Background - the US Prevention Practitioners Network

Over the course of the next two years, the McCain Institute, with support from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and a steering committee of violence prevention and social safety experts, will develop and engage a US practitioners network for individuals working in **targeted violence and terrorism prevention (TVTP)**. The aim of this is not only to connect practitioners across the US with one another, but also to build their capacity and the efficacy of their programs through a series of workshops that cover both theoretical and practical elements of delivering prevention and intervention initiatives. This information pack is for the fourth workshop in a four-part mini-series of workshops about the targeted violence and terrorism **threat landscape in the US**.

Why is it important to understand the threat landscape?

To be able to address targeted violence and terrorism in an informed and appropriate manner, practitioners must first develop a conceptual understanding of the phenomena, particularly of the dominant narratives, movements and figures that make up the domestic threat landscape. The McCain Institute and ISD are therefore hosting a series of workshops to equip participants and members of the emerging Practitioners Network with this understanding. Reflecting the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, which was released in June 2021 and identifies racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) and anti-government violence as primary threats, the first workshop in this mini-series addressed white supremacist and militia violence. The second workshop covered Incel and "manosphere"-related violent extremism, while the third addressed internationally-inspired terrorism. This information pack is for the fourth and final workshop of the mini-series on the threat landscape, and looks at the role of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information in targeted violence and terrorism.

What is the purpose of this document?

These read-ahead materials provide an overview of the nexus between misinformation, disinformation and mal-information and targeted violence and terrorism in the US, and is informed by both desk-based and ethnographic research. This document does not seek to provide an exhaustive deep-dive into the role of disinformation in targeted violent and terrorism. Rather, it provides a broad overview of how false content and conspiratorial worldviews intersect with targeted violence and terrorism, which may help practitioners as they incorporate TVTP into their work. This information pack provides:

- an overview of the concepts of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information;
- the different types of altered or false content that constitute disinformation;
- a summary of the nexus between misinformation, disinformation, mal-information and targeted violence;
- a series of case studies of hate-based conspiracies and their impact;
- a glossary of useful technical terms, and a glossary of terms and phrases related to hate-based conspiracies;
- further reading recommendations.

Documents like this one are provided ahead of every workshop. Past documents and workshop recordings can be found here. For any inquiries, please contact the McCain Institute or ISD.

The terms "**misinformation**" and "**disinformation**" have come to the forefront of public safety and public health discussions since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, in light of thousands of (fringe) outlets, social media influencers and other profiles sharing false claims about the origins of the virus, measures to protect against contracting the virus, and the purpose of vaccinations. The World Health Organization (WHO) outlines the severe consequences of this "infodemic" of false claims and misleading information, including, but not limited to, individuals acting on unevidenced claims and thus unknowingly placing their lives and the lives of others at risk; mistrust in health authorities, which in turn undermines the public health response; longer or more intense outbreaks of the virus as a result of people being overwhelmed with information and thus being unsure about how to protect their health and the health of their dependents. Disinformation surrounding the pandemic has also fueled hate, polarization and extremism through debunked claims that accuse certain communities of "creating" the virus or making the pandemic worse.

The contemporary threat of misinformation, disinformation and **mal-information** clearly cannot be understated. The presence and threat of these phenomena on public safety and health has long predated the COVID-19 pandemic, however. Hateful **conspiracy theories** have played a role in large-scale acts of violence, for example, including the Christchurch act of terror in 2019, which was inspired, in part, by "The Great Replacement" conspiracy theory. Before jumping into these potentially violent consequences of misinformation, disinformation and mal-information, this chapter defines these key concepts and outlines the types of content they entail, as well as where and how they are distributed.

Key Concepts:

Misinformation:	**Disinformation**:	**Mal-information:**	**Conspiracy Theories:**
Information that is false, but the person who disseminates it may believe it is true.	Information that is false and deliberately shared to cause harm or to influence.	Information that is genuine but used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country. This includes the misuse of personal or confidential information, and the political use of sensitive information.	A type of mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories seek to explain a phenomenon by invoking a sinister plot orchestrated by powerful actors. Adherents to conspiracies usually see themselves as an "initiated few" who have access to hidden or "secret" knowledge.

Misinformation:

Information that is false, but the person who disseminates it may believe it is true.

Example*:*

Claims that "highly concentrated alcohol ... could disinfect the body and kill the coronavirus" were rampant in the months following the outbreak of COVID-19. Some sources report these claims resulted in 800 deaths and nearly 6000 hospitalizations.

Good to know:
Both disinformation and mal-information entail an **intent** to harm or negatively influence.

Disinformation:

Information that is false and deliberately shared to cause harm or to influence.

Example*:*

At the height of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations in 2020, extreme right-wing actors and influencers spread claims that the protests were inherently violent. Some users created imposter content (see page 3), where fake accounts pretending to be pro-BLM were created to post fabricated content inciting violence against white people. Disinformation campaigns like this sought to paint and discredit BLM as a violent, anti-white movement.

Mal-information:

Information that is genuine but used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country. This includes the misuse of personal or confidential information, and the political use of sensitive information.

Example*:*

Doxxing is the mal-intended publication and distribution of personal identifiable information about another individual. Doxxing is known to be a cyber weapon of choice amongst REMVE actors - for instance, chat logs from Discord reveal "concerted efforts to compile private information on 'leftist enemies' ... to encourage harassment or violence".

Conspiracy Theories:

A type of mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories seek to explain a phenomenon by invoking a sinister plot orchestrated by powerful actors. Adherents to conspiracies usually see themselves as an "initiated few" who have access to hidden or "secret" knowledge.

Example*:*

The "New World Order" conspiracy alleges that a sinister cabal is behind various global events (including COVID-19), all of which are orchestrated in attempt to implement a one-world totalitarian government.

Types of Content:

First Draft has produced a guide on the spectrum of formats and techniques underpinning misinformation and disinformation:

Satire

At the lower end of the threat spectrum, satire or parody - the use of humor or exaggeration to mock or criticize and individual or institution - often has no intention to cause harm, but nonetheless has the potential to fool. While such content isn't always intended to misinform, online content labeled as "satire" can be hateful, polarizing and divisive in certain contexts. Crucially, recognizing satire as such requires an understanding of the context of whatever point or person is being satirized. With social media allowing for mass- and quick-resharing of posts to broad networks, contextual understanding often gets lost as more users get exposed to it, allowing for potentially harmful misinterpretation.

False Connection

"False connection" refers to an increasingly prevalent disconnect between the title, caption or headings of a piece of content, and the actual body or substance of that content. Clickbait is a clear example, where e.g. YouTubers or tabloids use sensational or hyperbolic headlines to draw consumers to their content. Some users, however, may not dig into the accompanying content, thus taking the headline at face value, resulting in a simplistic and un-nuanced understanding of the topic being addressed.

Misleading Content

Where a specific topic is framed in a certain way through the provision of incomplete information, e.g. "by cropping photos, or choosing quotes or statistics selectively".

False Context

Where content is taken out of one context and placed into another. A common example is the use of images, where photos from specific stories or events are repurposed in content about different topics entirely.

Imposter Content

Content authored by users that use the name, brand or identity of a public figure or organization to reach a certain audience and to add a sense of legitimacy, credibility and "weight" to a specific claim.

Manipulated Content

Content that is altered to deceive or change its original meaning or to make a specific point. "Deepfakes", or video footage that is made to make it seem as if an individual said or did something they didn't, are an increasingly common and worrisome example of manipulated content. Deepfakes also demonstrate the increasingly sophisticated nature of false content.

Fabricated Content

Content that is entirely false and doctored, but designed specifically to give a perception of legitimacy and credibility. Deepfakes can also fall into this category, as some deepfakes are entirely doctored and not manipulated versions of pre-existing footage.

Dissemination:

The increasing reliance on the Internet and social media in our everyday lives has also opened the door for the increased production, distribution and exposure to misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. Mainstream and fringe platforms alike contain various severities of misleading or entirely fabricated content, some designed with mal-intent, others the product of well-intended but incorrect information. This section briefly describes the presence and distribution of false content, both where it can be found and how it is distributed. While this focuses on the online disinformation landscape, it is important to note that misinformation can also be spread through offline means.

- **Mainstream platforms** - while there are increasingly strict content moderation policies on mainstream social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, informational challenges remain prevalent as disinformation actors continue to find ways to evade moderation (see page 5).

- **Alt-tech platforms (incl. imageboard sites)** - "Alt-tech" is used to describe sites and services that, through chance or by design, serve as alternatives to mainstream platforms. Not bound by the same guidelines as traditional mainstream media, alt-tech platforms often host a combination of misinformation, conspiracy theories, hyper-partisan commentary, and the collation of sensationalist stories that users share to reinforce their violent extremist world views. They have gained popularity amongst REMVE actors, as well as others who promote extreme or fringe opinions, as they are thought to promise less content moderation, and in some cases increased privacy, than mainstream platforms.

  Imageboard sites like 4Chan, 8Kun (formerly "8Chan") and 16Kun are known to be rife with harmful, hateful and inciteful content. 8Kun, for example, has been linked repeatedly with offline violence - it was connected, among others, to the 2019 Christchurch terror attack, the Poway Synagogue shooting and an anti-Hispanic shooting in El Paso, Texas. Each perpetrator [announced their plans on 8Kun](). It was also [used by rioters]() involved in the insurrection against the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 to mobilize others and to discuss which politicians to target once in the building. Finally, perhaps most importantly for the topic of disinformation, 8kun is also [the home of Q](), the anonymous person(s) behind the extreme-right pro-Trump conspiracy theory QAnon (see page 11), who used the site to publish cryptic, conspiracy-laden messages (known as "Q drops") that claimed a cabal of "Deep State" elites were conspiring against the American people and that Donald Trump was working to stop them. Message boards on the site, such as /QResearch/, were central to the initial promotion and dissemination of Q drops.

- **Alternative websites** serve a similar function as alt-tech platforms and often brand themselves as exposers of the "real truth" about a specific event or person. NaturalNews, for example, is ["a complex web of social media and website infrastructure used to create, promote and target health and political disinformation."]() Among others, this "disinformation empire", which has over 400 affiliated domains, is known to use troll farms (see page 5) to disseminate fake news en masse. It has also successfully circumvented content moderation on platforms like Facebook by using implicit or alternative branding and coded language (e.g. "NN") to refer to NaturalNews.

Conspiracy theorists and those distributing disinformation have a sophisticated playbook of tactics to disseminate their claims to large audiences and to circumvent content moderation policies. This page briefly considers a few of these tactics. See also Annex One for a list of technical terms that may be useful for practitioners to familiarize themselves with online information disorder.

Distribution Tactics:

Hashtag creation or co-option - Users intent on spreading disinformation may create bespoke hashtags or co-opt trending hashtags to increase exposure to the content they want to share.

Bots - bots are "computer algorithms that work in online social network sites to execute tasks autonomously and repetitively." Bots simulate human behavior and so can come across as accounts held by real people. They can be tasked with repetitive posting of disinformation, thus increasing public exposure to disinformative claims.

Troll farms - Also known as "troll factories", troll farms are "entities conducting disinformation propaganda activities on the Internet" at scale. Those that operate in troll farms are generally paid to create fake identities that give the perception of authenticity. These accounts are then used to post fake content, distribute disinformation, provoke specific "types"of users, and more. Those employed in troll farms may operate multiple accounts at any time, ultimately resulting in an army of "keyboard warriors" paid to amplify disinformation.

Micro-targeting - Micro-targeting refers to "using data to show certain messages specifically to those people who are likely to read, like and share such a post, and click on the (fake news or other) website where it originated." Social media analytics can, in essence, be used to target specific types of misinformation at users whose Internet and social media behavior suggests they may be receptive to that misinformation. The Cambridge Analytica scandal is a well-known example of how the practice of micro-targeting can be used to exert political influence.

Tactics for Evading Moderation:

Visual covering - This refers to visually covering brands and keywords that may flag a piece of content for moderation.

Coded language and/or lexical variation - Lexical variation refers to intentional misspelling of certain words. Anti-vaccine actors, for example, may use "V@ccine", "Vak-seen" and "V@x" as alternative spellings of "vaccine" to evade moderation. Coded language refers to the use of alternative language (rather than misspelled words) to refer to a specific topic. Antisemitic conspiracy theorists may spread anti-Jewish narratives using innocuous terms like "Elite" to refer to their claims that Jewish people have undue control over major global institutions.

Exploitation of specific platform features - some users are able to avoid moderation by posting misinformation onto their stories (e.g. Instagram stories) rather than on their feed. Others will post links to misinformation in comment sections rather than hyperlinking to this in their original post.

Perhaps the most telling example of the dangers posed by unchecked misinformation, disinformation and mal-information is their potential to escalate into hateful rhetoric and violence on- and offline. This chapter provides an overview of how false information can develop and cement hateful ideologies, and a series of case studies to demonstrate the nexus of false content with targeted violence and terrorism.

Overview:

Misinformation and disinformation serve multi-faceted roles in cementing violent extremist ideology, radicalizing others and mobilizing individuals to action:

- **Misinformation and disinformation are essential to violent extremist ideologies and narratives -** Extremism expert J.M. Berger outlines five common crisis narratives that are deployed by violent extremist groups to develop and disseminate their ideology. These are outlined below with reference to how they can apply to hate-based disinformation and conspiracy theories:

  - **Impurity** - "corruption of in-group beliefs, practices or traits, sometimes including infiltration of out-group beliefs, practices and traits". An example of impurity is the white supremacist belief that "normalization" of inter-racial relationships only supports the alleged global plot to decimate white populations.

  - **Conspiracy** - "the belief that out-groups are engaged in secret actions to control in-group outcomes". REMVE conspiracy theories from the "New World Order" to "The Great Replacement" often accuse Jewish communities of orchestrating global events, from immigration to COVID-19, as a means of population control, demographic control (e.g. to reduce white populations) and/or to implement a one-world government.

  - **Dystopia -** "the belief that out-groups have successfully oriented society to disadvantage the in-group". The "New World Order" conspiracy presents a dystopian worldview where a secretive cabal orchestrates global events and crises to implement a one-world government. The QAnon conspiracy similarly makes dystopian claims that public leaders and influencers are engaged in child-trafficking and pedophilia rings, and that former President Trump sought to fight this "deep state". Men's Rights Activists (MRA), Men Go Their Own Way (MGTOW) and many members of the Incel ("involuntarily celibate") community hold dystopian views that allege society is gynocentric, essentially favoring women and disadvantaging men in all domains of life.

  - **Existential threat** - "the belief that out-groups threaten the continued survival of the in-group". The perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch act of terror expressed the belief that non-white communities threaten (white) civilization and justified his attack against the Muslim community of Christchurch as a necessary defense against this threat. "The Great Replacement" theory, which motivated the Christchurch perpetrator, is founded in the belief that immigration is an existential threat to white survival. In order to reinforce this dystopian worldview, proponents of the theory will take news stories out of context, exaggerate migration and other demographic statistics and dehumanize non-white communities by stigmatizing them as inherently violent.

  - **Apocalypse -** "the belief that out-groups will precipitate a comprehensive end to history in the not-too distant future". While apocalyptic narratives are less prevalent than narratives of impurity, conspiracy, dystopia and existential threats, conspiracies like the "New World Order" point to an impending shift in society as we know it and may incite action and violence to protect against this. Similarly, white supremacist accelerationist movements

may urge violent action to prevent the US government from "increasing" its efforts to control US citizens. Some may call for violence against the state to replace current governance structures with those that embody and support white ethno-nationalism. Berger refers to this subcategory of apocalyptic belief - specifically that "the current world will be replaced by a perfect utopian world very soon" - as **millenarian belief**.

Ultimately, manipulated or exaggerated information, information taken out of context and doctored content are all used to enforce "us vs. them" narratives that posit the "other" as inferior, as "foreign" and as a threat to the survival of an in-group. Victimhood narratives are therefore also amplified with disinformation, where altered or out-of-context demographic statistics, unsubstantiated claims about the intentions of the "other" and conspiratorial worldviews enforce the perception that an "in-group" is victim to an "out-group". In many cases, society at large and/or political institutions are blamed for the alleged victimhood of the "in-group", where governments and multilateral bodies are accused of secretive plots designed to undermine the "in-group". This is dangerous in the extreme distrust it can foster of a) political institutions and credible global institutions like the WHO and b) any public health and safety initiatives driven by those institutions. Distrust in credible actors also serves to cement conspiratorial worldviews, where any initiative or response by those actors is perceived as part and parcel of the secretive plots they are accused of orchestrating.

- **Misinformation and disinformation can play a role in radicalization and mobilization** -
  False claims can be used to provide scapegoats for and to exploit public fears and grievances. For example, public fear and panic around the fast global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was exploited by fringe and mainstream actors to amplify anti-migrant narratives, essentially blaming the virus, its death toll and subsequent mitigation efforts (e.g. social restriction measures) on minority communities.

  Violent extremist actors may also recruit others by presenting their false claims as "the underlying, unpleasant truths of the world", radicalizing others by claiming these alleged "unpleasant truths" are the reasons behind their personal grievances. Many Incels claim, for example, that women are hypergamous - that they will always look for a better (e.g. more "handsome", wealthier) partner - and that feminism oppresses men. These claims are used to explain their "involuntary celibacy", thus scapegoating women and feminism for related grievances. Disinformation can also be used to "test the waters", where more moderate claims are presented on mainstream platforms to gauge the receptiveness of others to those claims - if they are receptive, they are then invited to fringe platforms or closed forums to consume more extreme content.

  Misinformation and disinformation also create echo chambers, "in which extremist views reverberate with little opposition or exposure to alternate views". This is of particular risk on fringe platforms, like 4chan and 8Kun, where there is little to no content moderation and where there is an absence of more moderate voices that can disrupt the sole consumption of dangerous views. As noted on page five, however, conspiracy theorists and violent extremists have also posted and kept disinformative claims on mainstream platforms, using a playbook of tactics that help them evade moderation.

  Finally, mal-information has been used by violent extremists to mobilize others to action or to intimidate their "enemies". The Intercept reports on alt-right attempts to dox leftist protesters, for example, while neo-Nazis in Germany have created "enemy lists" of politicians and journalists, inciting others to mobilize against them. In June 2019, a politician on these lists was murdered, underscoring the very real and potentially fatal consequences of mal-information.

Case Study One: COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Rhetoric

What are the claims?

The COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately brought with it conspiracies about the origins of the virus, including claims that the virus was man-made and deliberately "released" by the Chinese government as an act of biowarfare. Misleading terms like "Chinese virus" and "kungflu" have been used to describe the pandemic, further suggesting the virus is inherently Chinese, and resulting in members of the general public blaming Chinese people (as well as individuals of Asian descent they perceive to be Chinese) for the virus and its consequences.

Public figures, including political influencers, and members of the general public have spread misinformation about the pandemic that has fueled anti-Asian sentiment, including the aforementioned claims that the virus was created in a lab and released intentionally. The Pew Research Center reported in 2020 that one in four Americans believed COVID-19 was intentionally engineered in a lab, demonstrating how widespread and "mainstream" unverified pandemic-related claims are.

Anti-Asian conspiracies about the origins and cause of the virus spread across social media, on mainstream and fringe platforms alike. For instance, since the global spread of COVID-19, some estimates report a 900% increase of anti-Asian racist abuse on Twitter alone, while fringe imageboard forum, 4Chan, also saw "an explosion in the use of Chinese derogatory terms... after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic." 4Chan is also home to some of the more extreme claims, including that the Chinese government released the virus as a bioweapon specifically to kill children.

The Impact: Anti-Asian Violence and Violent Extremist Exploitation

Since the public spread of anti-Asian misinformation about the pandemic, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in the US have been subject to attack, including verbal and physical abuse, damage to property and Asian-owned businesses. A study by the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism found there was **a 150% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes from 2019 to 2020** in 16 of the US's largest cities, despite the overall hate crime rate dropping by 7%. Further, a 2020 study by the Pew Research Center reports that nearly 60% of Asian adults they surveyed say it is far more common for people to express anti-Asian views now than before COVID-19.

In addition, **violent extremist movements have capitalized on anti-Asian sentiment** to further white supremacist fear-mongering around immigration, among others. Misinformation and public fear surrounding the pandemic has essentially offered hate movements the opportunity to amplify and increase exposure to their narratives, further underscoring the role false information can play in violent extremist mobilization and radicalization.

What are the claims?

Proponents of the "New World Order" conspiracy believe a cabal of powerful elite figures wielding great political and economic power is conspiring to implement a totalitarian one-world government. The conspiracy often incorporates antisemitic narratives, drawing on long-established tropes that claim Jewish people control major financial and media institutions around the world. Antisemitic conspiracy theorists believe the "New World Order" is being implemented through a series of crises manufactured by these Jewish elite. These include:

- The Holocaust - **Holocaust denial** is rife amongst antisemitic REMVE movements. This ranges from claims that the Holocaust death toll is exaggerated to outright denial that it ever happened. Jewish people are accused of creating the Holocaust (or "Holohoax") to gain sympathy and influence globally.
- Medical crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Acts of terror, like the Christchurch attack.
- The drug trade and "war on drugs", which are explained as Jewish efforts to control supply and demand of drugs.
- Global phenomena, like climate change.
- Multiculturalism, where immigration is explained as a Jewish-made mechanism to "invade" Christian nations, cause chaos and exert control. Some sites claim mass immigration is caused by Jewish people to commit "**white genocide**".

Conspiracy theorists may also refer to "the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion", a text claiming to contain the minutes of meetings between Jewish leaders in the late 19th century, in which these leaders allegedly set out their plans for Jewish world domination. The text has been thoroughly and repeatedly discredited as a fabrication (e.g. "fabricated content") and a forgery, but is still referred to amongst antisemitic "New World Order" conspiracy theorists as "proof" of Jewish plans for taking over the world.

The theory has gained notable traction amongst REMVE and militia movements. REMVE groups in particular deploy the aforementioned antisemitic tropes that claim Jewish elite, particularly banking families like the Rothschilds, are behind global crises and conflicts. In fact, some groups and movements conflate these narratives entirely by referring to the "New World Order" as the "Jew World Order", or "JWO" for short.

The Impact: a deeply-embedded and hateful conspiratorial worldview

The "New World Order" conspiracy is dangerous in both the coded antisemitism it encapsulates and in its broader construction of a dystopian worldview that induces mistrust and fear of government and global institutions. Verified stories and knowledge recognized as "fact" are thus dismissed as doctored content, created by the secretive, shadowy cabal of Jewish elite in effort to implement the "New World Order". Mainstream media outlets, for example, are rejected as "Jewish propaganda arms" used to brainwash society, while the United Nations, the World Health Organization and other multilateral bodies are accused of being vehicles through which this cabal operates.

What are the claims?

Proponents of "The Great Replacement" theory argue that "white European populations are being deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through migration and the growth of minority communities". "The Great Replacement" theory was first coined by French writer Renaud Camus. Identitarian movements across Europe have used the theory to recruit others to their cause, claiming their countries and national "identities" are under threat due to increasing immigrant populations. The theory has also spread into North American and Australian extreme-right circles. In the US, the "**white genocide**" conspiracy is a more popular alternative to "The Great Replacement" theory but essentially suggests the same - that there is a conscious effort to replace white populations through immigration, integration, abortion and violence against white people. The "white genocide" theory was coined and popularized by David Lane, known also for his white supremacist motto, the "14 words" (see Appendix Two). Like with the "New World Order", Jewish communities are often scapegoated for this perceived "white genocide". Among others, proponents of either "The Great Replacement" or "white genocide" may claim the following:

- **"Eurabia"** - distinct but closely linked with "The Great Replacement" is "Eurabia", a term used to refer to the alleged "Islamification" or "Shariafication" of Europe. Conspiracy theorists will manipulate, fabricate or take demographic statistics and news stories out of context to reinforce this claim. Muslim and Jewish communities are often painted as the cause for (if not orchestrators of) this alleged replacement, falsely accusing Muslims and Jewish people alike of having an innate desire to destroy Western civilization.
- **The Kalergi Plan** - a "popular strain of the white genocide conspiracy theory, which alleges that there is a deliberate plan to undermine European white society by a campaign of mass immigration, integration and miscegenation".
- **Miscegenation** - believers of either theory are generally fundamentally opposed to all forms of inter-racial or inter-ethnic relations, arguing that this causes "degeneracy". Often, claims about the alleged negative consequences of miscegenation are framed in academic language, thus adding a false sense of legitimacy to what is essentially explicit racism.

The Impact: extreme violence against the perceived "enemies" of the West

The perpetrator of the 2019 terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, which resulted in over 50 fatalities and an additional 50 injured, posted a manifesto on the fringe imageboard, 8chan, prior to live-streaming his attack. The manifesto was titled "The Great Replacement" and reveals the conspiracy played a significant role in his mobilization to violence. In this manifesto, the perpetrator consistently refers to immigration as a threat against civilization, stating "we must crush immigration and deport these invaders already living on our soil" and that "it is not just a matter for our prosperity, but the very survival of our people". Months following, a mass shooting in El Paso, Texas was similarly motivated by the notion that non-White communities are "invading" the West. The shooter wrote in his manifesto, for example, that the attack was a "response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas".

Case Study Four: QAnon and anti-state violence

What are the claims?

In 2017, a user calling themselves Q posted on the "politically incorrect" board of the fringe imageboard platform, 4chan. Q claimed to have high-level security clearance and that they would work to covertly inform the public about President Trump's ongoing battle against the "deep state", a blanket term used to describe those in power allegedly working against the then-President. Since then, users claiming to be Q have made thousands of posts and claims, or "Qdrops", and have fostered a rapid rise in QAnon supporters globally. At its peak, the QAnon theory "combined anti-vaccine, anti-5G conspiracies, antisemitic and anti-migrant tropes, and several bizarre theories that the world is in the thrall of a group of pedophile elites set on global domination...". Specific claims include:

- **Satan-worshiping deep state rules the world** - The QAnon conspiracy alleges that Democrats, Hollywood celebrities, billionaires and others are all part of a Satan-worshiping cabal that rules the world. This often entails the same antisemitic tropes employed in "New World Order" conspiracies, particularly that Jewish families, like the Rothschilds, George Soros and others, control major financial institutions and are thus able to influence political affairs worldwide.
- **Pedophilia and human trafficking** - Q also alleges that this deep state engages in pedophilia, human trafficking and ritualistic child sacrifice. QAnon supporters have even attempted kidnappings, inspired by the belief that the targeted children were "falling victim to pedophiles".
- **Adrenochrome harvesting** - Related to claims that the deep state engages in pedophilia and child trafficking is medical misinformation that alleges these global elites steal children to harvest adrenochrome from their blood. This adrenochrome is allegedly used to keep members of this elite young and healthy. Adrenochrome-related misinformation surged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when celebrities posted "natural" photos of themselves, prompting QAnon supporters to claim they were suffering from adrenochrome withdrawal due the pandemic's impact on the "child-trafficking supply chain". This is testament to the all-encompassing nature of conspiratorial worldviews, where even celebrity selfies are explained as proof of conspiracy.

Importantly, even though Q's initial claims were predominantly US-focused, the influence of QAnon and the conviction that there is a deep state conspiracy have spread across borders into Europe and beyond - some reports suggest to at least 85 countries globally.

The Impact: attempted kidnappings, anti-state violence

QAnon supporters were among the insurrectionists that stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Some reports suggest at least 34 QAnon adherents took part in the attacks on the Capitol. Further, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START) reports that, as of September 22, 2021, at least 100 QAnon followers have allegedly committed ideologically-motivated crimes in the US. Importantly, at least 18 of these followers also have known affiliations with other REMVE and anti-government militia groups, including the Sovereign Citizens Movement, Proud Boys, Three Percenters and the Boogaloo movement, pointing to an interplay between a) a decentralized, primarily digital conspiratorial movement united only by their belief in Q's claims and b) more defined group structures with notable operations offline. There have also been attempted and successful kidnappings inspired by QAnon beliefs that governments run child pedophilia and trafficking rings.

Provided is a list of technical terms that may be useful for practitioners to know if they work with individuals that have been exposed to misinformation, disinformation or mal-information online. These are informed by First Draft's "Information Disorder: the Essential Glossary". For more terms, visit this glossary.

- **Algorithm** - "a fixed series of steps that a computer performs in order to solve a problem or complete a task". On social media, algorithms are used to identify and show users material they might be interested in based on their past social media behavior (e.g. posts they interacted with). This can be dangerous in its potential to build an "echo chamber" of content that reinforces potentially harmful or misinformed views.

- **Bots** - "social media accounts that are operated entirely by computer programs", and which are usually made to generate posts, leave comments and otherwise interact with a post. Bots have been used in disinformation campaigns to increase exposure to false content through mass-posting that content under popular posts (e.g. posts by celebrities) and/or by using trending hashtags, among others. A **botnet** is a network of bot accounts - these may operate in a coordinated fashion and are often owned by one person. Owners of bot accounts generally try to give the accounts perceptions of authenticity, for example through purchasing fake followers or posting manipulated stock photos.

- **Data mining** - data mining helps disinformation actors identify users with whom specific types of false content may resonate. It is essentially the process of monitoring social media data "by combining tools from statistics and artificial intelligence to recognize useful patterns". This allows bad actors to make a more informed decision about whether or not a specific user may be receptive to a piece of harmful or misinformative content, thus allowing them to micro-target disinformation campaigns.

- **Manufactured amplification** - when content is boosted artificially. Users can purchase fake followers, fake likes, and even fake votes and signatures on online polls to amplify the "influence" and reach of a piece of (fake) content.

- **Trolling** - "the act of deliberately posting offensive or inflammatory content", where the intention is generally to provoke, disrupt or incite conflict. **Troll farms**, as described previously, refers to groups of individuals paid to operate several accounts for the purpose of trolling and/or spreading disinformation.

The following is a list of conspiracy theories and related terms and phrases that are common in the US. This is for reference only and shouldn't be taken as an exhaustive list of vocabulary related to misinformation, disinformation and mal-information, nor as definitive signs of radicalization or conspiratorial worldviews.

Antisemitic conspiracies:

- **The "New World Order"** - the belief that a secretive cabal of powerful elite figures wielding great economic political and economic power is conspiring to implement a totalitarian one-world government. Jewish communities are often scapegoated as the "orchestrators" of this plot.

- **Holocaust denial -** Holocaust denial is the denial or downplay of the extent and reality of the Nazi genocide of Jewish people during World War 2. Since then, it has been used to amplify antisemitic conspiracy theories, to minimize the dangers of Nazism (and neo-Nazism), and to attack Jewish people and communities. Related claims include that the Holocaust was an Allied conspiracy to demonize Hitler and Nazi Germany, or that the Holocaust was a deliberate Jewish conspiracy.

Antisemitic terminology:

- **((()))** - triple parenthesis are used to identify or refer to individuals believed to be Jewish.

- **"Holohoax", "Hollow Hoax"** - used to belittle the Holocaust or express Holocaust denial.

- **"Jew World Order"** - denoting the belief that Jewish elites are behind the "New World Order".

- **"joo" or "juu"** - derogatory plays on "Jew".

- **"six gorrillion"** - used to refer derogatorily to the six million Jews that are thought to have died in the Holocaust.

- **"Zionist occupied government" or "ZOG"** - the belief that the US government is controlled by Jewish "elites".

White supremacist conspiracies:

- **"The Great Replacement"** - a conspiracy that claims white European populations are being deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through immigration and the growth of minority communities.

- **White genocide -** core to the US white supremacist ecosystem is the "white genocide" conspiracy, which "warns that 'the white race' is endangered by a changing demographic landscape caused by immigration and interracial relationships". This relates to "The Great Replacement" conspiracy, however "The Great Replacement" started in and is focused on Europe.

White supremacist terminology:

- **14 words** - white supremacist slogan coined by David Lane, which reads "we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children".

- **Race Realism** - euphemism used for racist beliefs about the genetic inferiority of certain racial and ethnic groups, particularly in relation to intelligence.

- **RAHOWA** - short for Racial Holy War.

- **Remigration** - a non-violent form of ethnic cleansing that calls for forced deportation of (non-white) migrant communities in effort to build ethnically or culturally homogeneous societies.

- **White Power** - common white supremacist motto.

- **WP** - short for "white pride".

- **WPWW** - short for "White Pride World Wide".

COVID-19-related misinformation:

- **COVID-19 is man-made and/or a bioweapon:** COVID-19 has been subject to countless claims that it was man-made and deliberately released as an act of biowarfare or in attempt to exert control over populations (e.g. through social restrictions).

- **COVID-19 is a hoax or the danger is exaggerated:** Some claim the pandemic is a hoax entirely, while others claim the death toll is either fabricated or exaggerated.

- **The vaccine is an attempt at controlling citizens:** anti-vaccine conspiracy theorists may claim the vaccine contains a microchip that allows corporations and/or governments to control and survey those who receive it. Misinformation about 5G ties into this, with claims that 5G networks can be used to send signals to the implanted microchips, thereby controlling vaccinated people.

- **The vaccine will alter a person's DNA:** some COVID-19 vaccines use messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine technology, or genetic code instead of modified versions of the virus the vaccines seek to protect against. Some anti-vaccine actors claim that mRNA vaccines change a person's DNA and are designed to transform humans into genetically modified beings who can be monitored and controlled by unspecified external forces. Related claims, which seek to undermine trust in the vaccine based on its composition, suggest there are aborted fetal cells in the vaccine.

COVID-19 conspiratorial terminology:

- **China virus, Chinese virus, Kung flu, Wuhan virus** - terms suggesting COVID-19 is inherently Chinese, or that Chinese people are to blame for the virus.

- **Plandemic** - used to denote the belief that the virus and its outbreak was planned (e.g. by Jewish communities or unspecified elites).

Glossary of Hate-Based Disinformation

The following is a list of conspiracy theories and related terms and phrases that are common in the US. This is for reference only and shouldn't be taken as an exhaustive list of vocabulary related to misinformation, disinformation and mal-information, nor as definitive signs of radicalization or conspiratorial worldviews.

Other:

- **Eurabia** - a conspiracy theory coined in the early 2000s by Bat Ye'or (aka. Gisèle Littman), who argued that Western countries are slowly being brought under Islamic rule. **Islamification, Islamization, Shari'afication, "creeping Shari'ah"** are also used to this end.

- **QAnon** - "QAnon is a wide-ranging conspiracy theory that claims that an elite group of child-trafficking pedophiles have been ruling the world for a number of decades and that [former] President Trump has a secret plan in place to bring this group to justice."

- **Disinformation about the Great Reset** - **"**The Great Reset is the name of an initiative launched by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in June 2020 that called for 'fairer outcomes' and a rethinking of global investment and government expenditure in order to revive the world's economy in light of the catastrophic economic effects of the pandemic. Conspiracy theorists believe this initiative is in fact a plot to destroy capitalism and enact a one-world government under the cover of COVID-19. The key elements of the Great Reset conspiracy, as analyzed in the Guardian, are that the 'global elite is using COVID-19 as an opportunity to roll out radical policies such as forced vaccination, digital ID cards and the renunciation of private property.'"

Annex Three - Further Reading

In addition to the sources hyperlinked to throughout this information pack, we recommended the following resources.

On the phenomena of misinformation, disinformation, mal-information and conspiracy theories

- "Disinformation" by the American Security Project.

- Research by the Global Disinformation Index.

- The Digital Forensic Research Lab at the Atlantic Council.

- "Types of Fake News" by the Arthur W. Page Center.

- Downloadable resources on misinformation by the News Literacy Project.

- "What are deepfakes - and how can you spot them" by Ian Sample for the Guardian.

- "Understanding Information Disorder" by First Draft News.

- Downloadable resources on disinformation by Fighting Fake.

- "Five types of fake news and how to spot them" by Media Update.

- "What is a troll factory?" by NATO.

- "How to Spot Fake News Online" by Lance Whitney for PC Mag.

- MediaWise by Poynter.

- "Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation" by Julie Posetti, Cherilyn Ireton and Claire Wardle, et.al for UNESCO.

- "A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world" by Poynter.

- "Developing a Civil Society Response to Online Manipulation" by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

- "The 101 of Disinformation Detection" by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

- "Counter Disinformation Toolkit" the UK Government's Communication Service.

- "Countering Online Misinformation" by UNICEF. See especially the tools listed from page 10-16.

- "Information Disorder - the Definitional Toolbox" by First Draft News.

- "COVID-19, Disinformation and Hateful Extremism" by Kate Cox, Theodora Ogden, Victoria Jordan and Pauline Palle for Commission for Countering Extremism

On specific types of misinformation and conspiracy theories (e.g. medical, hate-based):

- "Infodemic" by the World Health Organization. See also their information sheets on understanding the infodemic and the "potential of frequently used information technologies during the pandemic".

- "Disinfodemic - Deciphering COVID-19 Disinformation" by UNESCO

- "The COVID-19 social media infodemic" by Matteo Cinelli et. al.

- "Confronting Health Misinformation" by the US Public Health Service.

- The Institute for Strategic Dialogue's COVID disinformation briefings one, two, three and four.

- "Anatomy of a Disinformation Empire: Investigating NaturalNews" by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

- "QAnon offenders in the United States" by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.

- "The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory" (about QAnon) by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

- "QAnon and Conspiracy Beliefs" by Brian F. Schaffner.

- "The Boom Before the Ban: QAnon and Facebook" by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

- "Disinformation Briefing: Narratives around Black Lives Matter and Voter Fraud" by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

- "Hosting the 'Holohoax': A Snapshot of Holocaust Denial Across Social Media" by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

- "'The Great Replacement': The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism" by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.