequitable outcomes for Māori and Pacific communities. However, we are united in our recognition that Covid-19 is real, contagious, and deadly to people in our population. We agree that communities must be supported to survive and thrive in this changing world — including with funding and support to stay healthy during a pandemic.

This booklet was written to provide information about key people and groups involved in the protests, the harmful ideologies and information they support, and their ultimate political goals. We hope that this booklet will help readers situate the anti-COVID protections protests in the wider context of the far-right and understand the wider political motivations of the organisers.

A note on terminology

In this booklet, we use the term “**anti-COVID protections protests**” to describe the series of loosely connected protests that happened throughout Aotearoa in February and March 2022 and afterwards. When referring specifically to the protest and occupation that took place on and around Parliament grounds between 6 February and 2 March 2022, we use the term “**Parliament protest**”.

We have chosen to talk about Covid-19 protections, rather than “mandates” in order to be specific and to reflect the stated demands of protestors, which were to repeal the Covid-19 Public Health Response Act and all orders made under that act. “Mandates” is a term that was not clearly articulated by protestors, and can refer to many different things (e.g. government vaccine or mandates, staff vaccination decisions made by businesses.)

Fascism, right-wing populism and the far right

The groups that provided leadership and coordination functions at the anti-COVID protections protests, as well as the most politically influential individuals present, are supporters of far-right ideology. This is a set of beliefs and political ideas that are further to the right than the mainstream conservatism or centre-right politics in a particular society.

There are a range of ideologies that operate at the far right of the political spectrum. In its report *Ko tō tātou kāinga tēnei*, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019 noted (though Modi would erroneously fall outside of this definition in some ways):

“To the right of traditional right-wing conservative and libertarian opinions is a political space that has been called the far right. It is occupied by a range of ideologies, orientations and patterns of thinking. These include a strong form of nationalism that is not so much an ideology but rather an orientation that holds that western civilisation and its values are under threat from non-native (or alien) elements, whether people (particularly immigrants) or ideas (such as multiculturalism). [...] There are other far right patterns of thinking – including “deep-state” conspiracy theories (such as QAnon) or anti-feminist ideologies (such as “incel” ideology).”¹

In this booklet we concentrate on two forms of far-right politics: fascism and right-wing populism.

What is fascism?

Fascism is an extreme form of nationalism that promotes extreme devotion to one nation or people over all others. Fascist states are generally authoritarian and non-democratic.

Fascist states and groups are racist, believing that a strong state requires “racial purity” and a homogenous population. This can result in the persecution, deportation, or killing of people that are seen as “other,” for example people of different races or religious backgrounds, or disabled people.

Some other common characteristics of fascism include:

- support for ethnic or racial supremacy (such as white supremacy)
- opposition to multiculturalism and liberalism
- support for rigid hierarchies

¹ *Ko tō tātou kāinga tēnei/ Report: The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain.* (2020). Retrieved from: <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/part-2-context/harmful-behaviours-right-wing-extremism-and-radicalisation/>

- support for racism, misogyny, homophobia, ableism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, trans-hatred etc.

Fascism is often most associated with the Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany, and Mussolini's National Fascist Party in Italy, but fascist ideas and openly fascist groups continue to operate today.

To understand fascism in New Zealand and to get a sense of the dangerous end-point of these political ideas, it is useful to know a bit about fascism and its history.

Fascism then and now

The first fascist movements started in the early 20th century, with Mussolini's National Fascist party (Partito Nazionale Fascista) founded in Italy in 1921, and the Nazi Party (officially the National Socialist German Workers' Party/Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter partei or NSDAP) founded in Germany in 1920.

After the regimes led by these parties were defeated in the Second World War, new fascist movements emerged. Some have aimed to rehabilitate the ideas of the early 20th century fascists, while others have little continuity with those movements and express their ideas in different forms. However, they still have many common characteristics.

Fascism and similar ideologies continue to the present day, and fascist groups continue to be a danger to people, communities, and national security. While there are specific terms that historians use to identify the different kinds of fascist groups, in this booklet we use the term "fascism" to cover them all.²



Caption: Benito Mussolini, leader of Italy's National Fascist Party.



Caption: Picture of Adolph Hitler, leader of Germany's Nazi Party, performing the Nazi salute.

² Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism* (Verso Books, 2019), p6. Excerpt available from: <https://bit.ly/3kndW5U>

What is right-wing populism?

According to the [European Centre for Populist Studies](#), “right-wing populism, which is also called national populism or right-wing nationalism, is a political ideology which combines right-wing politics and populist rhetoric and themes. The rhetoric often consists of anti-elitist sentiments, opposition to the perceived ‘establishment’, and speaking to the ‘common people’.”

Right-wing populism has many common characteristics with fascism, such as support for rigid hierarchies, a strong state, racism, misogyny, homophobia, ableism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, trans-hatred and opposition to multiculturalism. However, there are also differences between the two. For example, [right wing populists](#):

- are more likely to use the electoral system to win political power and bring about political change through legislative changes
- are more likely to support free-market capitalism, while fascists oppose it in favour of some form of state-regulated capitalism
- are less likely to support aims for territorial expansion and conquest than fascists are
- focus on restoring a lost past, whereas fascists focus on total transformation to bring about a nation’s rebirth
- right-wing populists are more likely to identify as cultural or civic nationalists and reject any claim they are fascists or Nazis, although some right-wing populists do identify as racial or ethnic nationalists. Fascists are more likely to identify as ethnic or racial nationalists.

Some examples of right-wing populism include Donald Trump’s presidency in the United States of America, Jair Bolsonaro’s presidency in Brazil and Prime Ministership in India of Narendra Modi, who espouses far-right Hindutva nationalism ([some would argue](#) he is actually fascist at this point).



Caption: Former United States President Donald Trump with a “Make America Great Again” hat



Caption: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro



Caption: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Far-right actors

A number of organisations and individuals used the anti-COVID protections protests as an opportunity to push far-right ideas or promote their own agenda, while claiming to be fighting for people's rights and freedoms. Below we identify a number of these people and groups who played key roles in the protests, but are acting in bad faith or pushing dangerous ideologies.

A note on hyperlinks in this section: in the following sections, many of the groups and individuals are connected to each other. When we refer to a group or individual who is discussed elsewhere in this document, the hyperlink will take you to that part of the booklet (rather than to an external link).

Groups

End the Mandates NZ: A coalition of far-right groups of a right-wing populist persuasion that joined the group Convoy 2022 NZ in organising the anti-COVID protections occupation on Parliament grounds from February-March 2022. The occupation was modelled on the January-February 2022 far-right trucker convoy and occupation of Ottawa, Canada. The coalition has become inactive following the end of the Parliament grounds occupation, although its member groups continue to organise on this and other issues to spread their far-right politics. The member groups of the coalition include:



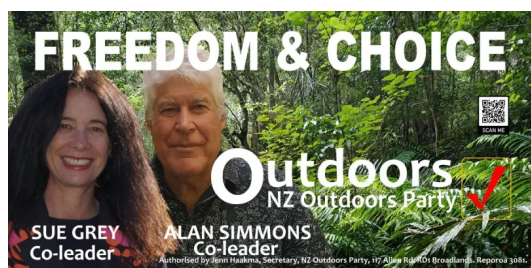
Destiny Church/Freedoms & Rights Coalition

Destiny Church is a [homophobic](#), [sexist](#), [Islamophobic](#) and [anti-immigrant](#) Christian fundamentalist church led by Brian Tamaki. Destiny Church created the Freedoms & Rights Coalition as a front group in 2020. The Freedoms & Rights Coalition organises demonstrations and motor vehicle blockades of cities across Aotearoa New Zealand against COVID-19 restrictions and uses these actions to get more money and support for Destiny Church. Tamaki's ultimate aim is for Aotearoa New Zealand [to become a theocracy \(ruled by a religious order\) with him as its leader](#). The Freedoms & Rights Coalition is part of the End the Mandates NZ coalition that led the Parliament protest. Following the end of the Parliament grounds occupation and the Government reducing COVID-19 protections, the coalition has committed to continue organising protests, with them now trying to pressure the Government to make the Bill of Rights supreme law in the New Zealand constitution in a clear allusion to Sovereign Citizen conspiracy theories (more on that below).



Voices for Freedom

Voices for Freedom was set up following the 2020 New Zealand general election by Claire Deeks, previously an unsuccessful candidate for far-right party Advance NZ. The group has been [identified by CERT NZ](#) as one of the main proponents in Aotearoa of false information and conspiracy theories about COVID-19. Voices for Freedom has distributed large numbers of flyers and pamphlets spreading disinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines, and organised protests to spread their positions. Voices for Freedom distribute branded t-shirts and placards widely at protests, turning people into human billboards. The group has engaged [in the harassment of children outside schools](#) and [members of the public outside vaccination centres](#). Following the Parliament occupation, Voices For Freedom has shifted focus to opposing the Three Waters Reforms. It is part of the End the Mandates NZ coalition that led the Parliament protest.



New Zealand Outdoors and Freedom Party/Outdoors and Freedom Movement

Created in 2015 initially as a green conservative party, the Outdoors Party became increasingly conspiratorial due to an influx of Ban 1080 Party members in 2017. Since then, its members have spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about the 9/11 attacks, 1080, 5G technology, COVID-19, vaccines, and a flat earth. Party co-leader [Sue Grey](#) has worked extensively with Christchurch neo-Nazi [Kyle Chapman](#) doing political organising. The Party is part of the End the Mandates NZ coalition that led the Parliament protest, where it rebranded itself from the Outdoors Party to the Outdoors and Freedom Movement. Marius Koekemoer, Outdoors Party candidate for the 2020 general election, has posted in a public Facebook group set up by some of the protestors espousing anti-immigrant racism and falsely claiming that the New Zealand Government pushed for open borders at the United Nations (more on that below) and that this led to the Christchurch terrorist protesting against such policies by engaging in the 15 March terrorist attack. Following the end of the Parliament occupation, it changed its name with the Electoral Commission to the Outdoors and Freedom Party.



New Zealand Doctors Speaking Out With Science

A group of doctors that oppose COVID-19 vaccines and restrictions. The group has been a major spreader of disinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions. [Its members have issued unofficial Covid vaccine exemption letters, and have called for government officials, academics and health workers to be put on trial and executed.](#) New Zealand Doctors Speaking Out With Science is part of the End the Mandates NZ coalition that led the Parliament protest.



Caption above: Picture of New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science spokesperson Mike Shaw outside the High Court building.

New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science

A group of teachers that oppose COVID-19 vaccines and restrictions. The group is part of a court case alongside New Zealand [Doctors Speak Out With Science](#) to end the vaccine requirements for health workers and teachers. Its spokesperson Mike Shaw is a conservative anti-abortion activist that has compared the Government's COVID-19 response to Nazi Germany (more on that comparison below). The group is part of the End the Mandates NZ coalition that led the Parliament protest.



The Hood NZ

A group of parents opposing vaccines who tried and failed to end the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines to children through the High Court. Their social media pages spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, including anti-vaccine conspiracist content from the Brownstone Institute, an American right-wing free-market think tank formed to oppose COVID-19 restrictions. The Hood social media pages also share anti-vaccine content from The Epoch Times, a far-right newspaper owned by the Falun Gong cult-like religious movement. The Hood is part of the End the Mandates NZ coalition that led the Parliament protest.

Other groups: Besides End the Mandates NZ, other far-right groups, ranging from right-wing populism to fascism in their ideology, participated in the anti-COVID protections occupation on Parliament grounds and sister protests across Aotearoa. These include:



Action Zealandia

Aotearoa New Zealand's biggest neo-Nazi group. Formed in July 2019, four months after the 15 March terrorist attack, Action Zealandia believes "European identity is under threat within New Zealand". Action Zealandia member [Max Newsome](#) recorded footage of the Parliament protest from Bowen House, which provides access to the Beehive. Another member, Johan Wolfe, New Zealand Army soldier and co-founder and leader of Action Zealandia's predecessor group the Dominion Movement, is awaiting trial on espionage charges.



National Front New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand's longest continually existing neo-Nazi group, which was formed in 1968 (although it briefly disbanded in 2019 before reforming in late 2021). Throughout its history, it has organised demonstrations and marches to [spread its neo-Nazi ideology](#) and members have [repeatedly engaged in violence against ethnic minorities](#). National Front New Zealand has regularly participated in anti-COVID-19 protections protests organised by the [Freedoms & Rights Coalition](#), with the two groups having formed an alliance in early 2022. The alliance was around the protests but could grow in the future.



Counterspin Media

A media outlet hosted on GTV, a company co-founded by billionaire Guo Wengui and former Donald Trump advisor and American far-right figure Steve Bannon. Counterspin Media has repeatedly spread conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines, climate change, United Nations Agenda 21, and claimed the 15 March terrorist attack was a 'false flag' or setup. During livestreams of the Parliament protest, Counterspin presenters repeatedly espoused Operation Reclaim, a plot to engage in a military coup against the New Zealand government. Following the anti-COVID protections protests, Counterspin has been spreading Russian government disinformation claiming

the US government has bioweapons labs in Ukraine, and sharing conspiracy theories praising the Russian government for fighting the Deep State (a conspiracy theory that a secret elite rules the US government). After the Parliament occupation ended, it has called for protesters to occupy the [Marsden Point oil refinery](#) to prevent its decommissioning.



The Health Forum NZ

Private group · 47.2K members



The Health Forum NZ

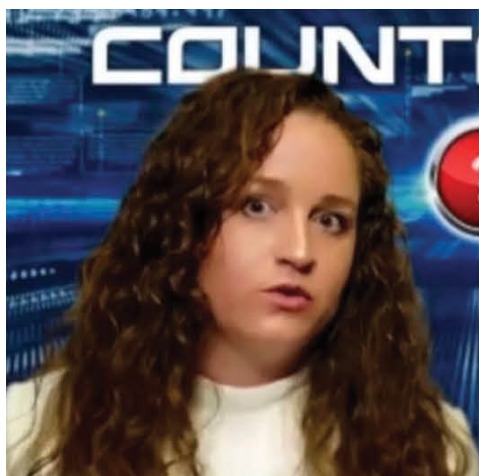
A Facebook group and Telegram channel run by nutritionist Lynda Wharton that has tens of thousands of members and spreads misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions. Members have spread the falsehood that rapper Todd Williams aka Louie Knuxx died due to being vaccinated against COVID-19. The Health Forum NZ has repeatedly shared the content from [The Freedoms & Rights Coalition](#) as well as of [Voices For Freedom](#) on their Telegram channel. The account made posts in favour of the Parliament protest, with Lynda Wharton having been a speaker at the protest. It has called for anti-vaccine people to [set up parallel economies](#) and conspiracy theories that the [World Health Organisation is proposing COVID-19 measures as part of establishing a world government](#).

Individuals



Kelvyn Alp

Director and programme host of [Counterspin Media](#). Alp is former leader of the far-right Direct Democracy Party of New Zealand and the Armed Intervention Force, a paramilitary group formed in 1996 which plotted to overthrow the New Zealand Government. At the Parliament protest, he repeatedly [incited protesters to storm the Parliament building, arrest Members of Parliament, put them on show trials and execute them](#). During Counterspin Media's Parliament protest live-streams, he promoted the Protocols of the Elders of Zion conspiracy theory. This conspiracy theory was fabricated in 1902 by the Tsarist Russian secret police and is the origin of the antisemitic Jewish world domination conspiracy theory, which holds that a secret cabal of Jewish people rule the world.



Hannah Spierer

Producer of Counterspin Media, partner of Kelvyn Alp. Espouses the Great Reset conspiracy theory that argues that a secret global elite is using the COVID-19 pandemic to establish a tyrannical world government through the World Economic Forum and other mechanisms and “traditional gender roles”, where women are subordinate to men. Also known as Sarah Smith.



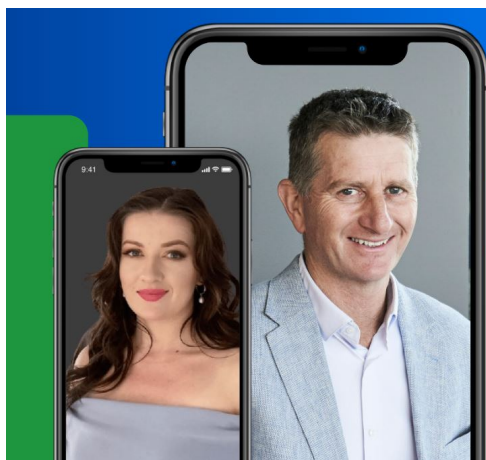
Derek Tait

Senior pastor of [Destiny Church](#) and the main organiser of the [Freedoms & Rights Coalition](#)'s anti-COVID protections protests in Christchurch. Tait met with [National Front](#) member [Mikey Hawthorne](#) to form an alliance between the Freedoms & Rights Coalition and the National Front.



Karen Brewer

An Australian conspiracy theorist with thousands of followers on social media. She spreads conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines, QAnon, government restrictions and the Freemasons controlling the New Zealand and Australian Governments. Brewer lives in Aotearoa to avoid paying A\$875,000 in damages [after falsely accusing Australian National Party MP Anne Webster and her husband of being part of a paedophile network](#). She was arrested for breaching COVID-19 Level 4 restrictions in August 2021 [after inciting people to occupy New Zealand Government and local council offices and overthrow the government](#).



Leighton and Chantelle Baker

Leighton is the former leader of the far-right New Conservative Party. He has repeatedly espoused [Christian fundamentalist, homophobic, sexist, and transphobic views, and made racist statements opposing Māori rights](#). After the 2020 general election, Leighton was removed as New Conservatives leader. Since then, he and his daughter Chantelle have extensively promoted misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions. At the Parliament protest, Leighton tried to position himself as a negotiator with the Government, while Chantelle extensively livestreamed the protests.



Damien De Ment

Far-right conspiracy theorist who regularly collaborates with [Counterspin Media](#). He has been one of the main spreaders of the QAnon conspiracy theory in Aotearoa. [He has made calls for the arrest, show trial, and execution of Government officials and academics](#), and [for himself to be installed as the temporary custodian of the New Zealand Government before it is replaced with a regime along the lines of Donald Trump's former administration](#). He has also [regularly engaged in stalking, and the digital and physical harassment of academics and activists](#). He is now organising with fellow far-right conspiracists to [try and kidnap academics, journalists and officials](#) — actions they justify as a form of “common law arrest” grounded in [Sovereign Citizen](#) ideology. After the Parliament occupation ended, he called for protesters to occupy the Marsden Point oil refinery to prevent its decommissioning. He has also joined Counterspin's media team, with him having previously been a repeat guest on Counterspin.



Mikey Hawthorne

Christchurch-based leader of the neo-Nazi group [National Front New Zealand](#) when it reformed in late 2021. Hawthorne has been a regular participant at the anti-COVID protections protests organised by the [Freedoms & Rights Coalition](#). He has also met with Freedoms & Rights Coalition organiser and Destiny Church senior pastor [Derek Tait](#) in order to form an alliance between the two groups.



Sue Grey

Co-leader of the far-right [Outdoors Party/Outdoors and Freedom Movement](#). She has repeatedly spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions and has served as a lawyer for several court cases to end the vaccination rollout and end restrictions. She has extensively worked with Christchurch neo-Nazi [Kyle Chapman](#) in political organising.



Kyle Chapman

Christchurch neo-Nazi who was the former leader of the [National Front New Zealand](#), and a founder of the Right Wing Resistance — both neo-Nazi organisations. He was also involved with neo-Nazi skinhead gangs. Chapman [admitted to a series of arsons during the late 1980s and early 1990s, including firebombing a marae](#). Since 2019, he has continued to self-identify as a Third Positionist fascist and has extensively worked with the Outdoors Party's [Sue Grey](#) to spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions. Kyle [has been arrested and went to court for having breached the level 4 lockdown in an anti COVID-19 protections protest in Christchurch in August 2021](#). Following the end of the Parliament occupation, Kyle and other far-right conspiracists have set up a "Freedom Village" in Christchurch's former residential red zone. Kyle and other far-right conspiracists at the village aim to set up a well, plant a garden, set up a school and create a "rapid response team" able to travel to the homes of people who were being "tormented" by Government officials. When journalists tried to investigate the "Freedom Village", one protester told journalists to leave, [then tried to take their camera from them and punched them](#).



Max Newsome

Former New Zealand Army soldier and member of the Dominion Movement as well as its successor group Action Zealandia — both neo-Nazi organisations. He [was in contact with the American neo-Nazi terrorist networks Atomwaffen Division, requested another neo-Nazi to pass on a message to the American neo-Nazi terrorist group The Base and then tried to form his own cell the Southern Order](#). He recorded footage of the Parliament protest while he was in Bowen House, where he was working in construction, [which led to him being fired](#).



Philip Arps

Christchurch neo-Nazi and convicted sexual abuser. Arps, who calls himself “Arpsy the Nazi” was imprisoned in 2019 for distributing footage of the 15 March terrorist attack that was recorded by the terrorist. In 2016, he was part of a group who delivered pigs heads and offal to the Al Noor Mosque. He tried to go to the Parliament protest but [was arrested for threatening to murder Jewish people](#). He instead attended the Picton anti COVID-19 protections protest.



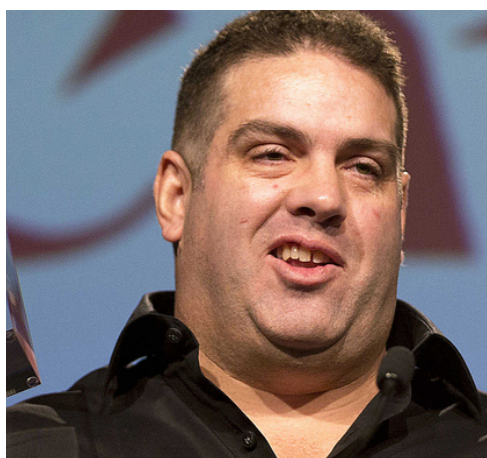
Vinny Eastwood

New Zealand radio talk show host (named after himself) and internet streamer who regularly spreads disinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines, restrictions and the New World Order and livestreams anti COVID-19 restrictions protest. He has also interviewed prominent overseas conspiracy theorists such as David Icke, who holds that the world is secretly ruled by a reptilian elite. Along with former Public Party leader [Billy Te Kahika Jr](#), he was arrested for breaching COVID-19 restrictions during a protest in central Auckland as the COVID-19 Delta outbreak began in August 2021.



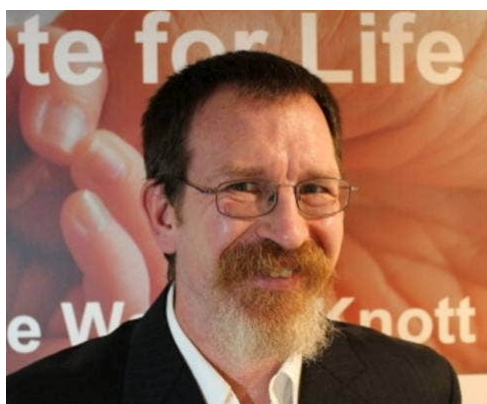
Billy Te Kahika Jr

Former leader of the far-right, conspiracy theory driven Public Party during the party's unsuccessful run in the 2020 general election. A Christian fundamentalist, Te Kahika Jr espouses [antisemitic conspiracy theories, for example that the Rothschilds and other Jewish people control the global financial system](#). After the 2020 general election, he continued to organise protests opposing COVID-19 restrictions. [He was arrested for breaching COVID-19 restrictions in August 2021, during a protest in central Auckland as the COVID-19 Delta outbreak began](#). Since then, he has continued to share his views via livestream.



Cameron Slater

Son of former National Party president John Slater, Cameron Slater published the WhaleOil blog, which regularly spread racist and sexist propaganda. Slater was the key player in the Dirty Politics scandal, where he worked with former National Party leader Judith Collins and current National Party officers to use the blog to attack and defame their political opponents. WhaleOil ceased operations in [2019 due to the financial losses Slater incurred from losing multiple defamation cases](#). Slater then created the BFD blog, which spreads racist propaganda and conspiracy theories about COVID-19 restrictions, and published End the Mandates NZ's press releases.



Warren Knott

Former Conservative Party candidate and Christian fundamentalist who runs the Islamic State Watch website, which espouses the Islamophobic conspiracy theory that all Muslims are ISIS supporters. Knott organised and spoke at rallies in support of Tommy Robinson, the British far-right anti-Islam activist. He also participated in organising in support of Canadian white supremacists Stefan Molyneux and Lauren Southern's failed 2018 tour in Aotearoa.



John Ansell

Former ad man for the National Party and ACT, Ansell was behind the National Party's infamous 2005 "Kiwi not Iwi" billboard campaign. Following his time with National and ACT, John has been a prolific spreader of anti-Māori conspiracy theories about Te Tiriti o Waitangi. More recently, he has compared [Jacinda Ardern to the Christchurch terrorist](#), and [has called for Nuremberg-style trials and executions of politicians due to the Government's COVID-19 vaccination programme](#). Following the end of the Parliament occupation, he has joined a group of far-right Sovereign Citizen conspiracy theorists lead by Australian conspiracy theorist Sandra Crack who held a kangaroo court framed as a "grand jury" that gave the New Zealand Government the death penalty for their COVID-19 protections policies.



Carlene Hereora

Regular contributor to [Counterspin Media](#) and major exponent of antisemitic QAnon conspiracy theories in Aotearoa. Hereora was the main organiser of the Sovereign Hīkoi of Truth, a group that portrays far-right [Sovereign Citizen](#) ideology as a form of Tino Rangatiratanga. The Sovereign Hīkoi of Truth tried to breach the Mercer checkpoint on the road to Auckland in late October 2021 as COVID-19 Delta raged around Aotearoa. Hereora has promised the New Zealand media will be sent to Guantanamo Bay. She has organised several Qanon protests and built up her following by recruiting at 'Oranga Tamariki' (Ministry for Children) protests organised by the Hands Off Our Tamariki campaign, with her giving speeches at these protests where she espoused QAnon conspiracy theories.



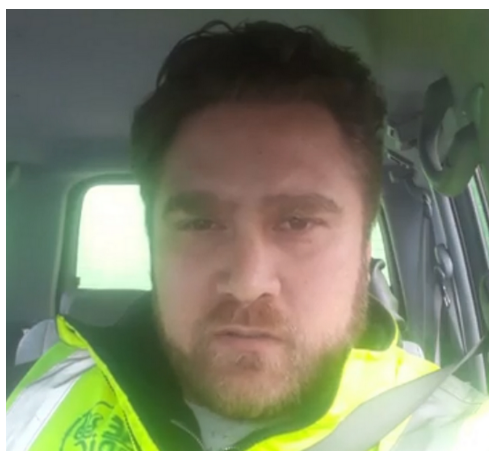
Napoleon Busch

Waiuku far-right conspiracy theorist [who has harassed vaccination bus workers in Auckland and verbally abused workers at a Waiuku branch of Subway by calling them Nazis after refusing to provide a vaccine pass](#). [Busch was visited by Police after the 15 March terrorist attack as part of the Police visiting far-right influencers following the attack](#). Also goes by the name Nick Bush.



Murray Chong

New Plymouth District Councillor who opposes Māori wards and has repeatedly made derogatory comments about te reo Māori. Chong is a former candidate of the New Conservative Party. He participated in an early February 2022 New Plymouth protest that tried to engage in a citizen's arrest of Andrew Little.



Brad Flutey

Former [Outdoors Party](#) and Social Credit Party candidate. In November 2021, Flutey organised a protest, supported by [Counterspin Media](#), that tried to overthrow a Northland iwi checkpoint protecting the area from the spread of COVID-19 Delta. He [was arrested in January 2022 after punching one police officer and kicking another officer to the ground](#). He [was arrested again on 26th February 2022 for inciting violence at Parliament grounds, and has been banned from going to the grounds](#). After the Parliament occupation ended, he called for protesters to occupy the Marsden Point oil refinery to prevent its decommissioning.



Peter Mortlock

Pastor of City Impact Church, a Christian fundamentalist church which has spread conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions and espouses sexist and homophobic views. Mortlock repeatedly endorsed anti COVID-19 restrictions protests across Aotearoa, such as those organised by the [Freedoms & Rights Coalition](#).

**Liz Gunn**

Former presenter on Television New Zealand and Radio New Zealand. Gunn is a regular guest on [Counterspin Media](#), where she has spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions, and has called for the overthrow of the New Zealand Government. She has also espoused the conspiracy theories that the October 2021 North Island earthquake was Mother Earth's retribution against the Government's COVID-19 response, and that the 15 March terrorist attack was a false flag attack. Gunn is planning to create her own far-right party called the Free New Zealand Party.

Far-right actors influences

Many key players and organisers of the anti-COVID protections protests draw rhetorical and ideological ideas freely from a range of influences. However, these players tend not to be committed to any one ideology, and do not care whether the ideas contradict each other — only what talking point is useful at a particular moment. We do not believe that pointing out contradictions in the “anti-mandate” rhetoric is a useful tactic. Instead, this section describes the most common ideological influences in order to help expose the core roots of the protest’s ideology, so that we can focus on these harmful underpinnings rather than the surface-level discourse.

Sovereign Citizens

The Sovereign Citizen movement originated in the USA. It is composed of loosely-affiliated groups and individuals, connected in their beliefs that their national governments are illegitimate, that taxation is illegal, that they are not bound by national laws unless they personally consent to them. Sovereign Citizens often base their beliefs in “pseudo-law” structures borrowed from historical agreements such as the English Magna Carta, or the pre-Civil War US-American constitution. The ideological roots of the movement are explicitly white supremacist — the founder of the earliest Sovereign Citizen group, William Potter Gale, believed that nonwhite people were inhuman and that Jewish people were plotting to control the world.

Sovereign Citizen ideology can be appealing to people in difficult circumstances, as it is rhetorically anti-Government, anti-tax, and in favour of individuals picking and choosing which laws apply to them. This offers a quick fix for people who are in legal trouble, who are afraid of the police and other government institutions, or who are poor and believe that they can improve their financial situation through refusing to pay tax. However, believing that you are exempt from the law doesn’t mean you actually are, and Sovereign Citizens can end up in deeper legal trouble than they started in, usually for acts such as ignoring financial and sales laws.

In Aotearoa, Sovereign Citizen ideology has repackaged with more culturally relevant forms of law, enabling its spread in our local context. For example, the focus on the US Constitution or the Magna Carta has been replaced with a focus on the British 1688 Bill of Rights, the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its English version The Treaty of Waitangi 1840, and He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirene/Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand 1835. Some Sovereign Citizens here have declared themselves to be sheriffs and are plotting to kidnap government officials, academics, journalists and community organisers on the grounds that they’re using their powers as sheriffs to engage in common law arrests.



Caption: Picture of a Sovereign Citizen ID card from a Black Hebrew Israelite, an antisemitic black sect that claims to be the descendants of the Biblical Israelites.



Caption: Picture of a Sovereign Citizen ID card granted a Māori Sovereign Citizen group that justifies their Sovereign Citizen ideology on the basis of the 1835 Declaration of Independence.

A note from the authors: We would also like to raise that tauiwi declaring themselves Sovereign Citizens is a violation of Te Tiriti, since the rights of tauiwi to live here are based on the Crown's agreement with Māori in Te Tiriti. Tauiwi who have renounced the Crown's laws have given up their legal right to live here. We also recognise that Māori have legitimate reasons to consider the Crown illegitimate — we would like to tautoko [Teanau Tuiono's kōrero](#) that the Sovereign Citizen movement is not Tino Rangatiratanga, and a better solution is in Māori community organising.

Wellness mumfluencers

Wellness mumfluencers use their position as influencers to spread dangerous ideas about health, children, and women's rights, and promote their own moneymaking schemes. Many wellness mumfluencers bring together several threads of far-right ideology: eugenic beliefs about health and disability, false solidarity and fearmongering aimed at women, and authoritarian approaches to protecting children, and their influence [has been strongly felt throughout the Parliament protest](#).

Wellness culture is highly individualistic and focussed on people healing their own ailments — even if this is not medically possible. Influencers frequently offer “cures” for conditions that conventional medicine struggles to treat, such as chronic illnesses. This can be a significant draw for people who have been hurt by the mainstream medical system — especially women and Māori. Another draw is that these influencers often promote multi-level-marketing schemes, which can seem like a way to make easy money. However, there is a lot of crossover between the pseudoscience used by wellness culture, such as “cleanses” to purge unspecified “toxins” from the body, and pseudoscience used by the anti-vax movement such as claims that vaccines are one of these “toxins”. Promoting these ideas helps influencers sell their multi-level-marketing products, such as essential oils they claim can cure COVID-19. Finally, these beliefs often connect to far-right beliefs about health, particularly that a person's health is entirely under their own control and that disabilities are meant to be either “fixed” or eradicated. This an ableist

position, as it makes out that disabled peoples are morally lesser and their lives are worth less than able-bodied peoples.

Mumfluencers often promote “women’s empowerment” as part of their businesses, offering “business empowerment” lessons and framing multi-level-marketing schemes as a way for women to have independent incomes. Similarly, their focus on mums is often based on helping women navigate the very guilt-heavy world of motherhood, since women are often the primary caregivers within families. This guilt, and the desire to avoid it, is often used to manipulate the audience and push them towards anti-vaccine and other far-right content. Mumfluencers use language about “peace” and “love and light” to prevent argument or critique, and avoid reasonable questions about whether the information they’re pushing is true.

Far-right ideology often includes conspiracy fantasies about children being harmed by marginalised groups such as Jewish, transgender, and gay people. These conspiracy claims have a long history in far-right politics, and have recently evolved into the [QAnon conspiracy](#) fantasy. This propaganda can be a powerful draw to parents — or anyone concerned about the wellbeing of children — and is often targeted at mothers in particular. However, the far-right’s concerns about children are often based on the *idea* of protecting children rather than actually doing so, and tends to be focussed primarily on white children. Anti-mandate protestors have been recorded suggesting that children at the campsite are used as human shields against police, and have kept children at the site even as sewerage and other safety hazards worsened, including when violence erupted at the site on March 2nd.



Caption: An Instagram post by wellness mumfluencer and anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist Natalie Cutler-Welsh in support of the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest.



Caption: An Instagram post by Nicky Clinch about her being at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest and supporting it.

Antisemitism

Antisemitism is hostility, hatred or discrimination against Jewish people as an ethnic or religious group. Antisemitic sentiment was widespread at the anti-COVID protections protests.

Individuals involved in the anti-COVID protections protests have falsely compared vaccination requirements (“mandates”) to the Holocaust, where the Nazis engaged in the genocide of six million Jewish people. By drawing a false comparison between the treatment of people refusing the vaccine and the suffering and genocide of Jews during the Holocaust, these individuals trivialise the Holocaust. Others drew swastikas on the Richard Seddon statue at Parliament and called Government officials and staff at private businesses surrounding the Parliament grounds “Nazis”. This trivialises the Nazi state by falsely equating its genocidal oppression to the Government’s vaccine requirements and other public health measures. Bad actors have also referred to Jacinda Ardern as “Jewcinda”, even though Jacinda Ardern is not Jewish, referred to COVID-19 as “Jew flu”, and referred to the COVID-19 vaccines as a “Jewish bioweapon”, when it exists to protect us from COVID-19 and was not created by any one ethnic group.

These antisemitic phrases all allude to a version of the antisemitic Jewish world domination conspiracy theory, which holds that a secret Jewish cabal that rules the world is the cause of the world’s problems. This particular version of this conspiracy theory holds that a secret Jewish elite created COVID-19 as a bioweapon to depopulate white majority countries, produced the COVID-19 vaccine as a false cure to accelerate this depopulation, and implemented government restrictions to ensure the Jewish cabal can maximise their control of the non-Jewish population.

The references to COVID-19 and the vaccine being bioweapons that depopulate white countries also tie in to the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, which holds that a secret (usually Jewish) elite is trying to turn whites in white majority countries into minorities, or exterminate them through mass non-white immigration and other measures like viruses and vaccines. The Christchurch terrorist used this to justify the murder of 51 Muslims in the course of the 15 March terrorist attack.



Caption: A car at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest painted with the phrase “Please Help & Stop Jewcinda”.



Caption: A placard at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest presenting Jacinda Ardern as a modern day form of Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler.

QAnon

The QAnon conspiracy theory arose in 2016 in the United States of America. It argues that governments around the world are controlled by a secret cabal of Satanic paedophiles, who are the cause of the world's problems. QAnon conspiracy theorists hold that the elites' reign will be ended by former US President Donald Trump, who they claim is a saviour that will plan and lead the mass arrests and executions of thousands of cabal members on a day known as "the Storm"

or "the Event". The QAnon conspiracy theory was one of the major motivations of the insurrectionists who engaged in the January 6th 2021 attack on the Capitol building in the USA. A major issue with the QAnon conspiracy theory is that none of its predictions have come true.

Since 2016, the QAnon conspiracy theory has spread to Aotearoa. Its spread was hastened during the COVID-19 pandemic, amplified by bad actors like Damien De Ment and Counterspin Media. QAnon theories have been repeatedly espoused by many of the individuals listed above, with protestors holding Trump 2024 flags and framing the Government's COVID-19 restrictions as the machinations of a Satanic pedophilic elite. [Counterspin Media called for protestors to storm Parliament](#) and [overthrow the Government](#), which they framed as a local instance of "the Storm." One reason that QAnon theories have found purchase in New Zealand is that there is a recent history of children being taken by the state and abused on a massive scale.



Caption: Picture of two pro-Donald Trump QAnon conspiracy theorists at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest, with one of them holding a placard that says "Trump Q Sent Us"



Caption: Picture of two "Trump 2024 Take America Back" banners at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest.

Communist and UN conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories that hold that governments around the world are controlled by the United Nations and a secret communist elite arose in their modern form from the American far-right John Birch Society in 1958. The John Birch Society falsely claimed that US President Dwight Eisenhower was a member of the Communist Party USA, and falsely claimed that the United Nations was trying to implement a world government. The John Birch Society and other American far-right groups have also espoused conspiracy theories claiming that the United Nations Agenda 21 is a plan by the UN to implement socialism globally. In reality it is a non-binding environmental sustainability plan.

Following the 1950s these conspiracy theories have spread globally, including to Aotearoa. Since the 1960s, members of New Zealand far-right have repeatedly applied these conspiracies to the Labour Party, which is actually a pro-capitalist social democratic party. The spread of these conspiracy theories has intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the above bad actors at the anti-COVID protections protests claimed that the Government's COVID-19 restrictions are being put in place by "communist" Jacinda Ardern in order to implement Agenda 21 and establish socialism in Aotearoa.



Caption: Protestor holding the sign saying “NZ Is A Democracy Not a Communist State!!!” at the 2022 Wellington anti-COVID-19 protections protest.



Caption: Protester holding a placard saying Ardern supports UN Agenda 2021/2030 at a 2021 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest.

Nuremberg Trials and Summary Executions

Bad actors at the anti-COVID protections protests have repeatedly and falsely claimed that the COVID-19 vaccine rollout violates the Nuremberg Code, and called for the Government, academics and civil society figures to be put on trial and executed along the lines of the Nuremberg Trials. These calls for trial and execution began in anti-mandate protests globally and then spread to New Zealand once the local protests began. Such calls are dangerous, without factual foundation and help create a political climate where political violence is legitimised. This atmosphere of political violence has led to bad actors inciting violence at the protests, and some protestors engaging in physical violence and verbal abuse of members of the public.

The Nuremberg Trials were military tribunals in 1945-1946 that prosecuted the Nazi Party's leadership for engaging in war crimes during the Second World War. Out of these trials arose the Nuremberg Code, which was a set of research ethics principles for human medical experimentation. The COVID-19 vaccine does not violate the Nuremberg Code. COVID-19 vaccines have a strong evidence base regarding their safety and efficacy based on rigorous trials and their successful use by billions of people globally — they are not a form of human medical experimentation as outlined in the Code. Bad actors' calls for government officials to be put on 'Nuremberg Trial' and executed are without foundation. The Nuremberg Trials ended in 1946, and the Government's COVID-19 response is not a breach of the international law or war crimes which the Trials considered. Like the individuals who falsely compared the Government's COVID-19 response to Nazism, this comparison is insensitive and without factual foundation.



Caption: Picture of a placard saying that “Nuremberg 2 Will Be A Blast” next to “Labour Govt” with an arrow pointing at a noose at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest.



Caption: Picture of placards saying Jacinda Ardern is Adolf Ardern, opposing vaccines and Ardern with a Nazi flag on it, and saying there will be Nuremberg Trials for Jacinda Ardern, Chris Hipkins and Ashley Bloomfield at a 2021 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest.

Misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, there has been an accompanying deluge of misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions. These false statements and misrepresentations range from claims that COVID-19 isn't real, vaccines are a harmful bioweapon, and restrictions are a plot by the Government to end people's human rights and establish a tyrannical regime.

COVID-19 disinformation has been spread by individuals here as well as by international bad actors like the “Disinformation Dozen”, which are twelve online accounts responsible for almost two thirds of all anti-vaccine content circulating on social media platforms. This “infodemic” has led to people in Aotearoa to believe in COVID-19 and other related conspiracy theories, and becoming disconnected from the scientific and social reality of COVID-19.

For decades, the far-right have been looking for ‘wedge issues’, divisive political issues that allow them to increase their support base in order to expand from a few small sects to a broader social movement. The far-right has found an effective wedge issue in the form of the government's COVID-19 restrictions. The spread of conspiracism, along with broader discontent about the Government's COVID-19 restrictions, has created a social base that can be taken advantage of and further radicalised. The further spread of far-right ideology, if left unchecked, will lead to an Aotearoa filled with more hate and more accepting of political violence.

Throughout the anti-COVID protections protests we saw protestors radicalised by disinformation become more willing to use violence. Protesters [sent death threats to Members of Parliament and media](#), [engaged in violence against Police](#), [physically assaulted members of the public](#), [sexually assaulted other protestors](#), and set fire to or tried to set fire to [university buildings](#), [tents](#) and the [Wellington Parliament's Children's Playground](#).

After the Parliament occupation was cleared by Police, some of the protestors then tried to [occupy Wainui-o-mata marae and physically assaulted protectors of the marae when they refused to let them occupy it](#). Far-right protestors who participated in the occupation have also gone on to organise a 14 day protest in Wellington calling for an end to COVID-19 protections, the NZ Government ending ties with the World Economic Forum and the World Health Organisation, the Three Waters reforms and regulations on natural medicines. Some of the participants in the Parliament occupation have now set up an occupation in Māhanga Bay after they failed at an occupation at Shelly Bay, with protestors having killed, skinned and eaten a seal during the occupation. Sovereign Citizens also hijacked a 2,000 strong Anzac Day service in Paraparaumu.

The longer misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, vaccines and restrictions spread, the more radicalised people will become, and the more likely they will be to embrace far-right ideology and act on calls for violence.



Caption: Picture of tents at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest with the placards “End the Mandates Now!” and “Growing Up Governments Told Us Not To Do Experimental Drugs Now They Mandate Them” next to them, with the latter referring to COVID-19 vaccines.



Caption: Picture of various placards at the 2022 Wellington anti COVID-19 restrictions protest, including “Investigate Evidence of Vax Contamination”.

Tools and resources

Conspiracies: differentiating between fact and fantasy

False claims of conspiracy are very common in the anti-mandate movement, as well as in the far-right more generally. However, we have to acknowledge that sometimes conspiracies *really do happen*, and we need a way to distinguish plausible allegations from false theories that are clearly fantastical and outlandish in nature.

One way to do this is to separate out serious, plausible “conspiracy theories” from impossible “conspiracy fantasies”.³ Plausible theories have features that fantasies do not, and there are some simple signs that an idea is a conspiracy fantasy. Some of the traits of plausible conspiracy theories and conspiracy fantasy are below (this information comes from [this episode of the Conspiracy Games and Countergames podcast](#)).

Plausible conspiracy theories

Plausible conspiracy theories have the following traits:

- a precise focus and an easily summarised purpose, like a political party spying on its opponents
- involve a limited number of actors (maybe big, but still limited, like Watergate);
- involve mistakes, flaws, and imperfections that lead to them being revealed
- end once they’re discovered and reported, which usually happens within a few years of them starting; mostly revealed by journalists, researchers etc. rather than by conspiracists
- are inseparable from the time and place they occur and become history once that era is over (e.g. the 1970s).

Conspiracy fantasies

Conspiracy fantasies have the following traits:

- have a blurred and imprecise focus, like controlling the whole world
- involve a potentially unlimited number of actors
- always go perfectly according to plan, with no mistakes or traitors, if something seems to go wrong it’s because “they” wanted it to
- do not end when exposed or debunked
- are eternal, never become a part of history, and do not belong to any particular era (compare e.g. the Watergate conspiracy to “the Jewish conspiracy”).

³ This is the term preferred by Allington, Buarque and Flores in their article [Antisemitic conspiracy fantasy in the age of digital media: Three ‘conspiracy theorists’ and their YouTube audiences](#). (2020).

Other resources about conspiracy fantasies and misinformation

- The Q in Qonspiracy - Interview with Wu Ming 1, [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) (both episodes of the Conspiracy Games and Countergames podcast)
- [Ethics of Conspiracy Theorising in the Age of the Novel Coronavirus](#), a talk by MRX Denith.
- This chart outlining principles of misinformation from Joan Donovan:



Further resources on Media Distrust

- Green MP Teanau Tuiono suggests getting information from Māori media rather than from corporate social media. This view is outlined in [this tweet](#) and [opinion piece](#).
- Tina Ngata looks at this theme in her work, including the blog post [Rangatiratanga in the Age of Misinformation](#) and her podcast “What a load of colony”.

Appendix: background information

The authors of this booklet acknowledge our left wing political positioning. However, this booklet is designed to be relevant and useful for as many people as possible. In this spirit of inclusivity we hope that this will find a wide audience. This appendix aims to provide additional background information to readers about the perspectives of the authors, including an outline of some of the differing views we hold in regards to the role of government in supporting communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. While our opinions are complex and internally divided on many of the details of how COVID-19 responses should be handled, we are united in our recognition that COVID-19 is real, contagious, and deadly at a population level, which means it is deadly to people in the population.

Covid-19 has caused significant death and long-term health effects

We are in the midst of compounding tragedies stemming from COVID-19 — the grief and trauma are ongoing. At the time of writing there have been [474,816,380 confirmed COVID-19 cases with 6,099,380 deaths](#), representing a 1.28% death rate. On top of this, [more than 50%](#) of people infected with COVID-19 experience persistent so-called “Long COVID” symptoms such as fatigue, fever, pain, decrease in mobility, difficulty concentrating, anxiety disorders, lung abnormalities, cardiovascular issues, skin conditions, and digestive issues (there are differences in this rate depending on where you live and vaccination status). The seriousness of the long- and short-term effects of COVID-19 is compounded by the disease’s contagiousness (especially that of the recent Omicron variant). The dangers associated with COVID-19 are also heavily concentrated among vulnerable groups such as the elderly and those facing auto-immune diseases, but also marginalised communities in general [as a result of things like inadequate information and healthcare access](#). Reflecting this, the Health Sector Workers Network of Aotearoa [support mandatory vaccinations](#) for people in their field.

Faced with this massive scale of loss, it can be hard to put faces to the numbers, especially from the relative reprieve on Aotearoa’s shores. It is critical that we consciously bring empathy and foresight to discussions about our response to COVID-19.

Government COVID-19 measures

Against the backdrop of COVID-19 infections, deaths and long-term impacts, governments have implemented a wide range of measures with the stated aim of protecting public health (and, some would argue, to increase their power). In Aotearoa New Zealand, these measures include Level 3 and 4 lockdowns used in 2020 and 2021, a range of vaccination requirements (“mandates”) for certain workforces and entry to some establishments, and mandatory scanning and masking requirements in some circumstances.

The authors of this booklet are divided on the exact remit the state should have in implementing measures and restrictions. However, we are united in our belief that communities and whānau must be supported to survive and thrive in this changing world, whether that be through government spending (free GP visits, increased sick leave, liveable unemployment and sickness benefits, support for rural and Māori health initiatives, massive overhauls of building

ventilation systems, etc) or community centred mutual aid approaches. Realistically, we expect there will need to be a combination of the two moving forward.

One area where we are internally divided is around the central government's decision to make Covid-19 vaccination mandatory in certain workforces. Māori and Pasifika whānau have expressed legitimate concerns about abuses of state power, bearing heavily on their communities' ability to trust the health, welfare, and justice systems. Many Māori and Pasifika communities mobilised to support the vaccination effort. Checkpoints were also established in many rohe to limit the spread of COVID-19. However, [some community leaders](#) expressed opposition to government-imposed vaccination requirements.

The age-based rollout resulted in early access to the vaccine being given to a higher proportion of non-Māori than Māori. When the 'traffic light system' was introduced, easing lockdown restrictions, Māori had much lower vaccination rates than non-Māori, exposing Māori to greater health risks. The vaccination strategy and the move to the traffic light system have thus been condemned for not actively protecting Māori, and therefore [violating Te o Tiriti Waitangi](#).

COVID-19 vaccines

International protests have emerged against not just vaccine mandates, but often against the science of vaccines themselves. The authors of this booklet are in agreement that vaccines are one of the pinnacles of modern medicine and are directly responsible for the repression of otherwise life-destroying illnesses such as Polio (to which one booklet author lost a grandparent after 30 years of partial paralysis). mRNA vaccines — which include the Pfizer vaccine used in Aotearoa New Zealand — are based on an emergent technology, and [COVID-19 is the first disease they have been rolled out for](#). However, the research behind mRNA vaccines has been underway for decades, and the mRNA vaccines used for COVID-19 have been double-blind tested.

Despite the incredible advances in medicine that researchers are [hopeful mRNA vaccines will support](#) beyond COVID-19, there are extremely legitimate concerns of the role of “big pharma” and its collusion with governments around the world. There are also [significant issues around patents and intellectual property](#) which prevent people (especially in developing countries) accessing life saving medicines — including COVID-19 vaccines — at a reasonable cost. These issues reflect the reality of modern capitalism, where our health is tied to the dollar.

We do not present any fast answers except to say that — regardless of these important issues — vaccines work, and COVID-19 vaccines are proven to be safer than the risks of contracting the disease (noting that different vaccines have different effectiveness, ways of working, and associated risks). Moreover, we uphold the leftist history of support for intellectualism and the scientific method more broadly, while recognising the ways ‘science’ has been misused to further racism, colonialism, imperialism, transphobia, misogyny, ableism, and classism.

We recommend [this article](#) which provides more information about COVID-19 vaccines.

Concluding thoughts

We echo calls from our Māori and Pasifika whānau for kotahitanga and whanaungatanga in our dealings with people who are legitimately impacted by mis- and disinformation (as opposed to bad actors).

The anti-COVID protections protests come from a variety of factors and represent a very mixed blend of people, groups, and motivations. We acknowledge those members who feel their legitimate questions are not being answered sufficiently, but swiftly and decisively condemn aspects of the anti-COVID protections protests that openly espouse white supremacist and fascist ideals (see our [earlier booklet](#) for our detailed definitions). We condemn calls for the extrajudicial murder of anyone who supports COVID-19 safety measures, those heartlessly comparing COVID-19 safety measures to the Holocaust, those supported by astro-turfed far-right international campaigns that do not even make sense in our government model, those committing violence, and those who peddle intentionally in disinformation for political and/or financial gain. Lines must be drawn, not just among the left, but critically among the supporters of these protests against the manipulative and dangerous factions.

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