



Antisemitism and anti-vax discourse in Europe

A report on conspiracy
ideologies and anti-Jewish
hatred on Facebook
and Twitter



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Introduction



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Not many expected the impact that SARS-CoV-2 (more commonly known as the COVID-19 pandemic) would have globally. The pandemic took everyone by surprise and the scientific race that followed for the development of a safe vaccine was unprecedented. Usually, the development of a safe vaccine can take 10 years and cost billions of US dollars.¹ However, vaccines for COVID-19 started appearing within a year. At the time of writing this report there are 254,382,438 reported cases, while the virus has claimed 5,114,874 lives globally.² So far over 7.5 billion doses have been given to people and 41.6 percent of the world's population is fully vaccinated. However, despite this extraordinary scientific leap a large wave of antivaccination denialists has appeared globally.

Vaccine hesitancy is not a new phenomenon. According to the World Health Organization, vaccine hesitancy is a complex and context-specific issue that varies across time, place, and type of vaccine.³ At the same time, it is influenced by different factors such as community trauma, scientific scepticism and political beliefs.⁴ What might differ this time compared to the past is the way information spreads and the role of social media companies in the spread of information and misinformation. In 2020 the Center for Countering Digital Hate looked closely at the way tech companies power and profit from vaccine misinformation and found that anti-vax social media accounts have 58 million followers.⁵

Vaccine hesitancy is closely related to conspiracy theories that focus on science. Both can have lethal consequences. One of

the most recent examples that follows a similar pattern to conspiracy theories that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic is the HIV/AIDS denialist movement. This movement does not accept the link between HIV and AIDS and claims that the drugs that are administered to HIV patients are more harmful than AIDS and that their aim is to cause genocide.⁶

The rapid spread of misinformation online, as well as the narratives that are used in anti-vax circles, are the reasons behind these reports. By monitoring media across Europe, a pattern of misinformation was noticeable: anti-vaccination narratives throughout the continent seem to adopt antisemitic narratives which are common in other conspiracy theories. In previous reports published by *Get The Trolls Out!* – specifically the two reports that focus on the QAnon conspiracy theory – the role of the internet, and specifically Big Tech, was clear. Continuing the research that was started a few years ago on conspiracy theories and narratives, this report sets a more focused aim and attempts to identify antisemitic tropes within online COVID-19 anti-vaccination conspiracy theories in Europe.

With this as our aim, we tried to identify the connection between anti-vax conspiracy theories and antisemitism, and the way they spread on social media. Eight media monitors from *Get The Trolls Out!* partner organisations in Belgium (Flanders), Belgium (Wallonia), France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and the United Kingdom (UK) monitored Facebook and Twitter in their countries and identified hashtags, private and public groups, and prominent figures who spread misinformation related to COVID-19 and the vaccines. Through these results, they identified antisemitic narratives. The period monitored is from March 2021–August 2021, however, in some cases the period was extended in order to include recent developments.

The results of the monitoring exercise are not surprising. Antisemitic narratives are present within anti-vax conspiracies in the countries where monitoring took place. In some countries antisemitism is more subtle than in others, however, it is still part of conspiracist efforts to spread misinformation and fear. One narrative that all countries have in common is an old antisemitic narrative: a group of powerful Jewish people that want to take over the world. In most countries such as Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), France, Hungary, Germany, and Poland this powerful figure takes the form of philanthropist George Soros or of the Rothschild family, who are generally central figures in antisemitic conspiracy theories. In other cases, those powerful secret figures are not named but implied. In Greece – which does not always present the same narratives as the other countries – these forces are represented as part of a satanic cult that targets Orthodox Christianity. This is not surprising, as vaccine hesitancy is prominent within religious circles in the country. Another narrative that all countries have in common is that of victimhood. Our media monitoring showed that the comparisons to the Holocaust and the representation of citizens as the ‘new Jews’ are widespread. In demonstrations in the UK, Belgium, France, and Germany there were people wearing the Star of David in order to emphasise their similarities to the Jewish population that was persecuted in Nazi Germany and throughout Europe. Dog whistling is also another common trait in anti-vax narratives, which is represented by implying that there is something unknown seeking world domination.

Despite efforts to tackle COVID-19 misinformation by Big Tech, the role of social media in the spread of such narratives is clear and rather concerning. Anti-vax conspiracists use an abundance of online methods in order to spread misinformation and hate.

However, despite efforts for moderation it is clear that such moderation is not equal throughout Europe. Some of the groups that were monitored for this report no longer exist – for example in Belgium or Germany. But in countries such as Poland and Greece moderation has failed. In addition, even when groups are taken down for violating community standards, they tend to reappear on a different platform, usually a messaging app such as Telegram (Germany, France, UK) or Viber (Greece). Our research identified six key points that we will explore in detail throughout this report:

1. It is rather common for anti-vaxxers to use **Holocaust comparisons** and consider themselves as the '**new Jews**'.
2. Variation of established antisemitic conspiracy ideologies, such as '**The Great Reset**' and the '**New World Order**', play a significant role and are seen in several countries.
3. **Antisemitic dog whistle**, or coded language, such as using the word 'globalists' instead of 'Jews', is present throughout Europe.
4. Feeling or causing **fear** is one of the main methods of uniting conspiracists.
5. **Victim mentality** is common among anti-vaxxers.
6. Connections to the **far right** are present in several countries.

Report Outline

This section is followed by the presentation of the research key findings. This report attempts to connect the discussions around COVID-19 anti-vax conspiracy theories with the wider research on conspiracy theories and the presence of antisemitism within conspiracy theories. For this reason, it includes a brief review of the current academic literature. In this brief review, we explore the terminology around conspiracy theories, the profile of conspiracy theorists, the way conspiracy theories spread, and the history and role of antisemitism. The results of social media monitoring follow. Each country includes a brief overview of the results, the main conspiracy narratives, the platforms where they spread and the hashtags that are more commonly used. Due to several differences among countries, some sections may differ. Finally, the report summarises the results and makes some recommendations on the way forward.

Note on terminology

Due to its widespread use, the term COVID-19 is used instead of SARS-CoV-2 throughout this report. In addition, conspiracy theory and conspiracy theorist are used throughout in line with academic literature. In several cases the terms conspiracy narratives and conspirators are used as well in recognition to terminological debates.

Key Points



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1 Holocaust Comparisons and 'the new Jews'

Anti-vax conspiracists often compare the current pandemic restrictions to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, considering themselves as persecuted minorities within their own countries. These parallels are seen in all of the researched countries. In several anti-vaccine demonstrations, protesters were seen wearing a reproduction of the yellow Star of David, which was used in Nazi Germany and its occupied territories to identify Jewish people, with the word 'unvaccinated' instead of 'Jew'. In the UK the prospect of a vaccine passport was enough to label it 'a new Nazi tool', while in Flanders those who advocate for vaccinations get called 'vacci-nazis'. This comparison is contradictory to another dominant narrative in anti-vaccine networks: the conspiracy theory alleging that Jews seek world domination. Hashtags:

#NoVaccineCoercion

#StopDictatureSanitaire
(#StopHealthDictatorship)

#VaccinGaskamerAarzelng
(#VaccineGasschamberDoubt)

#Vacci-nazis

2 The Great Reset and the New World Order

One of the main antisemitic tropes pervading conspiracy theories such as the 'New World Order' is one of Jewish dominance and control. The 'New World Order' conspiracy theory, and 'the Great Reset' as one of its most recent variations, alleges that a secret

global elite (often a dog whistle for Jews) is controlling world events and plotting to establish a global totalitarian regime where humans are enslaved. In the Flemish region of Belgium this theory is present but peripheral, whereas it seems to play a more central role in francophone Belgium (Wallonia) as it is additionally influenced by French narratives. The Great Reset and/or the New World Order are also present in Germany and Greece. In some countries such as Hungary or Poland these terms may not be used as much, but figures that are central in world domination conspiracies such as George Soros and the Rothschild family are present. Hashtags:

#NewWorldOrder

3 Antisemitic Dog Whistle

Antisemitic dog whistles and coded language are evident throughout the researched countries. In France for example the use of the hashtag **#qui** (who) in combination with suggestive phrases such as 'Who is the enemy?' and assumptions that vaccines are produced or funded by Jewish figures reveals the presence of antisemitism. A similar pattern can be seen in francophone Belgium, as it is highly influenced by French-based conspiracy theorists. Similar cases can be seen in Germany (where coded words are used to avoid moderation on social media platforms), Greece (where religion plays a dominant role), and Hungary (where George Soros is at the heart of antisemitic narratives). The production of vaccines by people who are Jewish or perceived as such is strategically used to further these hateful narratives. Hashtags:

#NousSavons (#WeKnow)

#Qui (#Who)

4 Fear

Fear is common in conspiracies. Either fear of losing something or creating fear among the population in order to gain support. In Greece, for example, fear is connected to concepts of religion and nation. Fear of losing the nation, presented through phrases such as 'protect the children', are common in nationalist narratives. In addition, fear of being replaced by migrants, of becoming a minority, of subversion of traditional gender roles, or of the general dissolution of the Western society, which are present in many conspiracy ideologies are used to inflict fear upon the wider population. Fear is also connected to the possible side effects of the vaccines themselves, as those who refuse to receive the vaccine are afraid of their health, even though their claims are not based on scientific facts. Fear specifically of the COVID-19 vaccine is also connected to the wider restrictive measures, such as lockdowns, that have been implemented by governments to prevent the spread of the virus. These are often described as the deterioration of democracy. Hashtags:

#VaccinGeïnduceerdeDoodTwijfel
(#VaccineInducedDeathDoubt)

#VaccineSideEffects



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5 Victim Mentality

Victimhood is another narrative common in conspiracy theories and connects with the comparison of conspiracy theorists as paranoids. The connection between conspiracy theorists to paranoia is widely met in psychological research. More specifically, some psychology researchers claim that conspiracy theorists share similar traits to those who suffer from paranoia. However, in conspiracy theory research paranoia is defined very broadly and, in some cases, its clinical definition is avoided. Anti-vaxxers see themselves as the 'new Jews', a new minority within Europe that is being constantly targeted and persecuted by the COVID-19 measures, and whose elimination will lead to a world domination and the 'New World Order'. Victim mentality is closely connected to fear, and both can be located in all countries that are under discussion. Hashtags:

#depopulation

#CrimesAgainstHumanity

6 Connection to Far-Right Ideologies

While the anti-vaccine movement includes a wide variety of people, including individuals with more spiritual world views and left-wing positions, those who are exploiting these circumstances and the power of social media to fuel anti-Jewish hatred usually belong to the extreme right wing of the political spectrum. This is particularly evident in Poland, where the main anti-vaccine actors are well-known far-right politicians, including MPs. Those who believe in far-right ideologies seek an enemy and usually that enemy is the one who is different from them. Since, in their view, the COVID-19 vaccine is part of a wider plan that is connected to world domination, and this world domination if orchestrated by a Jewish elite, the enemy are Jewish people and those perceived to be Jewish. For them, the vaccine represents a future global domination and the attempts by governments to vaccinate their populations promote a 'health dictatorship'. On the one hand, there are those who have been vaccinated, while on the other there are those who resist to conform to any sort of control. Thus, by using antisemitic narratives, COVID-19 vaccine conspiracies try to radicalise those who share similar concerns. Hashtags:

#HealthDictatorship

#StopHealthDictatorship

Academic Literature Review



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Conspiracy Theory and Conspiracy Theorists

According to Jovan Byford, conspiracies and the definition of the term conspiracy are a topic of constant debate.⁷ However, despite the many disagreements, there seems to be an agreement in academic literature.⁸ For example, for Pigden a conspiracy is a 'secret plan' of a certain group that acts in secrecy in order to influence certain events.⁹ For Keeley a conspiracy theory is an 'explanation of a historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons - the conspirators - acting in secret'.¹⁰ In his attempt to conceptualise the global impact of conspiracy theories Lee Basham¹¹ sees a conspiracy theory as something evil that is embraced by paranoids. In his definition conspiracy theories are 'terrible entities':

"A 'conspiracy theory' is an explanation of important events that appeals to the intentional deception and manipulation of those involved in, affected by, or witnessing these events. These deceptions/manipulations involve multiple, cooperating players. While there is no contradiction in the phrase 'conspiracies of goodness,' the deceptions and manipulations implied by

*the term 'conspiracy theory' are usually thought to express nefarious, even insanely evil, purposes. A total malevolent global conspiracy is the extreme example. Imagine that the 'world' as we know it today is an elaborate hoax. A cabal of unaccountable, parasitic power elites virtually unknown to the public controls the economy, politics, popular ideology, and pop culture and so, by causal implication, the lives of the masses."*¹²

There is certainly an abundance of conspiracy theories throughout history. From John F. Kennedy's assassination and Elvis Presley's death, to the Illuminati, the New World Order and the supporters of the Flat Earth, conspiracy theories and their supporters deal with covert operations, political cover-ups, and scandals in which there is always someone working in secrecy and pulling the strings of everything around us.¹³

Conspiracy theorists question documented and verifiable facts.¹⁴ QAnon is one of the most prominent examples. QAnon emerged on 4Chan and immediately gained prominence in the USA.¹⁵ From beliefs of a supposed deep state, to that of satanic and cannibalistic paedophiles that rule the world, to anti-vaccination claims, QAnon theories primarily spread online.¹⁶ However, the US Capitol riots in 2020 exposed their violent nature. According to National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) there were at least 34 QAnon supporters in the siege of the Capitol and at least 32 had committed crimes before the Capitol Riots including weapons possession, terrorist threats, felonies, kidnapping and murder among others.¹⁷

Conspiracy theories can do more harm than good; however, they do spread wide and fast. To understand conspiracy theories, the reasons people believe in them and the way

they spread, Douglas et al.¹⁸ looked at the wider literature that focuses on conspiracy theories. What leads people to believe in conspiracy theories is complicated and multifaceted. Conspiracy theorists are influenced by psychological, political, and social factors and they have epistemic, existential and social motives.¹⁹ They do not have one universal political ideology and they can be part of the left and the right wing of the political spectrum, although conspiracy theories are generally adopted by the extremes.²⁰ Nevertheless, certain conspiracy theories tend to have believers from certain political ideologies. For example, antisemitic and Islamophobic conspiracy theories tend to be embraced by the right wing.²¹ In addition, those who believe in one conspiracy theory tend to believe in others as well.²²

In the wider literature those who believe in conspiracy theories are associated with paranoia which, as a term, is used in its broader sense rather than its strictly clinical sense.²³ Byford uses the example of Grigorii Schwartz-Bostunich, a pro-Nazi Russian émigré, who thought his Gestapo bodyguards were 'Masonic agents plotting against him' to explain why historical research in conspiracy theories associated them with paranoia.²⁴ However, despite the similarities that conspiracy beliefs share with paranoid ideation, paranoia in its strict clinical sense cannot be associated to conspiracists.²⁵

The Spread of Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories thrive during times of crisis. Their presence is well documented throughout history, however, the way we now communicate and the rise of social media has changed the way they spread.²⁶ Furthermore, the role of non-traditional media in spreading conspiracy theories has been well

documented.²⁷ A nationwide survey in the USA by Stempel et al.²⁸ looked at the correlation of conspiracy beliefs and the media.

“As expected, we found evidence of robust positive associations between belief in conspiracy theories and higher consumption of non-mainstream media (blogs and tabloids), membership in less powerful groups, and personal economic decline. These findings support both the paranoid style and the cultural sociology theories of conspiracy theorizing.”²⁹

In addition, Rob Dacombe argues that social media

“enable the rapid spread of information based on (superficially, at least) plausible information produced by what appear to be reliable sources. This context matters, in part because it allows a great degree of individual agency in the dissemination of conspiracy theories.”³⁰

In 2020 the project *Get The Trolls Out!* published two reports that looked at the way QAnon grew and spread on social media.³¹ The second report that was published December 2020 used artificial intelligence methods to analyse QAnon’s presence on Twitter. It analysed over half a million Twitter messages related to QAnon. The results were staggering:

- 3,000 different QAnon-related hashtags
- 1,250 QAnon supporting Twitter profiles
- 1/3 of all tweets centre on coronavirus denial
- 1/4 of tweets originate from the US
- 7 main topics found among QAnon profiles: support for Donald Trump,

support for EU-based nationalism, deep state conspiracies, COVID-19 conspiracies, religious conspiracies and extremism

- 1/5 of all tweets target ‘Jewish Elite’ and ‘horders of immigrants’

The events that took place in the US capitol, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the recent Facebook scandals, highlight the role of social media in the spread of conspiracy theories and showcase that they have wider consequences for the society. Research has shown that conspiracy theorists are more likely to use social media to get information about issues that concern them.³² However, those who are more prone to be influenced by conspiracy theories that spread on social media already prepossess “a belief system hospitable to conspirational information.”³³

Antisemitism in Conspiracy Theories

This report’s focus is on antisemitic narratives in anti-vax conspiracy theories. Before moving forward with the analysis, it is important to look at the history of the long connection between antisemitism and conspiracy theories as discussions of conspiracy theories that exclude antisemitism are incomplete.³⁴ Antisemitism within the conspiracy culture goes as far back as the early 19th century.

In 1806 Augustin Barruel, a French author, publicist, and Jesuit priest, received a letter by someone who identified himself as Jean-Baptiste Simonini. By that time conspiracy theories about the Illuminati and Freemasons were already spreading. In this letter, Simonini claimed that he had infiltrated a Jewish community in which he was baptised and that they revealed to him that the Illuminati and Freemasons were founded by them, and they planned on taking over the world. It is worth

noting that Barruel had already established himself as a conspiracy theorist following his book about an alleged conspiracy that led to the French Revolution, and that the original version of the Simonini letter was never found.³⁵ When discussing the importance of the letter, Byford points out that “the document offers a poignant example of a pattern of reasoning which is fundamental to the conspirational explanatory style.”³⁶ The spread of antisemitic conspiracy theories is connected to extended rights that were given to the Jewish population. For example, Jews were considered to have benefited from the French Revolution when they were granted citizenship rights in France in 1791.³⁷ However, this led many to believe that they played an integral role in the Revolution.³⁸

In an overview of the history of the ‘Jewish conspiracy’ Byford³⁹ emphasises the role of the printed press in the spread of conspiracy theories and highlights several publications throughout history. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is one of those. The Protocols, which was first published in book form in Russia in 1905 by Sergei Nilus, is considered one of the most ‘infamous antisemitic documents of all time’.⁴⁰ Similarly, to the Simonini letter, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion explain how a group of Jewish elders will attempt world domination.⁴¹ The Protocols had several versions and their origin is contested. According to Hagemester, the origins of the Protocols is ambiguous.⁴²

“Investigating the Protocols, one often meets the border between fiction and fact and can observe how this border is crossed: the Protocols was compiled from a series of fictional texts and then presented as the authentic document of an actual conspiracy. But the literature about the Protocols also far too frequently ignores this border, when, for example, comprehensive and (admittedly) gripping stories take precedence over well-researched histories.”⁴³

Despite the ambiguity of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion’s origin, their antisemitic content is not disputed. They still remain the most notorious and widely spread antisemitic publication in modern era. Kofta, Soral and Bilewicz recognise the Protocols of the Elders of Zion as one of the two factors that places Jews at the centre of conspiracy theories.⁴⁴ The Protocols were published in the beginning of the 20th century and 17 million copies made their way to Europe and beyond; this made them the second most popular book after the Bible.⁴⁵ The other reason is the fact that Jewish minorities seemed to be more and more competitive in society, politics, and economics due to the rights they received in several countries despite the fact that they were considered a minority.⁴⁶

More recently, antisemitic conspiracy narratives seem to be connected to several events. From the spread of antisemitic narratives during the NATO war in Yugoslavia⁴⁷ to their presence in the COVID-19 pandemic which will be explored in more detail in this report.

Country Reports



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BELGIUM – FLANDERS

Brief Summary

Overall, antisemitic tropes of Jewish dominance seem to be a peripheral aspect rather than a central feature of online anti-vaccine conspiracy ideologies in Flanders. Conspiracy narratives such as the 'New World Order' and 'the Great Reset', include antisemitic dog whistles and tropes of an 'all powerful Jewish elite', but have a background role. Attention and criticism are mainly directed against national governments, tech giants and professionals in the health sector. Popular critics of COVID-19 policies, who are primarily politicians (such as Dries Van Langenhove, Theo Francken, and Sam van Rooy) resort to the unconstitutionality of measures, without directing this criticism at Jewish people, although these narratives provide the basis for more conspiratorial perspectives on social media. In short, Jewish people as a religious minority are only incidentally seen as responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. More noteworthy, and arguably problematic, is the prevalence of comparisons between the treatment of unvaccinated individuals and the Jewish persecution during WWII. Those who advocate for vaccinations are called 'vaccinazis', and receiving the jab is compared to walking into the gas chambers in Nazi-era concentration camps. These parallels downplay the severity of the Holocaust and

deeply affect those who suffered under the Nazi regime. These beliefs are widely shared on anti-vax Facebook groups, which host thousands of members.

Anti-vaccine conspiracy ideologies

At the moment of publishing this report, about 74 percent of the whole Belgian population has been fully vaccinated,⁴⁸ but in Flanders the rate reaches 80 percent.⁴⁹ Vaccines are not compulsory for anyone, including workers in the healthcare sector and nursing homes. However, to go mass events or take a flight, a negative COVID-19 test result or proof of vaccination is necessary. In the first half of 2021, Brussels saw a few rallies against COVID-19 measures that ended up with the police using water cannons and arresting hundreds of demonstrators. At the end of the summer, a few more protests against vaccines occurred in Brussels, mainly non-violent with demonstrators carrying placards with slogans like “Save our democracy” and “Protect our children”. The overarching conspiracy ideology in anti-vaccine circles in Belgium concerns the idea that the world is being controlled by a nefarious ‘cabal’ or elite which is using the COVID-19 pandemic to establish a totalitarian regime, depriving humans of their freedoms. Often, reference is made to ‘the Great Reset’. Originally, the Great Reset was the theme of the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) summit in 2020 calling for a new order – a greener and more social global economy – after the pandemic. This summit, and a book of the same title by the WEF founder Klaus Schwab and the economist Thierry Malleret, triggered a conspiracy ideology claiming that a malevolent elite is on their final stage of world domination.

Antisemitic dog whistling within ‘the Great Reset’

Across the anti-vaccine Facebook groups analysed for this research, references to the ‘Great Reset’ are abundant. Some of the content related to the ‘Great Reset’ presents antisemitic dog whistle – code words or sentences that seem innocuous to some, but are recognised as specific antisemitic accusations by those who are more familiar with them. For example, instead of using the words ‘Jewish’ or ‘Jews’ to refer to the elite implementing a world domination through the pandemic, other terms, such as ‘globalists’, are used. In many cases the accusations are against a precise influential Jewish individual, used as a symbol for Jewish control, wealth, and power. In COVID-sceptic and anti-vaccine groups, the Hungarian-born US philanthropist George Soros is often accused of controlling media platforms to spread the idea that vaccines are safe and beneficial, hiding the fact that they are DNA-altering, mind-controlling or lethal. Posts and comments label Soros as a ‘dangerous puppeteer’ responsible for ‘Gestapo practices’.

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8 april · 🌐

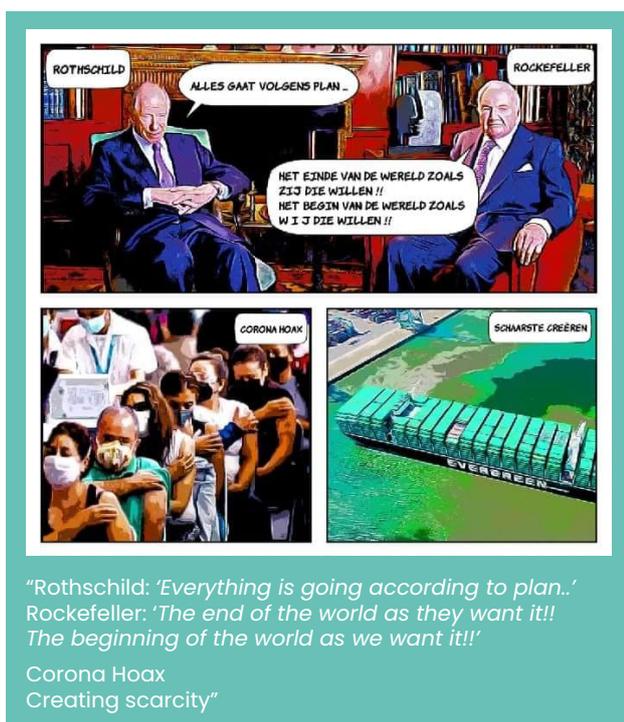
En jawel hoor, waar komt de vaccinatieplicht vandaan....bingo, S O R O S

[https://www.ongehoordnederland.nl/rapport-europees.../...](https://www.ongehoordnederland.nl/rapport-europees.../)

ONGEHOORDNEDERLAND.NL
Rapport: 'Europees Hof in de greep van Soros' • Omroep Ongehoord Nederland

“And of course, where does the mandatory vaccination come from? That is right, S O R O S”

The Rothschild family, another common target in the antisemitic conspiracy world, receives less attention but it is still framed as a collaborator, or financier, in this secret plot. The idea that both the government and the media are complicit in this ‘takeover’ prompts many to talk about revolting as the only way to tackle it, for example in phrases such as ‘we can [escape], if the masses revolt’.



Comparing COVID-19 restrictions to Nazi Germany

Another troubling narrative in Flemish anti-vax groups is the comparison between the government imposing COVID-19 restrictions and Nazi Germany implementing the Holocaust. “Our governments treat the unvaccinated as Jews” is a common refrain. Under what is labelled a ‘Corona-dictatorship’, those who advocate for vaccinations are called ‘vacci-nazis’, and receiving the jab is compared to walking into the gas chambers in Nazi-era concentration camps. Some anti-vaxxers argue that, similarly to the Nazi regime blaming Jewish

people for failings in both Germany and the world, they are also unfairly blamed for problems resulting from the COVID-19: “They will argue that it is all the fault of the unvaccinated, or those that put on their mouth masks wrong”. The comparison with the genocide of European Jews during World War II is also explicitly clear in online comments such as “Jews were also not allowed to go anywhere” in response to the proofs of vaccination required to access some venues, or “Germany also started with excluding people. History is repeating itself”. Implicit in the comparison is the perception of an ulterior motive behind pandemic restrictions; that restrictions are imposed with nefarious intent and ultimately aim to eradicate anti-vaxxers. Some go as far to say that “concentration camps are being reinstated”, or that “everyone who supports the government policy is a Nazi”.



Another comment says: “The bad logic of the vaccine zealots is akin to that of Nazis’ who claimed that Jews “hesitated”, because they did not volunteer for the concentration

camps or gas chambers." The likening of COVID-19 restrictions to the Holocaust is also captured in hashtags like

#VaccinGaskamerAarzeling
 (#VaccineGaschamberDoubt) and
#VaccinGeïnduceerdeDoodTwijfel
 (#VaccineInducedDeathDoubt).

These parallels are grossly inaccurate and disrespectful. They diminish the suffering under the Holocaust and downplay the trauma experienced by its victims.

Facebook groups

Flemish nationalist media outlets such as Doorbraak and Pal NWS, which are generally critical of 'the establishment' and reproduce 'Great Replacement' narratives, do not seem to platform antisemitic anti-vaccine voices. Opposition to the COVID-19 measures, and the use of antisemitic tropes and dog whistle, is mainly voiced by ordinary people on Facebook groups. Ranging from 2,000 to 45,000 members, they are generally private groups where access is allowed only to users that have to be approved by the administrators first. Some of these groups are: KVHV-Gent, Nee tegen vaccinatie en passpoort, Ja mensenrechten en vrijheid (No To Vaccine and Passport, Yes to Human Rights and Freedom), Belgie, Covid19 en de Waarheid (Belgium, Covid19 and the Truth), IK BEN EEN WAPPIE!!!! Wakker wappie (I am a WAPPIE [ed. believer in conspiracies]!!!! Woke wappie), Facebook voor ongevaccineerden (Facebook for unvaccinated), Nee tegen het Vaccin, Nee tegen COVID-19 vaccinaties en corona maatregelen (No against COVID-19 Vaccines and Corona), A.L.I.V.E, and België in Opstand (Belgium in Uprising). Very few of these types of groups emerge decisively on Twitter.

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook post. At the top, a user has shared a link from Times of Israel with the headline "Virus czar calls to begin readying for eventual 4th vaccine dose". The video thumbnail shows a man in a suit speaking at a podium with the Israeli flag. Below the video, there is a comment thread with several replies. The replies include: "Moordenaars" (Murderers), "GENOCIDE BOYS" with angry face emojis, "Onmogelijk dit, echt te gek voor woorden!.." (Unbelievable, too crazy for words!), "Ziek" (Sick), and "Dat de Vaccinazi's mogen branden in de hel! Nou, dan weten jullie het wel! Amen" (I hope that those Vaccinazi's burn in hell! Now, you know it well! Amen).

shared a link.
6 September · 🌐
Israël overweegt al de 4de shot.
See translation

TIMESOFISRAEL.COM
Virus czar calls to begin readying for eventual 4th vaccine dose

Visit the COVID-19 Information Centre for vaccine resources.
Get Vaccine Info

Moordenaars 🍌 3
Vind ik leuk · Delen · 3d
heeft geantwoord · 1 antwoord

GENOCIDE BOYS 😡😡😡
Vind ik leuk · Delen · Vertaling bekijken · 3d
heeft geantwoord · 1 antwoord

Onmogelijk dit, echt te gek voor woorden! ..
Vind ik leuk · Delen · 3d
heeft geantwoord · 1 antwoord

Ziek
Vind ik leuk · Delen · 3d
heeft geantwoord · 1 antwoord

Dat de Vaccinazi's mogen branden in de hel! Nou, dan weten jullie het wel! Amen
Vind ik leuk · Delen · 3d

"Murderers!"
 "Genocide Boys!!"
 "Unbelievable. Too crazy to put it into words"
 "Sick"
 "I hope that those Vaccinazi's burn in hell"



Documentaries

Among the anti-vaccine content shared online are two popular pseudo-documentaries: 'Val Van De Cabal' (The fall of the Cabal) by Dutch conspiracy theorist Janet Ossebaard, and 'Monopoly: Een Totaalplaatje Van The Great Reset' (Monopoly: A Complete Picture Of The Great Reset) by Tim Gielen. These works contain a wealth of conspiracy theories: from poisonous vaccines and chemtrails to the Pizzagate and Hillary Clinton's emails. Antisemitism is marginally present in the form of dog whistling.

BELGIUM – WALLONIA

Brief Summary

In Francophone Belgium, antisemitic tropes do not seem to be peripheral components of anti-vaccine narratives online. On the contrary, they often have a key role in supporting them. Antisemitic ideologies regarding an alleged "Jewish world conspiracy" supposedly linked to the vaccination programmes and related COVID-19 policies are frequently the backdrop against which the anti-vaccine conspiracy narratives play out. Further, analogies between the current public health policies and Nazi Germany, also through specific Holocaust-related language and symbols, are used to generate compassion and indignation, and to prompt actions against the vaccine and the health pass. The visible resurgence of antisemitism among anti-vaccination conspiracy narratives is of concern, as it tends to normalise antisemitism in public discourse; make Jews (and those perceived as such) more exposed to prejudice, hate speech, racial and anti-religious attacks; and make acceptable the scapegoating of minority groups. This research covered Belgian French-language content on Facebook and Twitter, but at times, it was difficult to distinguish posts and tweets shared from Belgium to those shared from France. France's media discourses also have a strong degree of influence over French-speaking Belgians, who consume both its news and online content.

Anti-vaccine discourses and the influence of France

At the moment of publishing this report, about 74 percent of the whole Belgian population has been fully vaccinated,⁵⁰ but in Wallonia the rate drops to 70 percent.⁵¹ Vaccines are not compulsory for anyone,

including workers in the healthcare sector and nursing homes. However, to go to mass events or take a flight, a negative COVID-19 test result or proof of vaccination is necessary. In the first half of 2021, Brussels saw a few rallies against COVID-19 measures that ended up with the police using water cannons and arresting hundreds of demonstrators. At the end of the summer, a few more protests against vaccines occurred in Brussels, mainly non-violent rallies with demonstrators carrying placards with slogans like “Save our democracy” and “Protect our children”. Among the most prominent public anti-vaccine figures in Francophone Belgium is Jean Bouillon, a doctor who led demonstrations in Brussels and Namur.

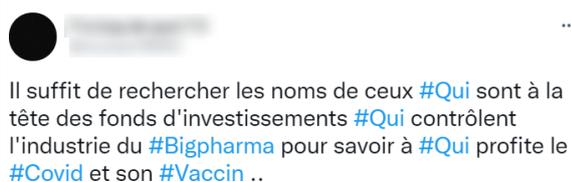
The influence that France’s news and debates have over the Belgian French-speaking population is rather strong. For example, the implementation of the COVID-19 health pass (*pass sanitaire*) in France prompted a series of anti-vaccination protests, as well as new anti-vaccination conspiracy narratives, in Belgium.⁵² Several studies⁵³ have found that, since the pandemic started, Belgium has seen a rise in conspiracy narratives and vaccine skepticism especially among French speakers.⁵⁴

Vaccine hesitancy and vaccine opposition encompass health concerns as well as lack of trust in authorities, whether it is the scientific community, the government or the media.⁵⁵ Combined with mis/disinformation as well as online conspiratorial milieus, this distrust can evolve into toxic conspiracy narratives. Similarly, criticism to the health pass might come from legitimate concerns on the social and economic exclusion of people, as well as on possible authoritarian turns. But when it is merged with pre-existing conspiratorial narratives, and the amplification power of social media, it has dangerous consequences as a driving force of anti-Jewish hatred.

“Qui” and the New World Order: antisemitic conspiracy narratives of domination and control

The pandemic has sparked a boom in antisemitic conspiracy narratives that explicitly or implicitly identify Jews as the plotters in sinister schemes to gain financial profit and power from the pandemic and the measures to address it. In Belgium, one of the most prominent hateful narratives that has gained popularity among COVID-19-deniers and anti-vaxxers is the ‘New World Order’ (NWO), a classic conspiracy ideology, with multiple permutations, that keeps taking on new shapes. Overlapping and coinciding with the newest version of ‘the Great Reset’, the NWO alleges that a secret global elite is controlling world events and plotting to establish a global totalitarian regime where humans are enslaved. Adapting to the circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic, this conspiracy ideology claims that COVID-19 has been created to dramatically reduce the planet population and to enforce authoritarian measures. Often hidden behind coded language, antisemitism is a fundamental part of this conspiracy ideology. Antisemitic tropes of Jewish domination and control can be identified behind references to George Soros, the Rothschilds, the Rockefellers as the masterminds of world events, as well as terms such as ‘bankers’, ‘puppet masters’, ‘scheming elites’ – dog whistle for Jewish people. Among the popular hashtags connected to this conspiracy ideology are **#NousSavons** (#WeKnow) and **#Qui** (#Who). With the former, users claim that they know that vaccines are ineffective/harmful/lethal, that they are being implemented to decimate the world population, and that it is the plot of a secret elite. The other hashtag, **#Qui** (#Who) is used to allude to Jewish people controlling the financial, political and media sector. It originated in France over the summer but

instantly spread in Belgium as well. “Who” comes from an interview with retired army general Daniel Delawarde on the French CNEWS channel in June 2021. During the programme, Delawarde hinted that a ‘specific group’ controls the media. When the journalist asked him who he was referring to, he answered “the community you know well.” Without saying it explicitly, the former general accused Jewish people of dominating the media sector. With the term **#Qui**, on online posts and placards at street demonstrators, anti-vaxxers refer to Jews and their control over the pandemic through their dominance in key sectors.



Il suffit de rechercher les noms de ceux **#Qui** sont à la tête des fonds d'investissements **#Qui** contrôlent l'industrie du **#Bigpharma** pour savoir à **#Qui** profite le **#Covid** et son **#Vaccin** ..

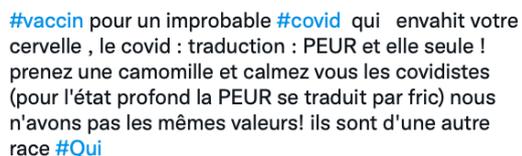
Le hasard **#Qui** fait tache ..

[Translate Tweet](#)

7:31 pm · 1 Aug 2021 · Twitter for Android

“It is sufficient to search for the names of those **#Who** are at the head of investment funds **#Who** controls **#BigPharma** industry to know to **#Whom** **#Covid** and its **#Vaccine** benefit ..

The randomness **#Who** stains ..”



#vaccin pour un improbable **#covid** qui envahit votre cerveau , le covid : traduction : PEUR et elle seule ! prenez une camomille et calmez vous les covidistes (pour l'état profond la PEUR se traduit par fric) nous n'avons pas les mêmes valeurs! ils sont d'une autre race **#Qui**

[Translate Tweet](#)

8:53 PM · Jul 1, 2021 · Twitter Web App

“**#Vaccine** for an unlikely **#covid** that invades your brain, the covid: translation: FEAR and fear only! Take chamomile and calm yourself covidists (for the deep state the FEAR translates into money) we don't have the same values! They are from another race **#Qui**”



Ils voient des complotistes, mais surtout des antisémites partout !

#Vaccin #PassSanitaire #juif #Qui

[Translate Tweet](#)



lemediaen442.fr

Ils voient des complotistes, mais surtout des antisémites partout !

La bourgeoisie voit des complotistes et des antisémites partout où la version officielle est remise en question. Ses réseaux sont puissants.

12:01 pm · 12 Aug 2021 · Twitter Web App

“They see conspirators, and especially antisemiteseverywhere !
#Vaccine #HealthPass #jew #Who”

Antisemitic comparisons with the Holocaust

Alongside conspiracy narratives on the sinister machinations of a Jewish elite, another antisemitic pattern emerged among anti-vaxxers soon after the COVID-19 vaccine roll out and the debate on the health pass. In COVID-19-denying and anti-vaccine networks, it became common to compare the way anti-COVID-19 health measures affect the unvaccinated to the way Jews were persecuted and annihilated in Nazi Germany. This analogy takes different forms, from literal comparisons to the use of a specific lexicon. The comparisons include the yellow Star of David – used by the Third Reich to identify Jews – with the word ‘unvaccinated,’ as well as the usage of Nazi imageries (such as the swastika) with the vaccine syringe. Others have equated the COVID-19 vaccination to the

inhumane and often deadly experiments that a group of Nazi doctors conducted on prisoners of concentration camps without their consent. At times, quotes or videos of Jewish individuals – experts, doctors, but also ordinary people – proposing Holocaust comparison are presented as a guarantee of the gravity, seriousness and veracity of the claims. Words such as ‘genocide’, ‘confinement’, ‘fences’, ‘camp’, ‘concentration camp’, and ‘dehumanisation’, which are generally associated with the Holocaust, were recurrently found in anti-vaccine content during the online monitoring for this research.

The memory and the heavy-loaded emotional weight of the Holocaust is used as a means to generate compassion and indignation, in order to prompt actions against the vaccine and the health pass. This comparison downplays the gravity of the persecution and oppression of Jews under the Nazi regime, but also throughout history, minimising or denying what antisemitism has caused and inflicted on those who are Jewish or perceived as such.



Platforms

While this section focuses on Francophone Belgian anti-vaccine networks on Facebook and Twitter, due to a common language, it was at times difficult to differentiate between users living in France and users living in Belgium. France’s public debates, including those on the vaccines and the health pass, also have a great influence into Belgium’s.

Facebook introduced strict community standards for the removal of hate, Holocaust denial and COVID-19 misinformation, but this type of content is still present on the platform – especially in comments, hateful rhetoric disguised to evade moderations, and private groups.⁵⁶ When they are private, groups are self-moderated discussion forums where the administrators have the right to moderation as well as the authorisation to approve individuals who want to join and see the posts. They function as echo chambers where users with similar views limit their exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforce the conspiracy narratives and hateful ideologies in which they believe.⁵⁷ Not only do these groups normalise hatred, but they also have the potential to lead individuals to more extreme narratives and far-right radicalisation.

Due to the fact that many Facebook anti-vaccine groups were private, and therefore not easy to access, this research on Wallonia and Francophone Belgium mainly focused on Twitter. Most of the antisemitic language and tropes identified within the anti-vaccine content on Twitter presents the abovementioned narratives, generally with very little text, and hashtags commenting on an image or video. Overall, these narratives are shared and spread by ordinary users rather than influencers, popular figures, or politicians.

FRANCE

Brief Summary

A highly worrying level of antisemitism is evident on anti-vaccine and anti-health pass content on both Facebook and Twitter. Since the beginning of the pandemic, antisemitism has been present in both COVID-19-sceptic and anti-restriction online spaces, but the vaccination campaign and the adoption of the health pass by the French government seems to have increased it. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gather in weekly street protests across France to denounce a 'health dictatorship'. Some protesters are seen waving antisemitic placards and wearing the yellow Star of David with the word 'unvaccinated'. A new antisemitic slogan, 'qui?' ('who?'), a veiled accusation that the pandemic is being orchestrated by Jews, is often accompanied by a list of names of known personalities that are supposed to be Jewish, suggesting that the Jewish community dominates the most influential sectors. While it is easy to detect antisemitism in anti-vaccine content on Facebook and Twitter, largely unmoderated apps such as Telegram host a huge quantity of conspiracy material as well as the most extreme levels of antisemitism and COVID-19-misinformation.

Anti-vaccine protests and conspiracy narratives

At the moment of publishing this report, about 75 percent of the whole French population has been fully vaccinated.⁵⁸ Vaccinations are compulsory only for health workers. Introduced in July 2021, a health pass (*pass sanitaire*) – a certificate issued to people who have tested negative, or have been fully vaccinated, or have fully recovered from COVID-19 – is mandatory to

access public venues such as restaurants and cinemas, as well as planes and long-journey trains. This policy has prompted strong opposition from a portion of the population who sees the health pass and the vaccine as an infringement of personal freedoms. Street protests have occurred on a weekly basis. According to interior ministry figures, each Saturday demonstration in August gathered between 150,000 and 200,000 marchers across the country.

Similar to other European countries, the opposition to the health measures brings together COVID-19 deniers, conspiracy theorists, vaccine sceptics, and anti-establishment groups. Large volumes of misinformation about COVID-19 have been circulating on social media since the beginning of the pandemic, including claims that COVID-19 does not exist or that its danger is greatly exaggerated, or that it has been purposely created in a lab.⁵⁹ Content shared on Facebook and Twitter alleges that the pandemic is a way for the government to take further control with the complicity of the media.

Others believe that COVID-19 exists, but the vaccine is dangerous, or useless, and is being promoted by the pharmaceutical lobbies to increase the wealth of some companies. Protesters are calling the current circumstances a 'health dictatorship' (*dictature sanitaire*) and see the health pass as a proof of the severe authoritarianism of Emmanuel Macron's government.

Although France's vaccination campaign and the requirement to hold, and show, a health pass can be criticised, opposition to vaccines and COVID-19 certificates often articulate dangerous antisemitic stereotypes that are becoming hate speech trends online and offline.

'Qui?' ('Who?')

On 7 August 2021, Cassandre Fristot, teacher and former member of the far-right National Rally party, marched during an anti-pass demonstration in the French town of Metz waving a placard with the words "Mais qui?" (But who?). The sign included two diabolic horns drawn, followed by a list of French and international Jewish public figures and the word "traitors!". Fristot was suspended from her job and put under investigation under accusation of seeking to incite racial hatred.

The question "But who?" was a reference to an interview with retired army general Daniel Delawarde broadcast on CNEWS in June 2021. During this interview, Delawarde hinted that a specific group controls the media and, when the journalist asked him who he was referring to, he answered "the community you know well". Without saying it explicitly, the former general accused Jewish people of dominating the media sector. Cassandre Fristot has not been the only one to use the slogan "qui?". Before and after her case was picked up by the media, banners displaying the same antisemitic question had appeared on the Saturday marches against the health pass in France. Similarly, on social media this slogan is shared in posts with antisemitic conspiracy narratives claiming that Jews are in control of key sectors and manipulate governments and people to their own gain.

Among the countless tweets with the hashtag **#qui**, many display photos of heads of pharmaceutical companies developing the vaccine. While it is true that, for example, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla is Jewish and is the son of Holocaust survivors, and that Moderna's chief medical officer Tal Zaks is Jewish and from Israel, false ideologies see this as proof of a secret Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.

Antisemitic tropes of domination and control

The age-old antisemitic trope of Jewish greed and financial control is, to a large extent, present in the expression of opposition to vaccination and the health pass in France. Criticism of COVID-19 measures often contains the idea that Jews are overrepresented in influential sectors (politics, finance, the media and the pharmaceutical sector) and are therefore making key decisions on how to manage the pandemic and profiting from it. High-profile figures that have publicly expressed support for the vaccination campaign have become a target of attacks, especially individuals who are Jewish or perceived as such. Cassandre Fristot's placard contained the names of financier George Soros, World Economic Forum founder Klaus Schwab, intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy, former presidential adviser Jacques Attali, ex-health minister Agnès Buzyn, and ex-foreign minister Laurent Fabius, among others. Most of them are Jewish.



On est pas le pays de pasteur, on est le pays qui s'est fait infiltrer par les kouchners et toute la clique. Kouchner, les maisons jaunes et les traffics d'organes au kossovo il n'en parle pas. **#QUI** veut nous génocider ?

BFMTV @BFMTV · 31 août
Pour Bernard Kouchner, le pass sanitaire est "un grand débat lilliputien"

7:38 PM · 31 août 2021 · Twitter Web App

"We are not Pasteur's country; we are the country that has been infiltrated by the Kouchners and his gang. Kouchner, the yellow houses and organ trafficking, he never talks about it. **#WHO** wants to genocide us?"

These names also appear on anti-vaccine content on social media, often accompanied by the hashtag **#Qui**. Bernard Kouchner and Laurent Fabius, former ministers who both have Jewish origins, are often accused of having “infiltrated” the healthcare sector in France. Lists of names, sometimes accompanied by pictures, of known personalities that are supposed to be Jewish are anti-semitic, because they imply, or explicitly state, that the Jewish community dominates the most influential sectors.

Another antisemitic stereotype that recurs within anti-vaccine content, on social media and on placards, is the allegation that Jews are profiting from the pandemic and that they cannot be criticised publicly. Adopting the US white supremacist Kevin Alfred Strom’s quote “To know who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticise”, some anti-vaxxers ask “Who can’t we criticize? Who is the enemy? Who is feeling targeted?”

Antisemitic comparisons with the Holocaust

Many anti-vaccine protesters feel betrayed by a government that is indirectly pressuring them to get vaccinated by requiring the COVID-19 health pass to access some public spaces. The government is accused of authoritarianism and of imposing a ‘health dictatorship’. When this criticism contains comparisons with the Holocaust, it becomes antisemitic. Demonstrators in France are seen wearing a reproduction of the yellow Star of David, which was used in Nazi Germany and its occupied territories as a means of identification of Jewish people. Comparing the current health situation to the crimes of the Nazi regime is grossly inaccurate and constitutes a serious form of minimisation of the horrors of the Holocaust.



“No to #healthpass
#WHO can't we criticize?
#WHO is the enemy?
#WHO is feeling targeted?
BUT #WHO?
#HealthDictatorship
#StopHealthDictatorship”



“The responsible is the one #WHO benefits from the crime” Seneca

#HealthDictatorship #StopHealthDictatorship
#PassOfShame #NoToTheMandatoryVaccine
#WHO #Resistance #Freedom #NewWorldOrder
#Gouvernement”



The French television show ‘Quotidien’ on TF1 reporting on anti-vaccine demonstrations in France

Accounts and platforms

Most of the antisemitic anti-vaccine content and hashtag are shared by ordinary users rather than known personalities and influencers. However, some political associations are also disseminating antisemitic conspiracy narratives related to the pandemic. Among them is 'Égalité et Réconciliation' (E&R), an association created in 2007 by Alain Soral, a Franco-Swiss far-right essayist with multiple convictions for antisemitism and Holocaust denial. While Soral has been deplatformed from mainstream social media, E&R is still allowed on Twitter, from which it shares antisemitic articles to its 32,000 followers. Another association, the Catholic, nationalist and extreme-right 'Civitas', is also actively using antisemitic conspiracy narratives when criticising vaccination. Some of their tweets, for example, contain antisemitic attacks against former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, who has Jewish origins. Civitas accuses him of disowning the government in order to pursue financial profit from the vaccination.



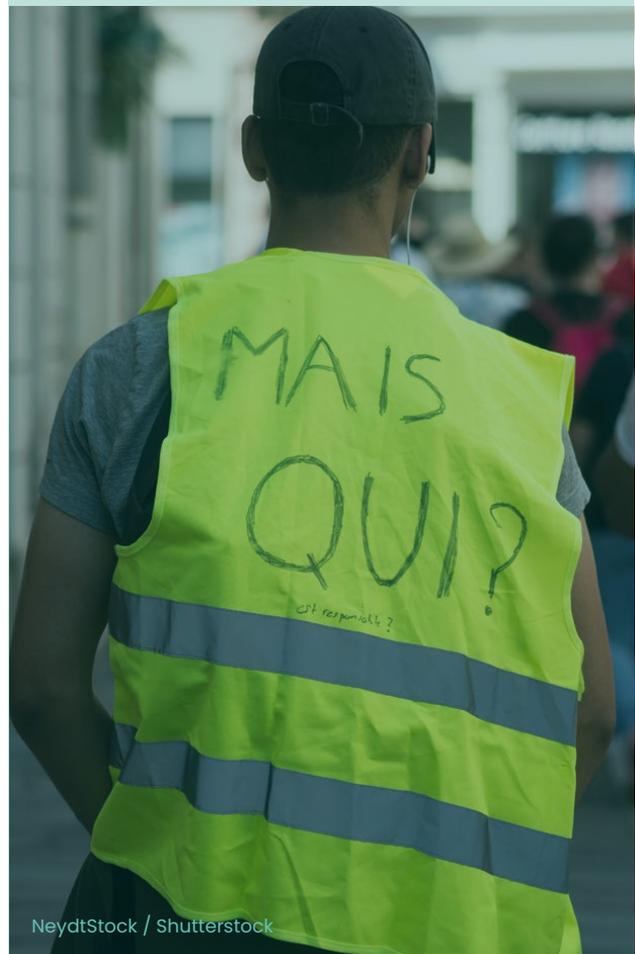
Qui imaginait le [#ConseilConstitutionnel](#) présidé par [#LaurentFabius](#) désavouant le gouvernement de [#Macron](#) au service de [#BigPharma](#), du Forum économique mondial et du [#GreatReset](#) ? [#Qui](#) ? [#Grève](#), [#boycott](#) économique et [#manif](#) partout ! Ni [#PassSanitaire](#) ni [#VaccinObligatoire](#)

PASSEPORT VACCINAL = VACCIN OBLIGATOIRE
BIG PHARMA FAIT SA LOI
[#StopDictatureSanitaire](#)

5:35 PM · 5 août 2021 · Twitter Web App

"Who imagined the [#ConstitutionalCouncil](#), presided by [#LaurentFabius](#) who has failed Macron's government serving [#BigPharma](#), the world economic forum and the [#GreatReset](#)? [#Who](#)? [#Strike](#), economic [#boycott](#) and [#demonstration](#) everywhere! No to [#HealthPass](#) no to [#MandatoryVaccination](#)"

This research has identified abundant antisemitism in anti-vaccine and anti-health pass content on both Facebook and Twitter. The antisemitic hashtag [#Qui](#) that became viral in the summer still continues being shared today on both platforms. However, users who feel that mainstream social media like Twitter and Facebook censor opinions (by having policies on hateful content and misinformation), have increasingly moved to other unregulated apps to share their content and interact with others. Antisemitic anti-vaccine conspiracy narratives are especially widespread on private groups and channels on Telegram.



GERMANY

Brief Summary

Due to the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG), it was difficult to find anti-vaccine content in retrospect (from March to August 2021) on Facebook and Twitter that was explicitly antisemitic. While these narratives abound on platforms such as Telegram (and to some extent YouTube), Facebook and Twitter have banned pages, people, and hashtags related to COVID misinformation and anti-Jewish hatred. On Facebook and Twitter, antisemitism mainly takes the form of dog whistling, and is present in conspiracy ideologies such as 'the Great Reset' and the 'New World Order' where terms such as 'puppets', 'string pullers', and 'globalists' are used. Antisemitic comparisons with Nazi Germany are also shared on the main social media platforms, with analogies between the current health regulations and the Enabling Act of 1933, a law which allowed Adolf Hitler to assume dictatorial powers. The 'Querdenken' ('Lateral Thinking') is the most active movement of pandemic sceptics, anti-vaxxers and anti-lockdown protesters in Germany. Operating on both social media and on the street, this group is becoming more and more radicalised and promotes antisemitic tropes within their anti-vaccine activism. Among the most prominent figures of the pandemic-denier movement are the vegan chef Attila Hildmann⁶⁰ has also been banned from Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter for sharing openly antisemitic and neo-Nazi content. Further, with the proliferation of false or misleading information during the COVID-19 outbreak, major social media platforms updated their policies around COVID-19 misinformation in 2020. On Facebook, for example, hashtags like **#covidioten** have been disabled, which means that they cannot be searched for and do not link to other content when they are clicked or searched. Other hashtags like **#ungeimpft** (unvaccinated) can be searched, but there is additional information provided on vaccination from official sources. These policies have pushed prominent hate actors to use other unregulated platforms such as Telegram. However, research by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue⁶¹ has shown that Facebook has failed to enforce the COVID-19 misinformation policies and seems not have taken meaningful action to counter it. Further, a study by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate⁶² revealed that a total of 12 anti-vaxxers are responsible for almost two-thirds of anti-vaccine content circulating on Facebook and Twitter.

The NetzDG and social media bans

The Network Enforcement Act, or NetzDG, is a German law adopted in 2017 that obliges large social media companies to promptly remove illegal hate speech in Germany. If platforms repeatedly do not take down

hateful content within a defined span of time (between 24 hours and one week), they can face fines of up to €50m (£44m). Due to this legislation, as well as the high levels of attention paid to online abuse by German civil society organisations, big IT companies have been deplatforming hate organisations and influential hate actors, in addition to deleting hateful posts and tweets. Some far-right alternative media outlets spreading antisemitic anti-vax content have been banned from Facebook. Among them, COMPACT, a right-wing online media outlet, online TV, and print magazine that defines itself a "Magazine for Sovereignty," has been banned from Facebook and Twitter since August 2020, but is still using Telegram and YouTube to disseminate content. The COVID-19-sceptic vegan chef Attila Hildmann⁶⁰ has also been banned from Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter for sharing openly antisemitic and neo-Nazi content. Further, with the proliferation of false or misleading information during the COVID-19 outbreak, major social media platforms updated their policies around COVID-19 misinformation in 2020. On Facebook, for example, hashtags like **#covidioten** have been disabled, which means that they cannot be searched for and do not link to other content when they are clicked or searched. Other hashtags like **#ungeimpft** (unvaccinated) can be searched, but there is additional information provided on vaccination from official sources. These policies have pushed prominent hate actors to use other unregulated platforms such as Telegram. However, research by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue⁶¹ has shown that Facebook has failed to enforce the COVID-19 misinformation policies and seems not have taken meaningful action to counter it. Further, a study by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate⁶² revealed that a total of 12 anti-vaxxers are responsible for almost two-thirds of anti-vaccine content circulating on Facebook and Twitter.

Anti-vaccine movements

At the moment of publishing this report, about 68 percent of the whole German population is fully vaccinated⁶³ – one of the lowest rates in Western Europe. Vaccination is not mandatory for any workers, including people working in healthcare and care homes. A survey⁶⁴ of unvaccinated citizens, commissioned by Germany's Federal Health Ministry, shows that 10-15 percent of the respondents either doubt official information or don't believe that COVID-19 is as dangerous as claimed.

Of the unvaccinated people surveyed, about two percent reject vaccines in general and one percent see the vaccination campaign as a money-making tool by pharmaceutical companies. Street protests against COVID-19-related restrictions and vaccines occurred in the main German cities, gathering thousands of people. One of the main rallies happened in Berlin in August 2020, with over 30,000 people taking to the street – a mostly peaceful demonstration until hundreds of protesters tried to storm the federal parliament. This protest, as well as all of the main ones, have been organized by the 'Querdenken' ('Lateral Thinking'),⁶⁵ a group of pandemic sceptics and deniers, anti-vaxxers and anti-lockdown protesters that is getting increasingly radicalised.⁶⁶ This movement also has no problems with neo-Nazis joining the demonstrations and the social media groups of 'Querdenken.' Far-right extremists use this chance to mobilize under the guise of 'worried citizens' for their own anti-democratic agenda.

The 'Querdenken' originated in the spring of 2020 in Stuttgart and then spread across the country, becoming a breeding ground for initiatives and small parties against vaccination and measures to contain the pandemic. These include 'DieBasis' ('Grassroots Democratic Party of Germany'), 'Widerstand 2020' ('Resistance 2020') 'Elternstehen auf

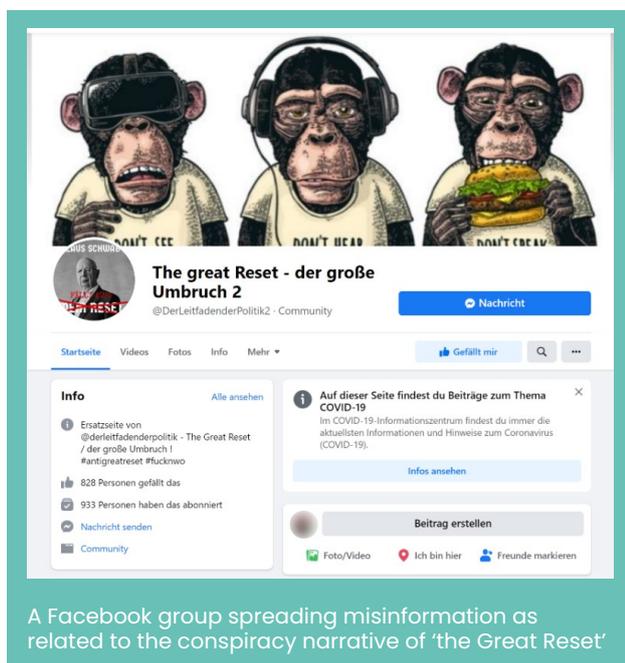
('Parents stand up'), 'Schülerstehen auf' ('Pupils stand up'). 'Parents stand up' and 'DieBasis' are present on Facebook and Instagram, with pages and supporters, but their leaders are banned from the two platforms. Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) has been monitoring the 'Querdenken' movement since April 2021 under a newly introduced category of concern: the "delegitimization of the state where relevant to constitutional protection."⁶⁷

Antisemitic dog-whistling in 'the Great Reset' conspiracy ideology

One of the most prominent conspiracy narratives that has gained popularity among COVID-deniers and anti-vaxxers is 'The Great Reset.' According to the conspiracy, a global financial elite is planning a reset of the current world economic order, and have used, or even orchestrated, the COVID-19 pandemic as a justification.⁶⁸ This conspiracy narrative originated from the 2020 annual conference of the World Economic Forum (WEF), which was titled 'the Great Reset', and its plan of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic through a greener and more social economy. A book of the same name has been written by the WEF founder Klaus Schwab and the economist Thierry Malleret. This recovery plan, however, has been interpreted by some communities opposed to the COVID-19 measures as the real explanation on why the pandemic is happening. At a 'Querdenken' demonstration on 21 November 2020 in Hanover, the now suspended detective chief inspector Michael Fritsch gave a speech asking the audience to engage with Klaus Schwab and 'the Great Reset', because "that's what it's all about, not COVID-19." The people in this 'sinister and mysterious' group with enormous influence on world politics and economy are often labelled 'puppets', 'string pullers', or 'globalists.' These are

antisemitic dog-whistling terms: references and insinuations that, without openly expressing hatred against Jews, draw on centuries-old antisemitic tropes that have falsely portrayed Jewish people as world masterminds deciding the shape of the global “new world order”. This idea was also expressed in the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” – a fake documentation from the early 20th century. Adolf Hitler used it to justify his murderous antisemitism and the Holocaust. Today, prominent Jewish people like George Soros, the Rothschild family, and the Bilderbergers are all common targets for conspiratorial antisemitism – they are often named as the key ‘puppet masters’ gaining world domination and enriching themselves through the recent health measures.

Other conspiracy ideologies used in groups opposing the COVID-19 measures are ‘the Great Replacement’, ‘Cultural Marxism’, ‘the Great Awakening’. All of them place emphasis on what they see as the plot of ‘globalists’ to destroy Western society, and enforce a world dictatorship, through migration to Europe, environmental protection, anti-racism activism, and health measures.



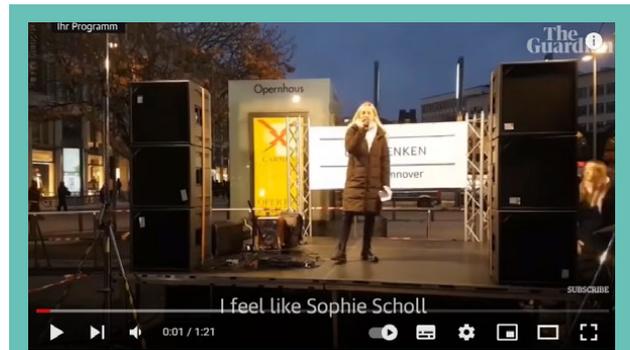
A Facebook group spreading misinformation as related to the conspiracy narrative of ‘the Great Reset’



Antisemitic comparisons with Nazi Germany

On social media as well as in street protests against the vaccination, pandemic deniers often use comparisons between the current pandemic circumstances and Nazi Germany. Anti-vaxxers stage themselves – in complete denial of facts and using the offender-victim reversal, anti-vaxxers see themselves as ‘the new Jews’ – that is as victims of the state (due to the COVID-19 prevention policies) like Jews were victims of the state during the Nazi regime. Some demonstrators wore imitations of the ‘Judenstern’, the yellow Star of David that Jewish people were forced to wear from 1941 in Nazi Germany to make them easily identifiable. In this current imitation of the yellow star, the word ‘Jew’ is replaced by the word ‘ungeimpft’ (‘unvaccinated’).⁶⁹ During the ‘Querdenken’ demonstration in Hanover in November 2020, a woman took the stage and said “I’m Jana from Kassel and I feel like Sophie Scholl,” comparing

herself to the German resistance student executed by the Nazis. During a rally in November 2020 in Karlsruhe, an 11-year-old girl said in a public speech that she felt like the Nazi victim Anne Frank, because she could not have a birthday party with her friends due to restrictions. COVID-19 policies and regulations have also been labelled ‘*Ermächtigungsgesetze*,’ the Enabling Acts of 1933 which allowed Adolf Hitler to pass laws without the need of parliamentary approval, paving the way to the Nazi dictatorship.



During the Querdenken demonstration in Hannover in November 2020, a woman took the stage and said: “I’m Jana from Kassel and I feel like Sophie Scholl”, comparing herself to the German resistance student executed by the Nazis.



Under a Facebook post by ‘DieBasis’, users comment: “I’ve been waiting for the start of the Nuremberg Code 2 for months.” “Someday the time will come when many will say: I didn’t know and I didn’t see it coming. Now I know how a certain Ado.. [Adolf Hitler] might come to power.” “Stop Corona Fascism”

Main figures spreading conspiracies narratives

Attila Hildmann, a popular vegan chef who used to appear regularly on TV, is a famous creator of online antisemitic anti-vaccine content in Germany. During the pandemic, Hildmann underwent a rapid radicalisation, becoming an ardent antisemite and a Nazism admirer. At its peak, Hildmann’s reach hit about 100,000 followers. Recently, these numbers have been heavily reduced. Not only was he banned from Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, but in September 2021, his former assistant leaked Hildmann’s personal information, including passwords and login credentials, to the hacker group Anonymous, making him lose access to his channels of communication. After fleeing to Turkey to escape German authorities, Hildmann is still spreading antisemitic misinformation on Telegram and his website, making false connections between COVID-19 and ‘the Jewish elite.’

Microbiologist Sucharit Bhakdi, one of the most prominent COVID-19 deniers in Germany, and founder of the new political party ‘DieBasis’, has also used antisemitic tropes when talking about the pandemic. On a video interview dated April 2021, he says that Jewish people have escaped

the evil of Nazi Germany, “found their own country and made something even more evil than Germany has ever been.” In this antisemitic rant, he also said that Jews learnt the evil very well and are implementing it. With these comments, Bhakdi is implicitly accusing all Jewish people of being responsible for the politics of the state of Israel and he is explicitly comparing the horrors of Nazi Germany to the Middle East conflict and the situation in Israel.

Among the influential figures spreading anti-vaccine conspiracy narratives are two very popular musicians: soul singer Xavier Naidoo (who has been active in the conspiracy narratives scene for years before the pandemic, but emerged during the pandemic as an engaged QAnon supporter), and the hit singer Michael Wendler (antidemocratic pandemic denial). In the summer of 2021, a group of actors led by renowned director Dietrich Brügemann published a series of short videos criticising the COVID-19 restrictions. It later emerged that the organisers were connected to the political party ‘DieBasis’ which developed out of the ‘Querdenken’ movement. The main proponents of this initiative were not well-known figures before the pandemic, but some of them were renowned in their fields, such as Sucharit Bhakdi. Others include actor Till Schweiger, doctor Bodo Schiffmann, IT entrepreneur Michael Ballweg, moderator Nana Domena, primary school teacher, Holocaust trivializer and YouTube Influencer Nikolai Nerling, former AfD politician Heinrich Fiechtner, former police officer Karl Hiltz, lawyer Markus Haintz, former physician and former SPD MP Wolfgang Wodarg and anti-vaxx heroine and YouTube/Telegram-influencer Miriam Hope.

GREECE

Brief Summary

Among all of the countries analysed in this report, Greece presents one of the lowest presences of antisemitic content in anti-vaccine and COVID-19-denial online spaces. The Greek anti-vaccine movement is mostly centred around the idea that vaccination is a threat for Christianity, without explicitly defining who is behind this threat. On both Facebook and Twitter, antisemitism appears in the shape of the two main tropes identified in all countries (the comparisons between the unvaccinated and Jews persecuted during WWII, and conspiracy ideologies claiming that an elite of powerful Jewish people are secretly plotting to gain control through vaccination). However, these discourses are not dominant and are not expressed by influential accounts.

Anti-vaccine conspiracy ideologies

At the moment of publishing this report, about 60 percent of the whole Greek population has been fully vaccinated.⁷⁰ Since July, vaccines are compulsory only for workers in the healthcare sector and nursing homes, and only vaccinated people are allowed inside bars, restaurants, cinemas and theatres. During the summer, thousands of people in Athens and Thessaloniki rallied to protest against the inoculations. Some of the protesters were holding wooden crosses and waving Greek flags.

Although the Greek Orthodox Church officially supports vaccination, the strongest opposition to COVID-19 measures and vaccines comes from Greek clerics and people with a strong Orthodox Christian identity.⁷¹ COVID-19 safety regulations, such as social distancing and masks, were never enforced in churches.

While the majority of anti-vaccine content on social media is closely related to the expression of a Greek Orthodox Christian identity, the anti-vaxxers could be roughly divided into different groups, although there are many commonalities between them.

Christians in danger: The opposition by some Orthodox Christians to vaccination sometimes crystallises into conspiracy narratives claiming that vaccines are a threat to the Christian population specifically. This narrative is closely related to both the New World Order and Great Replacement conspiracy ideologies. In the context of the pandemic, vaccines are seen as a tool to persecute Christians and make them a minority.

ΑΚΟΜΑ ΕΝΑ ΣΧΕΔΙΟ ΤΗΣ ΣΑΤΑΝΟΚΙΝΗΤΗΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΤΑΞΗΣ [youtube.com/watch?v=inr1HE...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inr1HE...) ΣΧΟΛΙΟ ΜΑΣ: ΑΚΟΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΑ ΔΕΝΤΡΑ ΘΑ ΕΧΟΥΝ "ΤΣΙΠ" ΩΣΤΕ ΝΑ ΜΗΝ ΜΠΟΡΟΥΝ ΝΑ ΚΡΥΦΤΟΥΝ ΟΙ ΔΙΩΚΟΜΕΝΟΙ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΟΙ. ΣΤΩΜΕΝ ΚΑΛΩΣ #NewWorldOrder

Translate Tweet

youtube.com
«Θα γεμίσουν τα δάση με...» - Η ανάρτηση του Γιαννακόπ...
Σε μια σοβαρότατη καταγγελία προέβη ο ισχυρός άνδρας της ΒΙΑΝΕΞ, Δημήτρης Γιαννακόπουλος σχετικά με το κολ...

9:04 pm · 12 Aug 2021 · Twitter Web App

ANOTHER PLAN OF THE SATANIC-DRIVEN NEW ORDER [YOUTUBE LINK] OUR COMMENT: EVEN TREES WILL HAVE A "CHIP" SO THAT THE PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS CANNOT BE HIDDEN. STAND WELL. #NewWorldOrder

The New World Order conspiracists: The New World Order (NOW) is a conspiracy ideology claiming that a global elite is secretly controlling world events to dismantle individual liberties, enslave humanity, and construct a world totalitarian regime. It is antisemitic when it refers to Jewish individuals seeking global control. Within the context of the pandemic, people who believe in the implementation of a New World Order, think that

vaccines are a means, for a global elite, to strengthen their powers and manipulate the population.

Θα με πείτε τρελό? Ψεκασμενο? (αν και τυπικά είμαστε κάτω από τον ίδιο ουρανό οπότε λογικά είμαστε όλοι ψεκασμενοι) αλλά ίσως και να υπάρχει μια δόση αλήθειας #εμβολιασμος #μητσοτακη_παραιτησου #COVID19 #NewWorldOrder

Translate Tweet

1. Create a Problem	Take a flu-like illness with very common symptoms, that can be easily treated and a 99.97% recovery rate. Essentially a last-dose of seasonal flu but like the regular flu can be dangerous to people with weak immune systems or serious underlying health issues. Call it COVID-19.
2. Provoke a Terrified Reaction	Use the mainstream media to provoke massive fear. Ensure daily reporting of any death of someone "test" COVID as being a death. "Stop" COVID. Report all "cases" even though most people have no or mild symptoms. Bribe scientists with grants and doctors with bonus payments for supporting testing and vaccinations.
3. Impose Lockdowns	Impose national and local lockdowns. Commence the "Great Reset" to transfer wealth and power up to global corporations and the financial elite: (1) Destroy small businesses; (2) Strengthen global corporations; (3) Cause a massive rise in State debt to international financiers; (4) Push cashless payments.
4. Exaggerate "Cases"	Use totally unreliable PCR tests to massively exaggerate the number of "cases" or so-called "infections" among healthy people who have no symptoms and cannot spread any infection.
5. Mandate Face Masks	Promote fear and to signal public compliance by mandating masks. In reality, cloth masks are totally ineffective against any virus. Prolonged use of masks actually increases health risks due to lack of oxygen, breathing in waste air and fungal infections.
6. Impose Contact Tracing	Normalise surveillance. Get people to accept having all of their personal movements and contact with people tracked, recorded and analysed.
7. Impose Health Passport ID systems	Introduce "health passport" apps for smartphones as a form of biometric identity card to monitor and control people's freedom of movement and ability to access education, employment and all types of services. These will become a global digital identity system that will be compulsory to go anywhere.
8. Rollout 5G Microwave Networks	5G networks allow constant gathering of huge amounts of personal data from smartphones and all internet connected devices. 5G massively increases the amount of high-frequency microwave radiation that can reduce blood oxygen levels and trigger COVID-like respiratory symptoms. 5G illnesses will be blamed on COVID to justify vaccinations.
9. Mandatory Vaccinations	Mandatory vaccination will generate massive profits for big Pharma corporations who have 100% legal immunity for all injuries and deaths. Vaccines will destroy natural immunity, increase identity rates and promote global depopulation. New Chik and H1n1 vaccines will create genetically modified humans bioengineered for obedience, sterility and easy control.
10. Cashless Economy	Cash allows people to shop in privacy. With cash the State does not know what, where or when you buy something. A cashless economy means a total loss of financial privacy as all purchases can be constantly monitored and controlled. Access to digital finance can be withdrawn from anyone who dissents from officially approved purchases, votes or behaviour.
11. Compel RFID Microchip Implants	Move from health Passport apps to "more convenient" Radio Frequency Identity (RFID) microchip implants that allow constant 24/7 monitoring of health, movements, contacts and digital payments. With RFID chips, all human privacy will completely cease. Initially, these chips will be voluntary. Once normalised, they will become compulsory.
12. Arrive at the Totalitarian New World Order	A bioengineered, high-tech totalitarian world with genetically modified humans, weakened natural immunity, micro-chipped, permanently connected to the internet, monitored and controlled 24/7. Human beings will be reduced to the level of "biological machines" living in a totalitarian prison. The real goal of this so-called "Great Reset" is high-tech Fascism / Communism. COVID is merely the excuse.

12:07 am · 21 Aug 2021 · Twitter for Android

"Will you call me crazy? Sprayed? (Although we are generally under the same sky, so logically we are all sprayed) but maybe there is a dose of truth #vaccine #misotaki_quit #COVID19 #NewWorldOrder"

Fake news lovers: These anti-vaxxers believe in the conspiracy narratives on vaccines mentioned above, but also read and share fake news, that is false or misleading information presented and formatted as news.



"Another pilot who collapses after vaccination during a flight!!! This "sudden death" strikes mercilessly!!"

QAnon-influenced conspiracists: Anti-vaccine discourses in Greece sometimes present elements that have been previously disseminated by QAnon, a movement which falsely claims that former President Trump is opposing a 'deep state' made of a Satanic paedophile elite.⁷² Conspiracy narratives around children over-emphasise a wicked danger against them to gain consensus. In this case, vaccines are presented as a nefarious means to kill children and decimate the population.



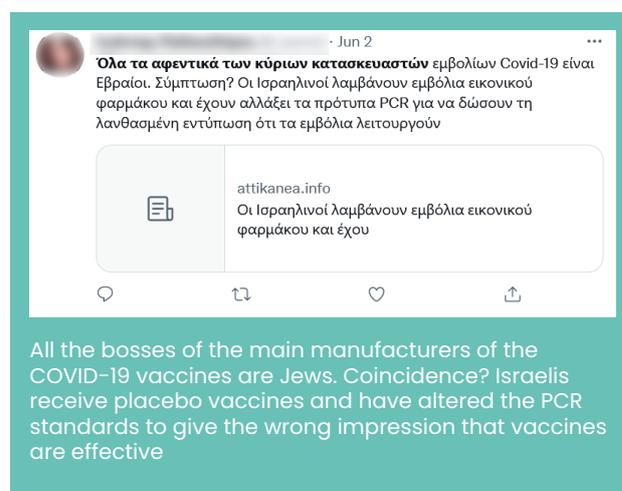
"What would they be sorry for my friend? This is what they want to achieve after all! #depopulation #WorldEconomicForum #NewWorldOrder #Agenda2030. Their agenda continues as planned. Children are the target! (and not only)"

Popular hashtags used on Facebook and Twitter to indicate anti-vaccine content are:

#NewWorldOrder
#5G
#vaccines
#vaccination
#VACCINATIONS
#Vaccine
#depopulation
#Agenda2030
#vaccineSideEffects

Antisemitism

Among the anti-vaccine conspiracy narratives illustrated above, antisemitic tropes and antisemitic dog whistling are not dominating and are generally on the periphery of the organised anti-vaccine communities, but they can be easily found. In line with the research results in other countries, at its core is the idea that Jewish people, or Israel, are in control of the vaccine production in order to dominate the world population for their own benefit. Within this frame, compulsory vaccination is seen as a plan by Jews and Israel.



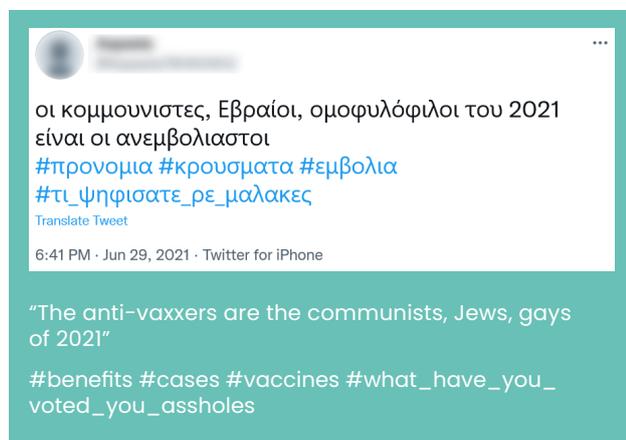
All the bosses of the main manufacturers of the COVID-19 vaccines are Jews. Coincidence? Israelis receive placebo vaccines and have altered the PCR standards to give the wrong impression that vaccines are effective

The idea that Israel is lying about the vaccine is also spread by far-right news outlets, such as Makeleio. gr (Mayhem). In November 2020, Makeleio,⁷³ on its front

page, compared Pfizer’s Jewish CEO Albert Bourla to Nazi war criminal and doctor Josef Mengele. The publication alerted its readers that he will “stick the needle” into them and referred to the soon-to-be COVID-19 vaccine developed by the pharmaceutical company as “poison”.

Some social media posts also blend COVID-19 conspiracy theories with both anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim ideologies, and narratives about the Antichrist. Other contextualise geopolitically the threat by additionally mentioning the menace of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Trivialisation of the Holocaust can also be found in anti-vaccine content, with antisemitic comparisons between the compulsory vaccinations and the German Nazi regime, as well as the anti-vaxxers and Jews during WWII.



Platforms

While it is possible to encounter COVID-19 and vaccine conspiracy narratives with antisemitic connotations on both Facebook and Twitter, it seems that anti-vaxxers prefer other social media platforms to get organised and reach a higher number of people. The instant messaging application Viber, for example, hosts numerous Christian groups of thousands of members where the Greek Orthodox religion plays a significant role. Facebook groups bring together fewer people, perhaps due to the crackdown on COVID-19 misinformation content – on paper at least.⁷⁴ Public groups identified during this research, such as “AGAINST THE NEW ORDER OF THINGS”, “VACCINES THE ABSOLUTE GENOCIDE”, and “NO VACCINES NO TEST ANYTHING OF ALL OF THESE! WE WANT FREEDOM COME TO SAY IT” show that vaccine misinformation, including antisemitic content, are not efficiently removed.



Alexandros Michailidis2 / Shutterstock

HUNGARY

Brief Summary

The anti-vaccine movement in Hungary is highly active and their most outspoken players are far-right politicians (Mi Hazánk party) and healthcare sector influencers (Gábor Lenkei, György Gődény). However, the movement does not affect the mainstream and even a significant proportion of the unvaccinated in Hungary do not engage with their activities. While conspiracy narratives blaming Jewish people for COVID-19 were widely shared online at the beginning of the pandemic, currently antisemitism is generally absent in the content that is being disseminated by anti-vaccine actors. When antisemitic comments are shared, they remain isolated and do not steer the conversation. Some ordinary users might express hatred against George Soros, which is a common antisemitic dog whistle, while others might trivialise the Holocaust by comparing themselves to Jews under the Third Reich. However, anti-vaccine narratives do not overall fuel and feed into antisemitic discourse, which is only very marginally present as a subtopic. The opposition to vaccines and COVID-19-measures mainly focuses on the health risk posed by the jabs and the repressive policing of the government which are curtailing freedoms.

Anti-vaccine actors and conspiracy narratives

At the moment of publishing this report, about 66 percent of the whole Hungarian population has been fully vaccinated.⁷⁵ In July 2021, vaccinations were made mandatory only for healthcare workers. But at the end of October, the government announced it will require employees at state institutions to be vaccinated. Private

employers will be allowed to enforce this rule too. During the summer almost all of the lockdown restrictions were lifted, including the requirement of immunity certificates (issued to those who have been vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19) to enter recreational venues. Europe-wide research conducted by YouGov in June 2021, showed that Hungarians were the most likely to believe lockdowns 'do more harm than good', at 42 percent - twice as many as those believing they 'do more good than harm'.⁷⁶ In early 2021, when the COVID-19 lockdown measures were at the highest, hundreds of people marched in Budapest against the restrictions, defying the then ban on public gatherings.

However, after Hungary loosened the measures, becoming one of least strict countries in Europe,⁷⁷ street protests ceased, and the opposition to vaccines is now mainly voiced online. Having said that, the anti-vaccine movement in Hungary is very active and has gained ground in the past year.⁷⁸ According to a research piece by the institute Political Capital supported by the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project,⁷⁹ mainstream anti-vaccine narratives have been supplemented, and radicalised, by the far right and pro-Kremlin fringe media.

The main anti-vaccination actors could be classified into two groups: health influencers and far-right politicians. The first group is mainly composed of individuals who have been in the healthcare sector and business before the pandemic. Among them, pharmacist György Gődény and vitamin shop entrepreneur Gábor Lenkei, who have been active in the anti-vaccine association Orvosok a Tisztánlátásért (Doctors for Clarity), whose conference in August 2021 in Budapest saw German anti-vaccine microbiologist Sucharit Bhakdi participate as a speaker. Other

influencers are life-coach Dezső Repei, and Imre Postas, former psychologist who was recently arrested for preparation of acts of terrorism.⁸⁰ The other group, the political actors, includes members of the extreme right-wing party Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland Movement), which stands openly against mandatory vaccination. Mi Hazánk has organised street demonstrations, and some of their well-known members are very prolific spreaders of anti-vaccine misinformation on social media. Among them, member of parliament Dóra Dúró and the party leader Laszlo Toroczkai.



Conspiracy narratives related to the COVID-19 vaccines include claims that vaccines are not effective at all, are causing illness, or are producing new COVID-19 variants, to more extreme falsehoods such as the idea vaccines modify humans' genetic system, implant a microchip, or have led to more deaths than COVID-19 did. Less

health-related anti-vaccine narratives focus on how decision makers and big businesses at national and international level are exaggerating the dangers of COVID-19 to gain power, influence and profit. The prevailing arguments in the anti-vaccine circles are the concerns that the vaccination constitutes an infringement to freedom of choice. For many, the government is to blame for oppressive and authoritarian actions against the unvaccinated, who feel forced to receive the vaccine despite their health concerns.

Antisemitism

At the beginning of the pandemic, in some circles Jews were falsely blamed for having created the virus in a lab, for fabricating a hoax about the existence of COVID-19, and for spreading COVID-19, all with the goal of gaining power and profit. However, antisemitism is currently generally absent in the narratives disseminated by anti-vaccine actors online. When antisemitic comments are shared, they remain isolated and do not steer the conversation. Generally, they are dog whistles – coded language that does not openly attack Jewish people – around the Hungarian born US philanthropist and financier George Soros, seen as a symbol of global Jewish power.



In other cases, some anti-vaxxers liken themselves, and the measures around the vaccines, to the persecution experienced by Jews in Nazi Germany. For example, on the Facebook group “Stop COVID forces vaccination” (which has been removed from the platform), a commentator said “Shooting us quite well. It is a genocide for sure. The background power should leave us alone. Because the anger of the nation will reach them soon.” Another one wrote: “He is not part of the Hungarian nation, he is a member of the Jewish country. He is working for the government now too and this is the part of their plan.”

Established far-right politicians, who have consistently and widely expressed antisemitic views in the past, have not been disseminating antisemitic narratives in their opposition to the vaccination scheme.

Social media platforms

Facebook is by far the most prevalent social media platform in Hungary, with 85 percent of the population using it at least on a weekly basis,⁸¹ while Twitter is not popular at all. On Facebook, anti-vaccine content is mainly shared in private and public groups, with a few thousand members voicing their opposition to the vaccination and sharing relevant content. Some of these groups are ‘Oltásáldozatok’ (‘Vaccination victims’), ‘Oltáskritikus Életvédők Szövetsége’ (‘Vaccine Critics Life Protection Association’) and ‘Oltás után elhunytak és károsultak’ (‘They died and were injured after vaccination’).

In 2020, Facebook cracked down on users, groups, and pages that were repeatedly sharing COVID-19 misinformation.⁸² Among them, vitamin shop entrepreneur Gábor Lenkei’s page and György Gődény’s group were both removed for spreading spread false information about COVID-19 and vaccines.

POLAND

There is a visible overlap between movements and actors promoting anti-vaccine disinformation, COVID-19 conspiracy narratives, and antisemitic tropes in Poland.⁸³ While many elements are common across Europe – such as antisemitic conspiracy ideologies of Jewish domination through the pandemic, and antisemitic comparisons of COVID-19 health measures with Nazi Germany – Poland shows an exceptionally high amount of overt and extreme antisemitism on all main social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube).

The antisemitism in the pre-existing debate on the restoration of Holocaust-era properties in Poland, which contains country-specific historical revisionism, permeates and reinforces discourses of opposition to measures against the pandemic. As a result, anti-vaccine and COVID-19-denial activists promote conspiracy narratives alleging that a foreign power (a coded word for Jews) is taking over Polish businesses and Polish territory, respectively through the lockdown and other anti-COVID-19 measures and through Holocaust-era property restitution.

The most influential figures promoting conspiracy narratives on COVID-19, and stirring hatred against Jews, are far-right political leaders, including current members of parliament and popular media personalities. Extreme antisemitism and COVID-19 disinformation are widely shared on public pages, groups, and accounts on main social media platforms. Despite breaching community standards and hateful content policies, this content is rarely removed.

Anti-vaccine movements and conspiracy narratives

At the moment of publishing this report, about 53 percent of the whole Polish population has been fully vaccinated⁸⁴ – a rate below the EU average. In the summer of 2021, the provinces with the highest levels of COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations were also the ones with the lowest vaccination rates (the Lubelskie, Subcarpathia and Podlaskie voivodeships). In these provinces, the far-right has been especially active in the last few months and years.

Many anti-vaccine campaigners believe that the vaccinations cause death, and that this is part of a secret plan to radically reduce the world's population. This conspiracy narrative, which consists of different variations, is also known by the name of the 'Great Reset'. It claims that a global financial elite is planning a reset of the current world economic order, and have used, or even orchestrated, the COVID-19 pandemic as a justification for it. Microsoft founder Bill Gates is often placed at the heart of the conspiracy, while the financier George Soros appears as well, but to a lesser degree. The lockdown measures are believed to be intended to cause bankruptcies and facilitate the taking over of small businesses by governments, global corporations or other malicious actors. COVID-19-deniers claim that COVID-19 does not exist, or that it is not as dangerous as portrayed by the authorities. In this view, politicians and the media are spreading lies and acting against the interest of 'ordinary people'. Public health policies are not particularly strict in Poland, especially compared to other European countries. The digital COVID-19 certificate is not required to access public venues. Yet, even smaller safety measures, such as the wearing of the face mask, are condemned as 'segregation' and 'discrimination'.

Throughout the year, street demonstrations – against the lockdown first and against the vaccination after – occurred in cities and towns across Poland, gathering between a few hundred and a few thousands of people each time. In more recent protests, demonstrators accused the government of implementing a 'sanitary segregation' through the restrictions on unvaccinated people; demanded that the vaccines, labelled 'medical experiments', are halted until further scientific proof of their safety; and claimed that 'the government is killing' people in a 'false pandemic.'⁸⁵

Antisemitic conspiracy ideologies on Jewish domination

The classic trope of Jewish global control became apparent during a few rallies against the vaccination programme. On 18 August 2021, some demonstrators in the western town of Głogów chanted that Jews "rule the world" and are behind the pandemic. This conspiratorial antisemitism, which dramatically escalated during the COVID-19 outbreak,⁸⁶ is deeply rooted in a centuries-old tradition of anti-Jewish accusations of calamity and crisis. In the early 20th century, this tendency was fuelled by 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', an anti-Jewish forgery that was supposed to prove a Jewish World Conspiracy and that continues to circulate widely today. In the context of the pandemic, this antisemitic conspiracy ideology has been adopted in anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown milieus, where Jews are accused of having orchestrated the COVID-19 pandemic to execute their plot of domination on Poland. Sometimes these accusations name Jews explicitly, as in the rally in Głogów. Other times, coded words for Jews – such as 'globalists' or 'foreign power' – are used instead. This antisemitic ideology is extensively present on all of the main social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Antisemitic comparisons with Nazi Germany

Antisemitic discourse also permeates anti-vaccine narratives in a different way, through the trivialization of the Holocaust. Polish anti-vaccine activists have compared and equated the so called 'segregation' and 'discrimination' of the unvaccinated to the ghettoization of the Jews during World War II. While such tropes could be found in the anti-vaccination movements in other European countries too, they have a different connotation in Poland, as it was on occupied Polish territory that Nazi Germany established the most notorious death camps.

In a YouTube video from August 2021 entitled 'Grzegorz Braun SHARP speech: in 1939 armbands, now masks. A speech at a demonstration in Warsaw', Grzegorz Braun, Polish MP and one of the leaders of the far-right Confederation party, is recorded while making a speech at a rally against COVID-19 health measures. He said: "I will allow myself a drastic analogy. It is like summer 1939. So far, they just order some people to wear armbands and when the time will come to go to the ghetto, it will be too late for protests. At that time in the city of Warsaw there were quite a few of those [Jews] who thought the armband had its good aspects, in fact, it clarifies the situation, it allows some to distance themselves clearly from the fallen Polish cause, some of them chose the armband to choose peace for themselves. And it is similar today, they order the nation to wear the face masks."

Another analogy that is being made in anti-vaccine networks is with the Nuremberg trials, the prosecution of major Nazi leaders for crimes against peace, crimes of war, and crimes against humanity. Some activists suggest that a sort of Nuremberg trial will be held against officials who are in charge of COVID-19 preventing measures.

MP Grzegorz Braun recently started a new initiative, and Facebook page, called 'Norymberga 2.0' ('Nuremberg 2.0'). At the inauguration of the initiative on 22 September 2021, Braun repeatedly talked about 'a supposed pandemic', referred to the health measures as a 'genocide' and demanded the punishment of the 'officials-perpetrators'. The 'Norymberga 2.0' Facebook page includes a link to the fundraising appeal for the initiative, which, in a few days, raised more than 100,000 euros. By allowing this page and the link to be shared, Facebook has enabled the fundraising for this far-right conspiratorial movement.



The 'Norymberga 2.0' page on Facebook

Popular figures spreading conspiracies narratives

In Poland, among the anti-vaxxers who spread antisemitic conspiracies, there are several well-known individuals who have a long record of hateful activism and a high profile in Polish society. They are far-right political leaders, including current members of parliament, and popular media figures. They have a significant online audience, and use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as their main tools to spread conspiracy narratives and disinformation.

One of the main faces of the far-right conspiratorial movement is the above-mentioned Grzegorz Braun, current MP, one of the leaders of the far-right Confederation

party, and former presidential candidate. Braun has 220,000 followers on Facebook, 59,000 on Twitter, and 122,000 subscribers on YouTube. On his pages, nationalistic posts frame Poles, Polish families and the Polish economy as the targeted victims of a government who wants to batter them through lockdowns and segregation to favour ‘foreign capital.’ Other posts are political interventions of other kinds, with explicit antisemitism and Holocaust revisionism, such as a series of events aiming to deny the historical facts of the anti-Jewish pogroms which occurred in eastern Poland during World War II. Already, at the beginning of the pandemic, Braun combined extreme antisemitism with COVID-19 conspiracy narratives.



In July 2021, Braun posted a series of photos of his participation in a public meeting aiming to “uncover the truth” about the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom. In the photos published by Braun, he is seen alongside the notorious long-time antisemitic campaigner Stanislaw Michalkiewicz. In one of the photos, the slogan “Poland is not Polin” is clearly visible. Polin is the Hebrew name of Poland and in the last few years it has been often used by antisemitic far-right extremists warning against an imagined threat of Jewish domination of Poland.

In a YouTube interview in April 2020, he accused ‘Jewcommies’ of trying “to use the coronavirus to get rid of Trump”. During a speech in parliament in September 2021, Braun made death threats against the health minister Andrzej Niedzielski in reaction to COVID-19-safety policies (he also threatened of death then then health minister Lukasz Szumowski in May 2020). Some of Braun’s connections in the anti-vaccine and far-right milieus are also anti-Jewish hate crime offenders.⁸⁷

Another notorious figure disseminating antisemitic anti-vaccine content is Wojciech Sumlinski, a well-known far-right journalist, author, filmmaker, and former employee of Polish Television (TVP). In recent years, he became active in denying the facts of anti-Jewish pogroms in Poland during World War II, especially the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom, where Polish residents murdered almost all of their Jewish neighbours. With the pandemic, Sumlinski combined the antisemitic Holocaust revisionism with COVID-19 conspiracy theories. Sumlinski has more than 79,000 followers on Facebook, 28,000 on Twitter and 123,000 subscribers on YouTube. In May 2021, Sumlinski was interviewed on the YouTube channel of the far-right Media Narodowe (National Media), in a broadcast entitled “ANTI-Polish action of the Jews! >It’s not an accident!< Israeli occupation of Poland?” Answering the antisemitic comments by the host, who accused the Jewish community of trying “to destroy Poland’s reputation in the world or to take over the Polish lands”, Sumlinski answered by mixing antisemitism with COVID-19 conspiracy narratives: “If we [...] dig a little bit, then in the background of this whole madness, we will notice mostly, or in fact nearly first of all, representatives of just one national group, namely the Jews.” By

September 2021, the interview with Sumlinks recorded more than 65,000 views. In 2021, the Independence March Association, the organization running the National Media, which has more than 240,000 subscribers on YouTube, received grants from institutions of the Polish Ministry of Culture of almost 1,500,000 Polish zloty (300,000 GBP).⁸⁸

In another interview, broadcast on the far-right YouTube channel wRealu24 (ForReal24) on the domination of 'Polin' by Jews, Sumlinski made connections with the pandemic. He said: "It is a strange coincidence, when we look at those different foundations, the Rockefellers, all those Gates who are at the source of this pandemic - nonpandemic - then we see they have common roots, everything comes from one nationality [...] We have to resist it. [...] It is clear where it leads, both the pandemic and what the Jews are doing." This interview recorded more than 40,000 view in less than one week, and has many violent antisemitic comments by ordinary users.



Other popular anti-vaxxers with far-right views who have used antisemitic tropes are pop singer Edyta Gorniak (485,000 followers on Instagram), the editor of wRealu24 Marcin Rola (514,000 subscribers on YouTube), and far-right journalist Tomasz Sommer (78,000 subscribers on YouTube).

Platforms and lack of moderation

Antisemitic conspiracy narratives and antisemitic Holocaust comparisons are widely shared on the main social media networks in Poland. Despite breaching community standards and hateful content policies on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, this content is rarely removed. It seems that platforms pay little attention to moderating and removing such content in the Polish market. This pattern has been observed by the NEVER AGAIN association during their social media monitoring and reporting, but also by medical doctors who have been threatened as a result of anti-vaccine propaganda online.⁸⁹ Cases of verbal and physical assaults, such as the attack on a Wirtualna Polska reporter for wearing a mask,⁹⁰ show that the impact of these narratives is clearly not restricted to online abuse.

As in other European countries, far-right, anti-vaccine, conspiratorial, antisemitic groups are active on Facebook because of the online spaces that can, to some extent, evade moderation when they are made private. However, in Poland this type of content is also widely shared on public pages, groups, and accounts. This research mainly focused on this, and especially the Facebook pages and YouTube channels of popular far-right leaders. Hashtags do not seem to play a major role in promoting content and connecting people, but a frequent keyword used across different antisemitic anti-vaccine networks is "plandemia" ("a plandemic").

UNITED KINGDOM

Brief Summary

In the United Kingdom, the vast amount of antisemitic content found in anti-vaccine networks on Facebook and Twitter centres around comparisons with Nazi Germany. This includes the idea that vaccine passports are a 'Nazi tool' and that COVID-19 policies are reminiscent of the Holocaust. A key figure in the anti-vaccine movement in the UK is Kate Shemirani, a former nurse who lost her licence to practice due to COVID-19 misinformation. Shemirani has publicly made comparisons between COVID-19 and Nazi times. The majority of the content found is hosted on Twitter, partly because this content on Facebook seems to be hosted in private groups which are difficult to access.

Contrarily to the other European countries monitored for this research, the conspiracy ideology alleging that an elite of Jewish people is orchestrating and profiting from the pandemic did not catch on within the UK anti-vaccine networks. While this narrative is present in the UK social media, it did not emerge on Twitter and on public Facebook posts and groups monitored during the research timeframe. Though this case study focusses on the United Kingdom, it must be noted that for some English-language content it is difficult to trace to its origin, so it is possible that some of the themes and narratives discussed here also apply to other English-speaking countries, like the United States.

Anti-vaccine movements and conspiracy narratives

At the moment of publishing this report, about 81 percent of the whole British population has been fully vaccinated.⁹¹ Vaccines are not compulsory for anyone, including workers in the healthcare sector and nursing homes. To go to certain mass events or to travel abroad, a vaccine certificate (the NHS COVID Pass) may be required. Street rallies have occurred across Britain to demonstrate against COVID-19 measures, from face masks and lockdowns to mandatory vaccination and the vaccine passport. Among the main anti-vaccine groups in the UK are: Stand Up X, a collective with regional groups which have been organising marches across the country (16,500 followers on Twitter), Stop New Normal, led by Piers Corbyn, who has been arrested over comparing the vaccination programme to the Holocaust (24,000 followers on Facebook); and Save Our Rights UK, a grassroots group founded by activist Louise Creffield aiming 'to create a real democracy' (90,000 followers on Facebook). Their opposition to COVID-19 measures is framed partially in terms of safety - vaccines are described as unsafe and deadly - and partially as a fight for freedom and against authoritarianism.

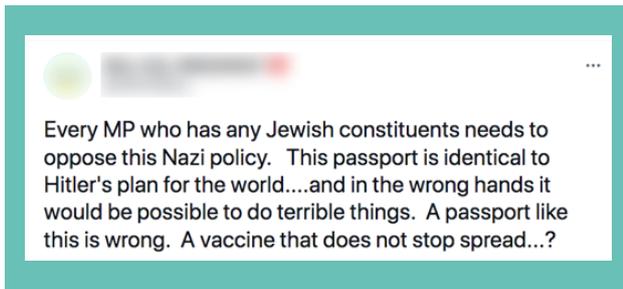
Government and mainstream media are repeatedly blamed of feeding 'ordinary people' lies and propaganda. In street protests and propaganda leaflets, antisemitic elements have at times surfaced but they have not been predominant. At the Unite for Freedom march in London, on 24 April 2021, anti-vaccine activists wore yellow Star of David badges - equating the persecution of Jews in Europe during WWII to the current COVID-19 preventive measures. Anti-vaccination protesters have also demonstrated outside schools, harassing pupils, parents and teachers, with some claiming that it is wrong to vaccinate children and others that the COVID-19 pandemic is a hoax.⁹²

Vaccine passports as a 'Nazi tool'

The most prominent narrative found on social media in relation to anti-vaccine content and antisemitism is the understanding of the COVID-19 preventive measures as a totalitarian apparatus akin to Nazism. Under this narrative, vaccine passports are labelled a 'Nazi tool' and COVID-19 vaccine certificates in general are compared to the yellow Star of David that Jews were forced to wear to be easily identified in Nazi Germany and its occupied territories. Governmental measures implemented to restrict the spread of COVID-19 are also labelled 'Nazi policies.' On Twitter, it has been claimed that an IT company commissioned to produce the UK digital vaccine passports is owned by the step-grandchildren of Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda in Nazi Germany. This assertion is used to reinforce the perception that vaccine passports, and other COVID-19 measures, are a 'new' Nazi tool being used on the masses. Supposed testimonies of Holocaust survivors arguing against COVID-19 policies are used to validate and strengthen this narrative. For example, during the summer of 2021, many Facebook groups shared a video of Holocaust survivor Vera Sharav. In this video, Sharav, who is an activist against some aspects of medical research, likened the COVID-19 vaccines to the Nazi medical experiments, warned against the Holocaust repeating itself due to the "spirit of eugenics living on", and compared the current enforcement of some public health policies to Nazi Germany. The wide circulation of the analogy between the persecution of Jews in Europe during WWII and the current public health regulations is concerning. It is antisemitic as it heavily downplays the historical tragedy of the Holocaust and the suffering of Jewish people.

Anti-vaxxers also claim that the COVID-19 pandemic and its vaccination programmes are part of a 'scheme' orchestrated by those in power to control society. Conspiracists spreading this narrative often refer to the vaccinated as 'sheep' who are being 'conned', and urge them to 'wake up'. Generally, politicians and prominent businesspeople are indicated as the ones who are part of this powerful elite deceiving and oppressing 'ordinary people'. While in other countries, such as France, Jews are seen as the secret conspirators and are accused through overt antisemitism or more subtle references, in the UK this narrative is barely present – at least on Twitter.





Prominence on Twitter

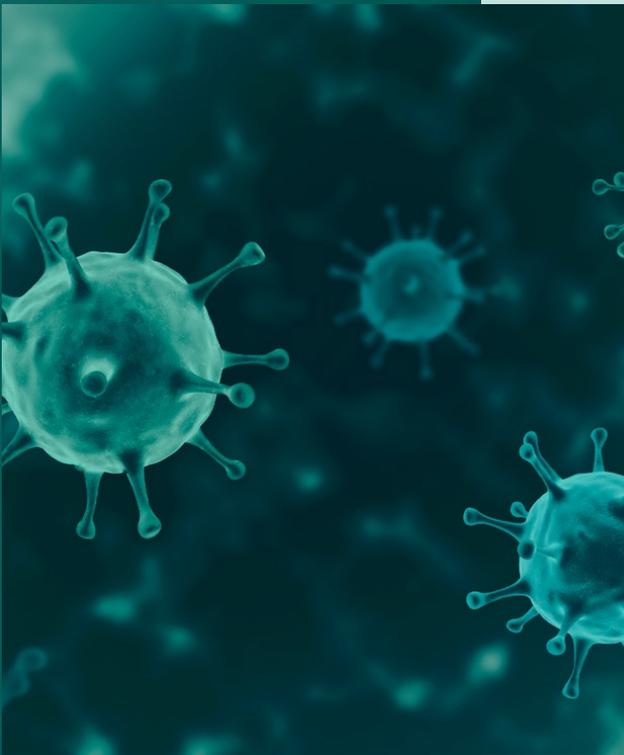
The majority of the data collected for the UK research came from Twitter rather than Facebook. There are a few reasons for this. First, Facebook allows the creation of private groups. It is mainly in these groups that the more extreme content is shared, as it is a way to connect with like-minded individuals and largely avoid moderation. Many groups have a sort of 'application process' in order to become a member, which makes it difficult for researcher to monitor the content shared in private groups, unless they are accepted as a member. Facebook has also taken some steps to crack down on anti-vaccine content, and therefore also its associated antisemitism. For example, several of the COVID-19 conspiracy groups from the Combat Antisemitism Autumn 2020 report⁹³ have now been shut down by Facebook. While Twitter has also taken some actions to limit COVID-19 misinformation, this content seems to spread much easier on this platform and be more visible, as there are no private forums. Some of the common hashtags identified through the research include **#VaccinePassport**, **#NoVaccineCoercion**, **#NoVaccinePassportsAnywhere**, **#VaccineSideEffects**, **#NoVaccineMandates** and **#DoNotComply**. Besides this, many openly talked about the Star of David when discussing vaccines on Twitter. Following the bans of prominent hate actors and COVID-19 conspiracists, such as David Icke, from the mainstream social media platforms, many far-right activists and anti-vaxxers have moved to different platforms. On Telegram, a largely unmoderated instant messaging app, which allows the creation of channels and groups, anti-vaccine content and antisemitism are very prominent. Telegram was not covered by this research, but key figures in the UK anti-vaccine movement, such as Kate Shemirani, are very active on Telegram after being banned from other platforms.

Kate Shemirani

In the UK, one of the main public figures disseminating antisemitic anti-vaccine narratives is Kate Shemirani, a former nurse who been permanently struck off the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register. On 24 July 2021, Shemirani made a speech at an anti-vaccine rally in Trafalgar Square in London, where she drew comparison between medical professionals battling the COVID-19 pandemic today with Nazi doctors and nurses who were prosecuted at the Nuremberg trials for human experimentations. Her analogy widely circulated online, drawing widespread condemnation. The Metropolitan Police are currently investigating Shemirani's statements for incitement to violence and antisemitic hate.⁹⁴ At this protest, other major agitators such as David Icke, Piers Corbyn, and Katie Hopkins were also present. Shemirani, as well as the other key anti-vaccine figures, are no longer allowed to have an account on mainstream social media platforms, and have therefore moved to Telegram and other apps. However, despite not being able to post themselves due to the banning, some of their content and messages gets through as it is posted and shared by supporters or taken from different platforms. For example, the video footage of Shemirani from the rally in Trafalgar Square in London has been widely circulating on Twitter.



Reflections



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Misinformation feeds hesitancy, hesitancy feeds fear, and fear feeds hate. When it comes to health misinformation the results can be deadly.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, the world saw a rise in anti-Asian hate crime due to misinformation, stereotypes, and conspiracy theories about the starting point of the virus. These rumours were fuelled by prominent political figures such as the former President of the United States, Donald Trump. Once the vaccination programme was rolled out, vaccine hesitancy took over and rumours and misinformation spread uncontrollably. As previous research suggests, conspiracy theories regarding science are not a new phenomenon, and when there are events that cannot be explained or easily controlled such as a pandemic such conspiracies become common. It is no surprise for example HIV/AIDS drug conspiracies share similar narratives to COVID-19 vaccine conspiracies.

This report explored the spread of a conspiracy within a conspiracy: antisemitic narratives within anti-vax conspiracies in Europe. The results are not entirely surprising. Antisemitism has had a prominent role within conspiracy theories for centuries. In certain cases, such as France, the rise of antisemitic narratives among anti-vaxxers follow similar patterns to the rise of antisemitism in the 18th and 19th century. The fear of world domination by a secret society and an unknown force was, and still is, prominent within conspiracists. The fear of losing one's national or religious identity seems to become an obsession to those who tend to believe in conspiracy theories, which leads to their association with paranoia. The most striking finding of this report is the association of the COVID-19 vaccination programme to Nazi medical experiments, the victim mentality of those who believe in these narratives and the association of 'Holocaust' narratives with the wider Jewish conspiracy of world domination and the establishment of a 'New World Order'. By presenting themselves as victims, conspiracy theorists inflict fear upon their targets: those who already believe or are generally more susceptible to conspiracy theories.

Contrary to the past, current conspiracy theories spread faster and wider due to the internet and specifically social media. Although tech companies have community standards related to online hate, antisemitism and more recently health misinformation, they fall short of adequate moderation. At the same time, even though some of the groups and social media accounts that were monitored for the purposes of this report have now disappeared, those who spread these theories have found other networks in which they operate, including messaging apps such as Telegram and Viber. Stopping conspiracy theories seems like an impossible task, however, putting an end to their wide reach is doable.

Recommendations

The monitoring period of this report was relatively short and focused on gathering qualitative data. However, the results are indicative that more work needs to be done and further actions need to be taken in order to reduce the spread of misinformation and hateful religious narratives. The recommendations that follow take into account the fact that a collective effort from different actors is necessary in order to fight conspiracy narratives and anti-Jewish hatred that could potentially lead to widespread violence.

1 Further inter-sector cooperation between CSOs, tech companies, and lawmakers

Civil society organisations (CSOs) should not be the only ones responsible for combatting hate speech and dangerous misinformation. While the existing cooperation of social media platforms with CSOs has given positive results, more needs to be done. Tech companies should give greater attention and consideration to the reports they receive from the CSOs they appointed as ‘trusted flaggers.’ This network of selected CSOs should also be extended with new partnerships, especially in countries where the moderation is unsatisfactory due to an insufficient base of local moderators who know the context and the language. Tech companies should make the most of the expertise of those organisations who are researching ways to counter hate speech with successful results and offer more technical and financial resources to facilitate their work. In this context, regulation, and therefore cooperation between CSOs and lawmakers, is also crucial to ensure that tech companies act extensively to remove hate from platforms. More consideration needs to be given to proposals of multi-stakeholders forums, such as Article 19’s Social Media Councils which protects freedom of speech in content moderation, where discussions and recommendations would be shaped by a diverse range of expertise and perspectives.⁹⁵

2 Improved social media moderation for health misinformation

Following widespread criticism, social media companies started addressing the issue of COVID-19 misinformation in their platforms, for example adding label warnings in health-related content. Terms of use state that content is also removed when it contains misinformation judged false or misleading by authoritative sources, and when it is likely to contribute to imminent violence or physical harm. Yet, platforms host an abundance of posts and tweets containing false information about the alleged dangers of vaccines, even though health misinformation can have harmful and deadly consequences. Unlawful content should be removed, but other strategies, such as revising the algorithm not to facilitate the spread of dangerous content, should be applied to make sure that fewer people are exposed to toxic conspiracy ideologies on one side, and antisemitic abuse on the other. Such actions need to be applied to health misinformation in general and not be limited to COVID-19 as such misinformation is widespread to health-related topics.

3 Consistent enforcement of existing hate speech and COVID-19 policies by tech companies

Facebook and Twitter's policies do not allow dehumanising content, Holocaust denial and trivialisation, as well as hatred on the basis of race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jewish people and other religious and ethnic minorities have been accused of having, spreading, or even creating the virus. Indeed, the current research found that such content is widespread on social media. In particular, our monitoring and reporting activity has also shown that in some countries, such as Poland and Hungary, hateful content, including calls for violence, is rarely removed despite reporting. There is a need for improved moderation and improved algorithms that can distinguish between freedom of speech and hatred while taking into consideration cultural characteristics as well as language differences.

4 Expert training for moderators

Algorithms play a key role in moderating online spaces. They can quickly detect content that has already been banned, and scan content at a speed and scale that would not be feasible for human moderators. However, in platforms with a higher degree of moderation, such as Facebook and Twitter, those who spread hateful conspiracy ideologies often use coded language to avoid removal of content and account bans. To be identified, both coded language and antisemitic dog-whistles, which constantly adapt and change, need not only human moderators, but also sufficiently trained moderators that can recognise it. Tech companies need to provide their moderators with regular expert training for each country and language in which they operate. Psychological support should be regularly offered, as exposure to hate can cause trauma.

5 Moderation on Facebook private groups

In private groups on Facebook, moderation is easier to avoid and radicalisation into more extreme content is more likely. People who manage groups - admins and moderators - can deny posts, remove posts and comments on posts, as well as remove and block people from the group. But if the private group consists of members who share the same antisemitic conspiracy ideologies, admins and moderators do not remove content even if it breaches the platform's policy and group members do not report it. While over the years Facebook has made the creation of new private groups slightly more rigorous, some degree of external moderation of private groups is necessary in order to avoid violations of the company's terms of usage.

6 Deplatforming of conspiracists and antisemites

Deplatforming of popular hate actors can take several years, as tech companies need to ensure that such strict action limits the spread of hate and violence and not freedom of speech. When deplatforming occurs, new accounts might pop up in the same platform or move to less moderated ones. However, when popular hate actors have been deplatformed, their followers and influence dramatically reduced and so did the circulation of toxic ideas. While deplatforming as a strategy to stop online hate is not enough, it should be applied more extensively, and more promptly, when individuals and organisations with a wide reach repeatedly share hateful conspiracy theories and antisemitism. CSOs play an integral role in such actions but their campaigning could last for years. Thus, tech companies need to invest in human resources that will liaise with CSOs constantly in order to deplatform hateful actors while ensuring freedom of speech is protected.

7 Common strategies and collaboration among tech companies

Common strategies in combatting misinformation and online hate are necessary. IT companies have a crucial role to play in this effort, however, they need to show commitment to a collective effort. A coordinated response is necessary in order to stop the spread of hateful content as it could have violence results. Such coordination should place the limitation of health misinformation at the centre of their efforts; however, it should not be limited to that. In addition, Big Tech needs to include smaller tech companies and new platforms on equal terms, since, as this report has showed, when one hateful group is taken down from one platform, it finds a host in another one. The fight against hate which leads to violence is a collective one. Big Tech should fund independent research and make online spaces safe for everyone.

8 Media and Information Literacy education

Media literacy education is crucial to combat misinformation and online hate. Education should target users of all age groups and backgrounds. Although they are more digitally savvy, young people should be given the skills and knowledge to be able to identify antisemitic tropes and antisemitic dog-whistles as well as hatred against minorities in the social media content they consume and share. Citizens should have critical thinking and digital literacy competencies, to identify possible misleading information and trustworthy sources, and to understand how radicalisation and extreme-right recruitment techniques work. Civil society already plays an integral role in such trainings. Their collaboration with IT companies, national governmental bodies and policy makers can have positive results and can limit the spread of conspiracies in the long term.

9 Strengthen collaboration among CSOs

CSOs play an integral role in society. Transnational collaboration among CSOs has proved to have wider reach and better results. More transnational research such as this report is necessary in order to explore topics in depth and provide long lasting solutions. In addition, multidisciplinary research that engages CSOs with different expertise is necessary as it covers all aspects of a certain issue. Transnational and multidisciplinary collaborations are integral for better understanding a phenomenon's patterns and extend. More funding needs to become available for such collaborations.



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Produced by

Led by the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) with the support of 7 partners spread throughout Europe, *Get The Trolls Out!* works to counter anti-religious hate speech through exposing individuals and organisations, finding and debunking dangerous narratives in the media, and educating young people on how to spot and respond to online trolls.



The **Media Diversity Institute** (MDI) works internationally to encourage and facilitate responsible media coverage of diversity in order to promote understanding between different groups and cultures.



The **Center for Independent Journalism** (CIJ) is a non-profit and non-political organization aiming to promote ethical, fact-based journalism and independent media in Hungary.



Amadeu Antonio Stiftung is one of Germany's foremost, independent, non-governmental organizations working to strengthen democratic civic society and eliminate neo-Nazism, right-wing extremism, and antisemitism.



Karpos is a Greek organisation which develops local and European projects encouraging expression and the exchange of views and creative ideas through the use of media.



The **European Union of Jewish Students** (EUJS) is a pluralistic, inclusive and non-partisan umbrella organisation. EUJS supports Jewish student unions throughout Europe and represents its members in international institutions.



ENORB strives to provide a civil society platform of different religions and beliefs to facilitate dialogue and promote the rights and freedoms enshrined in the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights and in other international human rights conventions.



LICRA fights against the growing political and social acceptance of xenophobia and discrimination in France, and offers free legal assistance to victims of racism and antisemitism.



The **'NEVER AGAIN' Association** is Poland's leading anti-racist organization. Since 1996, 'NEVER AGAIN' Association has been promoting multicultural understanding and contributing to the development of a democratic civil society in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe.

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