

# 'Dozen' created 73% of disinformation during Parliament protest

59 mins ago

**On March 2, 2022 hundred of protesters were being removed from Parliament grounds and surrounding streets, as a major police operation took place.**



Matt King took part in the recent anti-mandate protest there. (Source: 1News)

**By Tessa Parker**

The occupation, and eventual demise of it, was bold in real life; vegetable gardens planted, a strong smell and loud chanting. But it had a bigger life online, which according to The Disinformation Project, changed the narrative of the protest and pushed it towards violence.

The Disinformation Project is a research centre, examining information and information disorders in New Zealand.

During the Wellington protest, the organisation reviewed social media data daily, clocking hundreds and thousands of data points a day.

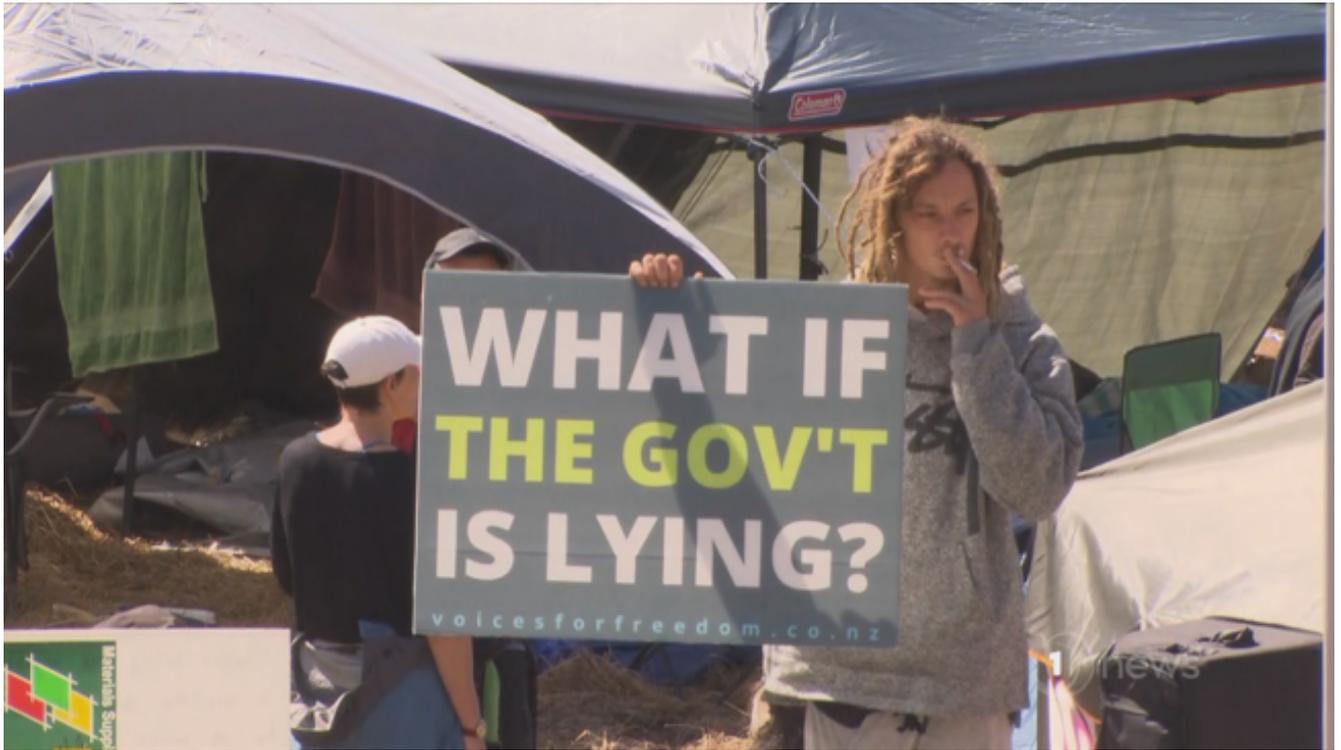
"We used a combination of techniques, we studied pages and groups through software called crowd tangle. We look at multiple platforms and the specific words, messages, themes, what this means for the audience," says Kate Hannah, director of The Disinformation Project.

On March 2, during the police operation, almost every third person can be seen videoing on their phone, and likely live streaming. Video content of the protest was spread across Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Zello and Telegram, all on public domains monitored by the researchers.

Despite the volume of content, 73% of the disinformation identified on Facebook was created by only 12 people.

"The key accounts have been growing through the pandemic, then during the protest everyone was interested and started tuning in to watch. That includes watching those livestreams that were feeding out disinformation."

The Disinformation Project tracked the growth of Covid-19 content and engagement during this time.



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Wellington's protest saw disadvantaged Kiwis, including many Māori and Pasifika, protest alongside white supremacists. (Source: 1News)

Between February and March, the alternative social media site Telegram grew by 100,000 people. At the beginning of the convoy, one page spreading disinformation posted the most engaged with content across all Facebook pages in New Zealand.

Then, on February 11 in New Zealand, more people watched Facebook videos that included disinformation than videos posted by mainstream media.

In it's research, The Disinformation Project says the attention given to these 12 accounts is how a protest that wasn't vaccine mandate specific also ended up at the Parliament occupation.

"Those leading producers came into the Covid-19 protest with pre-existing values about what it means to be a New Zealander and who's allowed to be a New Zealander. During the protest, even though it was about Covid, they brought these goals.

"When people have a strong grievance, they are pushed into seeing an in and out group" says Hannah.

The Disinformation Project says people used Covid-19 disinformation like a 'trojan horse', initially discussing disinformation, but quietly pushing their own ideas that go larger than the pandemic.

"Covid-19 was never the only end goal of those sharing and producing disinformation over the past two years, they have strong ideas on what New Zealand should look like.

"The original intent of the protest to audiences was the replication of the convoy, and to protest vaccination and the idea of mandates and loss of jobs. While that narrative started the convoy, it did change during the occupation, so by the end the narrative was around resistant to the state, government and mainstream media with violent and misogynistic language."