

Racist posts promoting anti-Māori sentiment on rise - researcher

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Anti-Māori sentiment online is increasing with many Māori MP's being threatened, abused and harassed.

But it's not just them. National leader Christopher Luxon was attacked online after using te reo Māori to pay tribute to the late Joe Hawke.

The Disinformation Project, a part of Te Pūnaha Matatini, has been tracking a rise in this behaviour for over a year but has noticed a significant spike in the past six weeks.

Project leader Kate Hannah said the anti-mandate protest at Parliament had caused an increase in disinformation and anti-Māori sentiment.

"A lot of the leaders of these groups have anti-Māori racist ideas sitting underneath their anti-vaccine mandate ideas."

'It gets really, really bad'

"They have opened those up and exposed people to further ideas against governance and that is where we see the racism emerging, particularly to Te Pāti Māori and other

Māori MPs."

Hannah's team monitors data from tens of millions of online posts, tweets, footage and quotes.

Hannah said "it gets really, really bad and it's really distressing, with people happy to post incredibly racist posts, which are incredibly misogynistic, violent or harmful statements with their own names and their own photos and images.

"We saw that in the response to the National leader's post about matua Joe Hawke. These are people, genuine online identities, these are their friends and whanau see them."

But Hannah pointed out there was another side to Luxon's post that was positive, and people welcomed and supported the use of te reo Māori in remembering Joe Hawke.

'Racist and misogyny go hand in hand'

Hannah said who people that are visibly different are targeted more.

"Wāhine Māori with moko are very much targeted as being visibly different and it's seen as offensive to be visibly different.

"This is in much the same way where hijab-wearing Muslim women are often the main target," she said. "It's about

controlling women's bodies and the ways in which they want to present themselves.

"We know that misogyny and racism go hand in hand in many people's minds. It's about standing up for people who are visibly different, to express themselves and to be who they are."