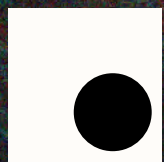


# WEAPONIZED LAUGHTER: MEMES AND HATE IN THE CANADIAN DIGITAL LANDSCAPE



**Hatepedia**

**UJA**

HOLOCAUST  
EDUCATION CENTRE



# **Weaponized Laughter: Memes and Hate in the Canadian Digital Landscape**

**A Report by the Online Hate Research and Education Project  
Produced by the Toronto Holocaust Museum**

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**This report contains and references imagery depicting slurs, hateful messaging, and graphic violence. Discretion is advised.**

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# FOREWORD

Greetings,

For 37 years, the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Centre has educated visitors of all ages about the horrors of the Holocaust and fostered meaningful discussions about civil society for present and future generations. Founded in 1985, our Centre has reached thousands through its museum, survivor speakers, and flagship programs like Holocaust Education Week, fulfilling our duty to preserve and share the memory of those who survived the Shoah.

On June 9 2023, the museum will re-open in a new state-of-the-art facility as the Toronto Holocaust Museum where visitors will be inspired to think deeply about the Holocaust and make connections between history, world events, and contemporary Canadian life. Through a layered, technology-rich experience, it will be unlike anything else in the field. We look forward to opening our doors and welcoming you to the future of Holocaust education in Toronto.

In October 2021, our Centre launched the Online Hate Research and Education Project, an inquiry into the rise of hate speech online. This project, funded by the federal government, aims to provide new insights regarding the spread of hateful ideologies online, and to educate a wide variety of public about online danger. The educational components of the project will continue well after the project ends in March 2023

The data and insights from this project will serve to support our museum to educate the public about the contemporary relevance of the Holocaust while providing the tools to understand how hate manifests itself in contemporary settings. With the publication of this report, we also hope to support researchers, journalists, teachers, law enforcement officers and lawmakers in countering hate under all its forms, wherever they may manifest themselves.

We look forward to welcoming you to the new museum this spring.

Dara Solomon

*Executive Director, Toronto Holocaust Museum*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines findings from an in-depth analysis of 2872 internet memes shared by over one hundred Canadian social media accounts that demonstrate hate speech as defined by the Ontario Human Rights Code. Key findings include:

- Our research demonstrates that memes play a key role in the spread of hate propaganda, as evidenced by the high number of memes found on the various accounts reviewed across social media platforms.
- Hateful memes can be found on every major social media platform, and often stay visible on these platforms for weeks and months, if they are ever taken down.
- Individual forms of hate rarely manifest alone. The overwhelming majority of the accounts included in our data set, as well as every major affiliation considered in our research targeted multiple groups, and 38.65% of the memes collected targeted more than one community.
- In addition to Jews, 2SLGBTQA+ people, and women, common targets of hate speech in memes included Asian people, Black people, Muslims, immigrants, and racialized people in general - including Indigenous peoples and people of non-European origin.
- More than one third of memes targeting 2SLGBTQA+ people directly engaged with anti-transgender narratives.
- Hateful memes from networks that originated in Canada were typically more likely to reference Canadian affairs than memes from international networks that operate in Canada.
- When compared to other targeted groups, a high rate of memes targeting Jewish people either imply that Jews are a powerful menace to society or deny, trivialize, or celebrate historic persecution towards Jewish people.
- When compared to other targeted groups, a high rate of memes targeting 2SLGBTQA+ people imply that they are abusive or predatory towards vulnerable people, such as children.
- When compared to other targeted groups, a high rate of memes targeting Black people imply that Black people are inherently violent or dangerous.
- When compared to other targeted groups, a high rate of memes targeting Indigenous people (including Indigenous Canadians) denied, trivialized, or celebrated historic persecution towards them.

# INTRODUCTION

Online hate takes many forms, and not all of them are obvious. While explicit, expletive-laden posts on social media are easy to identify as hateful, many lack the knowledge to dissect through elaborate propaganda often presented as humor. Since October 2021, the Holocaust Education Centre's *Online Hate Research and Education Project* (OHREP), funded through a grant from the Government of Canada's Anti-Racism Action Plan, has sought to shed light on this phenomena by creating new insights through research and by educating the public on the harms of online hate speech.

This report addresses both of these objectives. For over a year, our team has been collecting hateful memes posted online by Canadian users, dutifully analyzing them while looking at everything from their central theme to the communities they target, and the ways in which these images target these communities. The results of this process are deep and specific qualitative and qualitative insights into the scope and effects of online hate in Canada. A previous report, published in January 2023, looked at a subset of the data collected dealing specifically with the topic of the Holocaust, notably exposing a number of trends weaponizing the memory of the Shoah against its primary victims – Jews. This report, on the other hand, dissects through our broader data set, and provides clear information into who is targeted by online hate, how they are targeted, and who is targeting them.

Through the many workshops we have given since the start of the project – with a range of audiences from Grade 5 students to university classrooms – we have identified gaps in knowledge which limit the ability for parents and teachers to speak with children about the promotion of online hate. Many teachers, for example, expressed surprise when told that there are groups and movements which seek first and foremost to radicalize teenagers, and who use the same emerging social media platforms used by teenagers to reach them. Similar gaps hinder the capacity for journalists to report on displays of hate, lawmakers from addressing them, and law enforcement from effectively holding hate peddlers accountable for their actions. It is our hope that this report will provide information that is both valuable and accessible to a wide range of publics.

The choice to primarily study memes as a medium for online hate has proved controversial in some instances. After all, memes are broadly understood to be unserious, humorous images, meant to elicit laughter, not promote hate. Few understand the political function of memes on the Internet in 2023. The majority of memes posted on social media nowadays have no political meaning. Yet, there is plenty of evidence to support the argument that memes can be used to fulfill the same functions as pamphlets outlining political programmes once did. The potential for memes to go viral – and in effect, to dramatically accelerate the spread of political messages beyond the scope of the wildest dreams of past propagandists likewise beckons us to study their use in greater detail.

Our research found hateful memes published on every major social media platform we reviewed, regardless of the features of those platforms. Most of these memes were published by

known hateful actors, identified through media reporting and through open-source research methods. In many cases, the same memes were reposted across these actors' different channels, indicating an explicit propagandizing intent behind their publication.

However, the humorous nature of memes provides a level of cover which obscures the intentions of those posting them, and often gives them a level of plausible deniability, helping them avoid accountability for promoting hate. Many of the memes collected through our research used seldom-known symbols to promote hate in more discrete ways. Others cloaked despicable forms of hate, for instance Holocaust denial, as comedy. These strategies, along with many others, must be widely understood in order to disarm the propagandists who use social media to spread their hateful beliefs to a growing number of users everyday.

Daniel Collen and Étienne Quintal

*Researchers for the Online Hate Research and Education Project*

## About OHREP

At the conclusion of the National Summit on Antisemitism in late July, the Holocaust Education Centre received a \$340,000 grant from the Government of Canada's Anti-Racism Action Program to fund the 18-month Online Hate Research and Education Project (OHREP).

The aim of the project was to produce novel insights into the promotion of hate online, to hold workshops, and to create tools to empower students, teachers, civil society leaders, politicians and law enforcement to counter hate on-and-offline. Since the beginning of the project, we have conducted qualitative research into hateful online spaces, launched a website hosting a publicly-available Guide to Online Hate, hosted dozens of workshops reaching thousands, published a report about the weaponization of the Holocaust and online memes, and rolled out lesson plans to start conversations about hate in classrooms. Our researchers have participated in a number of professional conferences, and shared the findings with elected officials, even contributing as witnesses during a Heritage Committee inquiry into hateful displays. All this work was supported by our Youth Council, who gave us their insights into the lived experiences of young people throughout the project.

Though this report all but marks the end of OHREP, we hope the effects of our work continue to be felt for years to come.

## About Hatepedia

Hatepedia is an educational website and resource center built with from OHREP's original research to provide educators, parents, lawmakers, and researchers with tools to identify and counter the proliferation of online hate. Its most prominent feature is Guide to Online



Hate, a publicly accessible database of symbols, terms, themes, and meme characters that are commonly used in online hate. It is available in both official languages, and contains nearly 300 entries.

The website also hosts our report into the weaponizing of the Holocaust in online hate memes, lesson plans, as well as links to media appearances and workshops by the project's researchers.

# METHODOLOGY

The memes analyzed for the purpose of this project were collected over a 10 month period from October 2021 to August 2022. They were posted by a large number of accounts and groups found across the major social media platforms, as well as from leaked chat logs in the case of files found on the messaging application Discord. In order to justify collection, these memes had to fit three distinct criterias:

1. The meme was either posted by an account identifying (or identified, in the cases of accounts linked to prominent members of hate movements) as Canadian, or have been posted in reference to a Canadian topic.
  - In the case of memes collected from the website 4chan, only posts published by users using the 'Canadian' tag on their publications, or content directly commenting on Canadian political issues, was considered.
2. The meme targets one or more of the groups falling under the Ontario Human Rights Code protected grounds list, which includes age, ancestry, skin colour, race, ethnic origins, place of origin, creed, disability, family status, marital status, sex, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, receipt of public assistance and record of offenses.
3. The meme was posted between October 2019 and the end of the data collection phase in August 2022.

Sometimes, memes deemed hateful by our team did not target a specific group. Such memes often featured symbols like the Nazi swastika, which are undeniably hateful, but are often used as a more general expression of hate towards a wide variety of groups rather than towards a specific one. Although the symbols may have historically been used for hate speech directed at particular groups of people (for example, Confederate symbols are historically used as anti-black symbols and more likely used with this prejudice in mind), the memes they are used in often do not express hate towards a specific group, but rather support for an ideology or movement that is hateful towards many different identifiable groups.

Memes used for our research were collected using a variety of methods depending on the platform. Some were directly provided by project partners, in particular the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, and scrapped from leaked chat logs using a publicly-available tool called 'Discord History Tracker'. Most other memes were collected using simple screenshots, while memes collected from Telegram were downloaded using the platform's 'Export Chat History' tool.

The memes collected throughout the research were then analyzed and classified per relevant associated information, including the time of publication, time of collection, the platform from which the meme was sourced, the affiliation of the posting account to hate movements, the 'target' of the meme (who is being targeted by the meme's hateful meaning) and per their 'method of targeting' (what rhetorical devices are used to promote hate against the target. For the latter classification, we use the Hallmarks of Hate, a legal framework used in the prosecution of hate speech. This information was entered into a series of spreadsheets by a researcher, reviewed by another, and then copy-pasted into an aggregate list containing all entries in order

to facilitate quantitative analysis.

# The Hallmarks of Hate

Over the course of our research, we used a legal framework known as the Hallmarks of Hate in order to help assess the hateful intent of different messages. This framework, created by Canadian lawyer Richard Warman, lays out eleven ‘hallmarks’ – oft-used tropes in hate speech – which we used to divide our data set between different themes as they came across in our research.<sup>1</sup> It has successfully been used in Canadian courtrooms to prosecute hate speech cases. As this framework was developed over two decades ago, we interpreted them with some flexibility in order to reflect contemporary trends, all the while remaining true to their initial meaning. The Hallmarks of Hate are:

1. *The targeted group is portrayed as a powerful menace that is taking control of the major institutions in society and depriving others of their livelihoods, safety, freedom of speech and general well-being;*
2. *The messages use “true stories”, news reports, pictures and references from purportedly reputable sources to make negative generalizations about the targeted group;*
3. *The targeted group is portrayed as preying upon children, the aged, the vulnerable, etc.;*
4. *The targeted group is blamed for the current problems in society and the world;*
5. *The targeted group is portrayed as dangerous or violent by nature;*
6. *The messages convey the idea that members of the targeted group are devoid of any redeeming qualities and are innately evil;*
7. *The messages communicate the idea that nothing but the banishment, segregation or eradication of this group of people will save others from the harm being done by this group;*
8. *The targeted group is de-humanized through comparisons to and associations with animals, vermin, excrement, and other noxious substances;*
9. *Highly inflammatory and derogatory language is used in the messages to create a tone of extreme hatred and contempt;*
10. *The messages trivialize or celebrate past persecution or tragedy involving members of the targeted group;*
11. *Calls to take violent action against the targeted group.*

Though we applied the Hallmarks very directly, we did interpret some elements of them as more general than is clearly stated in their original descriptions. This includes the following interpretations:

**Hallmark 2:** We considered the use of ‘fake news’, or references to disinformation, as falling under the purview of this hallmark in contexts where these references aim to validate pre-existing stereotypes or to make generalizations about certain groups. References to

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<sup>1</sup> Goldberg, 2006.



disinformation in this case can include the use of misquoted and fabricated documents and religious texts. Additionally, we treated statistics as reports.

**Hallmark 7:** We considered the explicit endorsement of ideologies advocating for the banishment, segregation or eradication of certain groups as falling under the purview of this hallmark. Most often, this was done in the context of explicitly neo-Nazi propaganda featuring Nazi symbols.

**Hallmark 8:** We considered racist caricatures, such as the Happy Merchant and the Sheeet Guy as comparisons meant to dehumanize the target. As such, we itemized them as demonstrations of Hallmark 8, even if the caricature did not contain direct reference to animals, vermin, excrement, and other noxious substances. Additionally, sexualizations of targets that could be reasonably assumed to have been made in an effort to dehumanize a specific group were considered examples of Hallmark 8.

**Hallmark 10:** We considered memes attacking certain social justice movements as falling under the purview of this hallmark, as attacks would directly or indirectly misrepresent the historic goals of those movements.

**Hallmark 11:** We considered endorsements of violent strategic frameworks, most often Accelerationist Neo-Nazism, as falling under the purview of this hallmark.

## Affiliations

In order to be able to draw out diversified insights regarding the use of memes by different hate movements, ideologies or groups, our researchers endeavoured any affiliations potentially held by the various accounts reviewed. Using open-source research techniques, including the review of social media feeds as well as activist and media reporting, we associated certain labels to most accounts listed within our data set. For platforms where users post anonymously, we used these associations parsimoniously, only in cases where an affiliation was made explicit. These associations were based around the poster's self-identification, available news reporting describing the beliefs of the poster, a broad analysis of the body of publications by the poster, or specific themes in the memes themselves.

We define an ideology as a broadly coherent worldview built around specific core beliefs, and movements, which typically encompass a number of activist groups built around specific interpretations of an ideology.

## Degree of Hate

In order to further classify the memes collected through our research, we also ascribed a 'degree of hate' to them, which specified the intent of these different displays of hate. We considered three separate degrees of hate:

1. Explicit and direct: Memes falling under this degree targeted groups directly, with no other intent than to target these groups.
2. Explicit and indirect: Memes falling under this degree targeted groups directly, as part of an argument meant to support a non-hateful policy goal or belief.
3. Implicit: Memes falling under this degree targeted groups indirectly through the use of symbolism.

## Limitations

This research project was conducted by a small team of initially three, and for the major portion of this project, only two researchers. As such, the final scope of our work and findings was impacted by capacity challenges. Both temporal factors and having to balance a wide variety of tasks associated with a project of this scope limited our capacity to collect more data which could have contributed to developing larger samples for different target groups and affiliations. As well, while the majority of our teams identify as being part of one or more equity-deserving groups, the size of our team limited the diversity of insights as well as our capacity to collect data targeting specific groups. These hindrances were addressed through consultation with partner organizations, but should be considered when reviewing data from some of the smaller data sets mentioned in this report.

# BY THE NUMBERS

Throughout our project, we analyzed 2,872 memes, in the form of images and videos, reflecting the broad and ever-changing nature of memes today. These memes were published by 106 separate accounts, or, in the cases of posts made on Reddit, retrieved from 3 different subreddits, in addition to images anonymously published on 4chan.

363 of those memes were collected from Facebook, 708 from Instagram, 158 from Twitter, 325 from Discord, 1077 from Telegram, 10 from Reddit, 214 from 4chan and 17 from Youtube. These numbers should not be interpreted as estimations of the prevalence of hateful posts on these different platforms. However, these numbers do reflect the relative ease or challenges of scraping content across a variety of platforms, each with different community guidelines.<sup>2</sup> For example, collecting large amounts of content from a platform like Telegram, which employs 'laissez-faire' community guidelines, is much easier than doing so on more mainstream platforms like Facebook and Instagram, which have more severe rules against hate speech. Similarly, platforms like Reddit pose challenges regarding the collection of content pertaining to Canada, given the anonymous nature of user posts.

These memes were identified as promoting hateful beliefs in one of three ways. 1,704 of these memes promoted hate explicitly, meaning they directly targeted a given group, with the explicit purpose of attacking this group. 397 memes promoted hate indirectly, by resorting to hateful tropes in expressing non-hateful ideas and beliefs. These posts often supported political positions with targeted attacks towards certain communities. Lastly, 771 of the memes collected through our research promoted hate using symbols. These statistics support the view that the accounts reviewed for this project sought first and foremost to promote hate towards different communities, rather than express legitimate political beliefs.

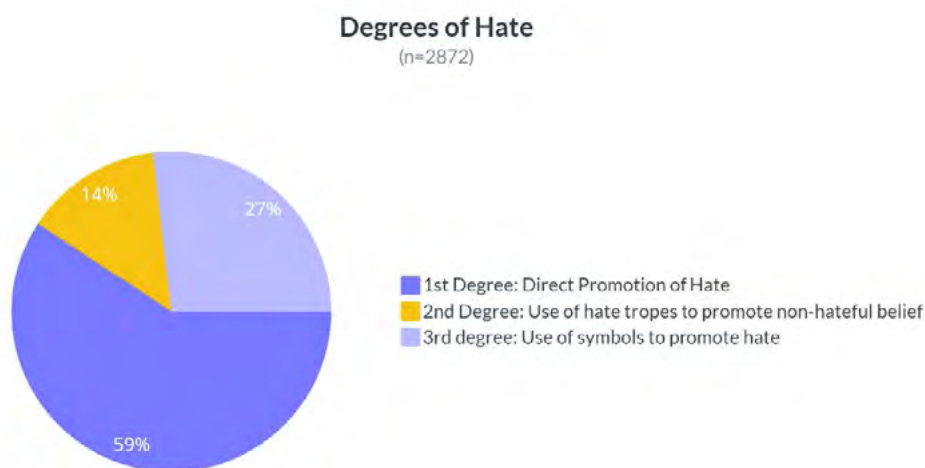


Figure 1: Degrees of hate in our data.

<sup>2</sup> Bateman and Thompson, 2021.



# Targets and the Hallmarks of Hate

The memes collected as part of this project targeted a number of communities and groups.

- 732 memes specifically targeted Jews.
- 585 memes targeted members of the 2SLGBTQA+ community, including 218 attacking transgender and non-binary people, and 149 attacking same-sex attracted people.
- 398 memes specifically targeted Black people.
- 347 memes targeted racialized people - in practice, these memes promoted racism against a broad range of communities, often without singling out specific ones.
- 200 memes targeted women.
- 123 memes targeted immigrants and refugees.
- 119 memes targeted Muslims.
- 62 memes targeted people of Asian origins.
- 43 memes targeted Indigenous people.
- 651 memes did not target a specific community. However, these memes most often displayed symbols of hate used to attack a wide range of communities, including the Nazi swastika and the Confederate flag. While these symbols are historically associated with the victimization of specific groups - Jews for the former, and Black people for the latter - these symbols also convey a general sense of hate which we deemed important to include in our analysis.
- Other communities and groups targeted in the content we collected through our research includes Sikhs, fat people, people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, people with physical disabilities, elderly people, recipients of public assistance, as well as a number of specific ethnic and national identities.

These statistics should not be interpreted as representative of the scale at which different communities are targeted over another online, but rather as representative of the scale of their targeting within our data set. These statistics should not be used to support claims that one community faces more hate online than another, in particular due to the high number - 1100 (or 38.65%) of our data set - of memes targeting more than one community at once.

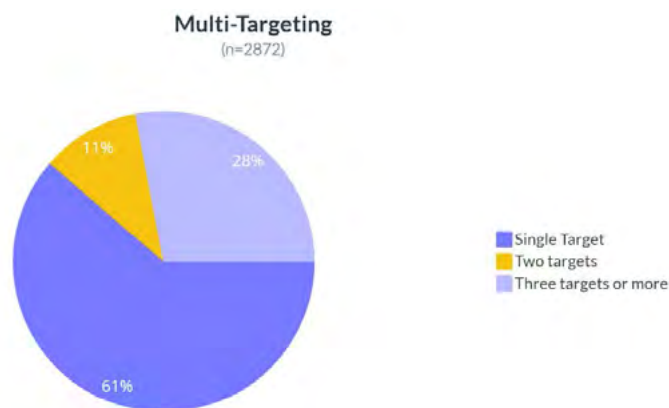


Figure 2: Percentage of memes per number of targets.

Memos collected through our research were analyzed per the Hallmarks of Hate framework, which has been used in Canadian courts to identify hate speech.

- 415 memes displayed the ‘powerful menace’ hallmark.
- 68 memes displayed the ‘true story’ hallmark.
- 149 memes displayed the ‘prey on the vulnerable’ hallmark.
- 244 memes displayed the ‘dangerous’ hallmark.
- 131 memes displayed the ‘evil’ hallmark.
- 456 memes displayed the ‘banishment, segregation or eradication’ hallmark.
- 365 memes displayed the ‘dehumanization’ hallmark.
- 263 memes displayed the ‘inflammatory language’ hallmark.
- 576 memes displayed the ‘trivialization or celebration of past persecution’ hallmark.
- 375 memes displayed the ‘calls for violence’ hallmark.

Memos displaying calls for violence were distributed unevenly across the platforms. 226 out of the total 375 memes (60.27%) displaying hallmark 11 were collected from Telegram, representing 20.98% of the total number of memes from the platform in our data set. This is likely a reflection of the platform’s ‘hands off’ approach to content moderation and struggles to take down violent content.<sup>3</sup> Memos collected on Discord (13.53%) and 4chan (13.08%) similarly had a higher propensity to call for violence, which might reflect on the challenges of content moderation on instant messaging applications in the case of the former, and on anonymous forums in the latter. The use of all three of these platforms for the purpose of hate promotion has been well-documented in recent years.<sup>4 5 6</sup>

680 memes displayed none of the hallmarks – most often, these memes did not specifically target a given group, but featured symbols associated to the promotion of hate. Memos targeting different communities showed varied rates of adaptability to the hallmarks of hate framework. For instance, while only 29 of the 732 memes (3.96%) we collected that targeted Jews did not display any of the hallmarks, a much higher number of memes targeting the 2SLGBTQA+ community – 121 of 585, or 20.68% – did not fit the framework. This could indicate a need to revamp the framework to take into account the changing nature of online hate speech.

Different groups were targeted at varying rates with certain hallmarks, which more often than not reflected prominent tropes leveled against them.

- Memos targeting Jews<sup>7</sup> were most likely to employ the ‘powerful menace’ hallmark (47.81%) and the ‘trivialization or celebration of past persecution’ hallmark (32.92%), reflecting the continued prominence of antisemitic tropes of Jewish global control and of the weaponization of the Holocaust in hate movements.

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3 Trust & Safety Foundation, 2021.

4 Gerster, Kuchta, Hammer and Schwieter, 2022.

5 Rieger, Kämpel, Wich, Kiening, and Groh, 2021.

6 Gallagher, O’Connor, Vaux, Thomas and Davey, 2022.

7 Appendix, figure 5.

- Memes targeting Black<sup>8</sup> (25.37%) and Muslim<sup>9</sup> (30.25%) communities most often employed the ‘dangerous’ hallmark, indicating the prominence of depictions of both groups as being dangerous to others.
- Memes targeting the 2SLGBTQA+ community<sup>10</sup> were most likely to employ the ‘dehumanization’ hallmark (20.85% of all anti-2SLGBTQA+ memes reviewed) and the ‘prey on the vulnerable’ hallmark (17.6%), indicating the prominence of dehumanizing depictions and of the portrayal of 2SLGBTQA+ individuals as being predatory in hate movements.
  - Transgender and non-binary people<sup>11</sup> (18.81%) and gender non-conforming people (28.57%) were more likely than same-sex attracted people<sup>12</sup> (10.74%) to be depicted in this manner.
- Memes targeting women<sup>13</sup> (30.5%), people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities<sup>14</sup> (64.7%) and fat people<sup>15</sup> (31.03%) and people of Asian descent<sup>16</sup> (40.32%) similarly often employed the ‘dehumanization’ hallmark.
- The ‘inflammatory language’ was most prominently used against Black people (28.14%), but was also prominent in memes targeting same-sex attracted individuals (29.53%), people of Asian descent (24.19%) and people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities (29.41%).
- Memes targeting Indigenous peoples<sup>17</sup> most often displayed the ‘trivialization or celebration of past persecution’ hallmark (62.79%) showing the prominence of residential school denial and of the celebration of colonial violence in our data set.

Memes targeting Indigenous people only accounted for a small portion (1.5%) of memes analyzed for this report. Of them, Indigenous people from North America were expectedly targeted often, as indicated either by mention of specific historic themes or by the inclusion of Inuit, First Nations, or Métis iconography. It is worth noting that the first widely-reported confirmation of mass graves at a Canadian Residential School occurred in May of 2021, and that ongoing confirmation of unmarked graves at Residential Schools throughout 2021 was widely reported throughout Canada.<sup>18</sup> Popular narratives that downplayed or outright denied the confirmations had been established between this time and August of 2022,<sup>19</sup> when the most recent memes observed in this study were posted.

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8 Appendix, figure 5.1.

9 Appendix, figure 5.2.

10 Appendix, figure 5.3.

11 Appendix, figure 5.4.

12 Appendix, figure 5.5.

13 Appendix, figure 5.6.

14 Appendix, figure 5.7.

15 Appendix, figure 5.8.

16 Appendix, figure 5.9.

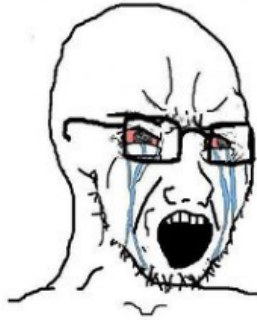
17 Appendix, figure 5.10.

18 Meissner, 2021.

19 Brown, 2021.



NOOOOOO RACIST COLONIZER  
 OPPRESSOR11111 RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS  
 IMPERIALIST NATIVIST COLONIAL OPPRESSOR  
 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE GENOCIDE CHINESE  
 DISCRIMINATION VICTORIAN NATIONALIST  
 CHAUVINISTIC SEXIST MURDERED LOUIS RIEL  
 CULTURAL GENOCIDE BRITISH APOLOGIST  
 ALCOHOLIC11111 \$10 DOLLAR BILL MAN BAD



YES

A meme depicting Canada's first Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald as a 'Yes Chad' responding to a 'Soyjak' who calls him a variety of names including "Racist Colonizer Oppressor" and "Residential Schools Imperialist". Retrieved from Discord.

## Ideologies and Movements

When analyzing the memes collected as part of this project, researchers endeavored to identify any affiliations they or their poster might have with prominent hate ideologies or movements. These associations were based around the poster's self-identification, available news reporting describing the beliefs of the poster, a broad analysis of the body of publications by the poster, or specific themes in the memes themselves.

We define an ideology as a broadly coherent worldview built around specific core beliefs, and movements, which typically encompass a number of activist groups built around specific interpretations of an ideology.

- 71 memes were affiliated to the anti-transgender movement.
- 30 memes were affiliated to anti-Zionist and specifically antisemitic ideologies.
- 37 memes were affiliated to the ideology of Extremist/Radical Black Hebrew Israelitism.
- 51 memes were affiliated to the COVID-19 conspiracism movement.
- 227 memes were affiliated to the Diagonal movement.
- 937 memes were affiliated to neo-Nazi ideology.
  - Of these, 74 memes were posted by members of a Canadian Proud Boys faction which now professes neo-Nazi ideology.<sup>20</sup>
- 95 memes were affiliated to the QAnon movement.
- 233 memes were affiliated to extremist undercurrents of Québec nationalism.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Smith, 2022.

- 117 memes were affiliated to the ideology of Radical Traditionalist Catholicism.
- 955 memes were affiliated to the ideology of white nationalism.
- 647 of these were specifically affiliated with the Groyper movement.

While some of these affiliations are oriented around a primary target group, our research shows that memes associated with each of them targeted at least one other community, with most targeting many more.

Affiliation -> Target ↓	Diagolon	COVID-19 conspiracism	QAnon	Québec Ultra- Nationalism	Radical Black Hebrew Israelites	Radical Traditionalist Catholicism	White nationalism
2SLGBTQA+ people	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black people	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Immigrants and Refugees		✓	✓	✓			✓
Jews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Muslims			✓	✓		✓	✓
Racialized people	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Women	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 3: Affiliations and targets.

## Platforms

Each of the platforms studied in the context of this project was found to be a home to different varieties of affiliations, which may or may not be a reflection of their features. Content found on platforms with little to no content moderation, like Telegram (20.96% of memes collected on the platform) and 4chan (13.02%), for example, were more likely to feature calls for or celebrations of violence. A variety of factors, including censorship, likely influenced which platforms were favored for sharing hateful memes. This would explain why groups with a preference for violent imagery, in particular neo-Nazis and Diagolon, prefer to use these platforms, though a similar tendency was observed for content found on Discord, a platform which hosts private group chats (13.49%).

# AFFILIATIONS

Our work is predicated around the idea that prejudiced beliefs are rarely entirely isolated. For instance, someone who expresses antisemitic beliefs is more likely than someone who does not to hold similar biases against other communities. The links between various forms of hate are made particularly clear in the manifestos and online footprints left behind by the perpetrators of recent hate-motivated attacks across the globe. A manifesto allegedly uploaded online by the perpetrator of the 2019 Poway Synagogue shooter expressed both antisemitic and Islamophobic beliefs.<sup>21</sup> The man behind the killing of 51 Muslim believers in Christchurch, New Zealand, also in 2019, believed a wide range of ethnic groups, including Muslims, Jews and Africans, should be expelled from ‘Western’ countries, referring to them as ‘invaders’.<sup>22</sup> More recently, in 2022, a shooting in Buffalo claimed the lives 10 Black Americans, though the shooter claimed Jews were ‘the biggest problem’.<sup>23</sup>

While these are extreme examples, each of these cases indicate that hate does not grow in a vacuum, and that hateful beliefs tend to be a part of broader worldviews. This is an observation that is supported by our research: 38.65% of the memes we collected and analyzed targeted more than one group. As such, we strived to correlate the beliefs expressed by the various accounts targeted through our research with affiliations to a number of hateful groups, movements, or ideologies. This allowed us to develop specific insights into the beliefs behind these various instances, and provides us with relative estimates regarding the rates at which their adherents target specific groups of people.

While we relied on very large data samples for some of these affiliations - in particular white nationalism and neo-Nazism - the analysis behind others relies on a smaller amount of data. As such, these findings are meant to be interpreted as indicative of broader tendencies, but should not be seen as providing either an exhaustive list of all the groups targeted by people professing these beliefs or as an exact assessment of the levels at which certain groups are targeted.

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<sup>21</sup> Murtaza, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Kampeas, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Tress, 2022.



# White Nationalism

White nationalism is a broad racial and political ideology which, according to the Southern Poverty Law Centre, argues that white identity should be the organizing principle of ‘Western’ countries.<sup>24</sup> White nationalists believe that the white race faces a number of existential threats across the world, such as multiculturalism, immigration, and declining birth rates among white people. The Great Replacement conspiracy theory, according to which elites are attempting to destroy the white race through a number of ploys, plays a central role in this ideology.

White nationalism is a very adaptable ideology, and the specific beliefs held by different white nationalist movements can differ. While some seek to create a whites-only ethnostate, others support slightly less radical solutions, such as the enforcement of white majority in Western countries. Likewise, white nationalists vary in their methods and embrace of violence. While some advocate for mass violence and genocide, others believe ending non-white immigration or enforcing the ‘remigration’<sup>25</sup> - or deportation - of non-whites to their ‘countries of origin’, whether or not they have ever lived there.

A malleable ideology, white nationalism often adapts itself to local contexts and online cultures. In Europe, white nationalism is peddled by the so-called ‘Identitarian Movement’.<sup>26</sup> In Canada, white nationalism is promoted by movements like Canada First,<sup>27</sup> and by networks of accounts active across social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and Telegram. Our research also found a number of accounts expressing white nationalist thought in the context of arguments for Québec nationalism and sovereigntism. White nationalist memes from less formal networks tended to emphasize on messaging that white people were the only real Canadians. These messages more often than not argued that ethnic and cultural groups such as Indigenous Canadians, Asian-Canadians, and Indian Canadians should not be considered Canadian.



A racist caricature of an Asian woman says “I’m Canadian” to a blond Caucasian man who disputes it.  
Retrieved from 4Chan.

<sup>24</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Cédelle, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Barthélemy, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Roback, 2021.

In recent years, white nationalism gained prominence through the rise of the alt-right,<sup>28</sup> a primarily Internet-based movement which merged meme culture and hate in their propaganda. The alt-right notably represented one of the larger factions during the 2017 white supremacist Unite the Right rally. With many of its figureheads deplatformed or facing legal consequences, the alt-right has since made way for a number of hate movements putting similar emphasis on the use of online cultures to grow their ranks, most notably the Groyper movement.

## The Groyper Movement

Sometimes billed as the descendent of the alt-right, the Groyper movement forms one of the most prominent factions of today's white nationalist movement. Like the alt-right, adherents to the Groyper movement are quick to embrace new technologies, and use youth-oriented social media platforms like TikTok in order to radicalize young publics. Their de-facto leader, Nicholas J. Fuentes, himself very young, embraces an overtly religious, and prominently antisemitic interpretation of white nationalist doctrine.

Adherents to the Groyper movement will often perform stunts designed to attract outrage and drive attention towards their messaging, including crashing conservative political events to ask loaded, antisemitic questions to speakers,<sup>29</sup> with the objective of pushing conservative attendees farther to the right. In recent months, the Groyperers have made headlines after rapper Kanye West affiliated himself with Fuentes and brought him to a dinner at 45th U.S. President Donald Trump's home for a dinner.<sup>30</sup>

Since gaining public attention, Fuentes' brand of politics has sparked imitators across international borders. In Canada, his supporters identify as 'Canada First', and often adapt his talking points to contemporary Canadian political issues.

## What our data says about their propaganda:

White nationalist memes collected through our study targeted a wide array of groups. A plurality of these memes targeted the 2SLGBTQA+ community (24.81%), in particular transgender people (9.53%) rather than racial or ethnic groups. This might reflect the growing influence of Christian nationalism over the ideology, and potentially points towards the prevalence of an understanding of 2SLGBTQA+ people as contributors to the so-called Great Replacement. Other prominent targets include Black people, racialized people, Jews, immigrants & refugees, as well as women.

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<sup>28</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Coaston, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Caputo, 2022.

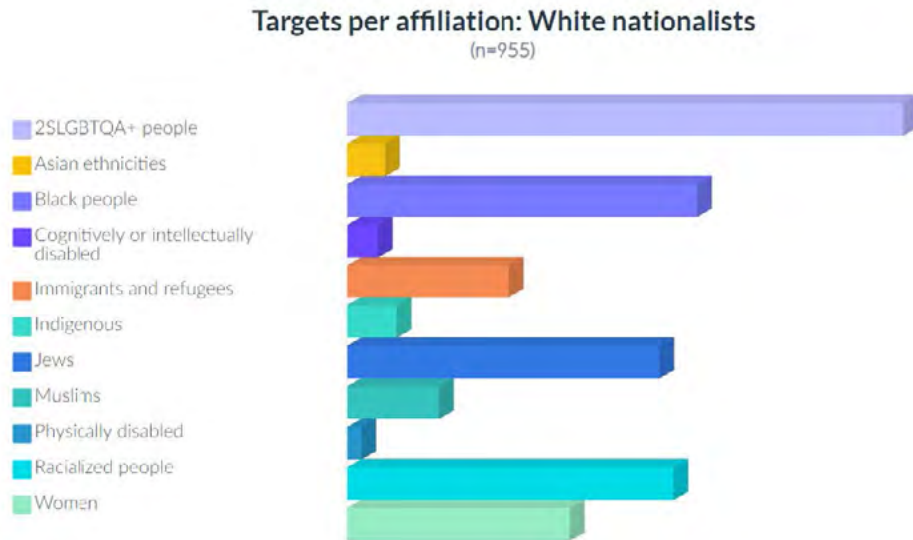


Figure 4: White nationalist memes and their targets.

While the range of groups targeted was similar for both, our data showed marked differences between the rates at which certain groups are targeted over others between Groyper-affiliated and non-Groyper white nationalist memes. In particular, while only 9.41% of non-Groyper memes targeted Jews, Groyper memes targeted them in 16.07% of instances, showing the importance of antisemitism to the latter movement's worldview.

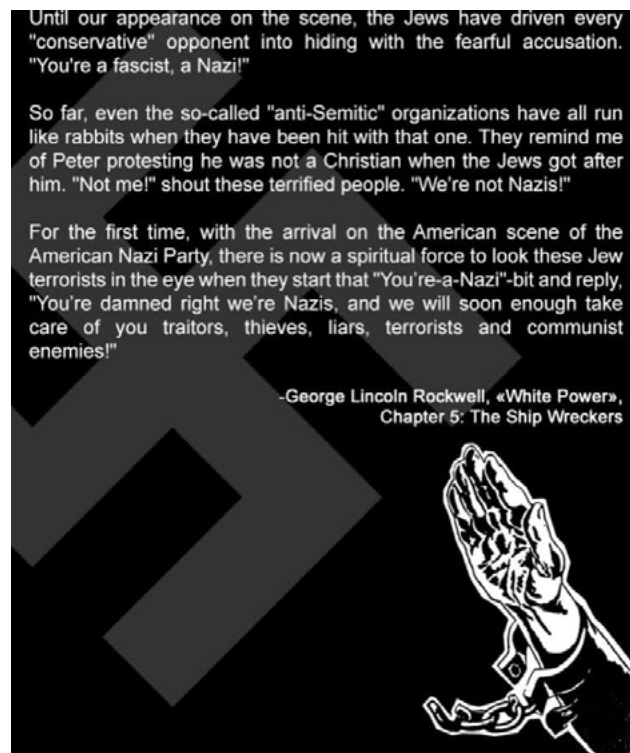
Perhaps surprisingly, memes published by affiliates of the Groyper movement were much less likely (22.26%) to mention Canadian political issues than other white nationalist memes (40.58%). These statistics could be explained by these accounts' reliance on the rhetoric of their American counterparts in determining their own.

Memes affiliated to white nationalism were found across a variety of platforms, in particular Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram.

# Neo-Nazism

Though the definitions of Nazism and neo-Nazism are not indisputed, they are established enough to recognize with working definitions. Nazism is typically defined as adherence to the fascist politics of what Germany's National Socialist Workers Party became under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. Neo-Nazism is most often used to describe distinct movements promoting National Socialism that emerged after the collapse of Nazi Germany.

A wide-variety of accounts and individual memes identified through our research promoted explicit and clear support for National Socialism. Though many contemporary white nationalist movements are in reality neo-Nazis, not all are cohesive and consistent in their beliefs and not every member of movements see themselves as such. An example of this would be the Diagonol movement, which has prominent members that have praised Hitler and positively referenced genocide towards Jewish people,<sup>31</sup> but that has not unilaterally adopted Hitler's politics into the movement. Additionally, some neofascists movements promote some specific elements of Adolf Hitler's beliefs and strategies, but also practice a more abstract approach to his beliefs that contradict traditional Nazism. For example, the Groyper movement's leader Nick Fuentes strongly promotes Adolf Hitler's politics and praises Nazi Germany, but also supports a specific contemporary form of American Christian Nationalism. As such, we reserved the affiliation of "neo-Nazi" in our data for clearly communicated support for either Adolf Hitler, Nazi Germany, the ideology of contemporary neo-Nazis or self-identifying Nazi movements since the Second World War, in particular George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazi Party.



"You're damned right we're Nazis..." A meme quoting George Lincoln Rockwell depicts a roman salute and a large Swastika. Retrieved from a Canadian Telegram channel.

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<sup>31</sup> Thompson, 2022.

In addition to known affiliations, some memes posted by anonymous accounts are included as neo-Nazi memes, either because the poster self-identified as a Nazis or because the message promoted neo-Nazism directly and specifically. Most of these come from 4Chan’s /pol/ board.



A flag design that merges Imperial Germany and Canada's flags. Retrieved from 4Chan.

## What our data says about their propaganda:

937 of the memes reviewed this study were labeled as being affiliated to neo-Nazism - making this affiliation the largest portion of our data. Many of these memes were posted by accounts that posted content affiliated with recently active Canadian neo-Nazi groups such as White Lives Matter, Folkish Resistance Movement, and white supremacist “Active Club” chapters that have been linked to Hammerskins, an international racist skinhead network.<sup>32</sup> Since all of these groups frequently repost content from U.S. chapters of their corresponding networks, it is no surprise that very few memes involved Canadian themes. Specifically, only 63 (6.72%) of these memes focused on Canadian content.

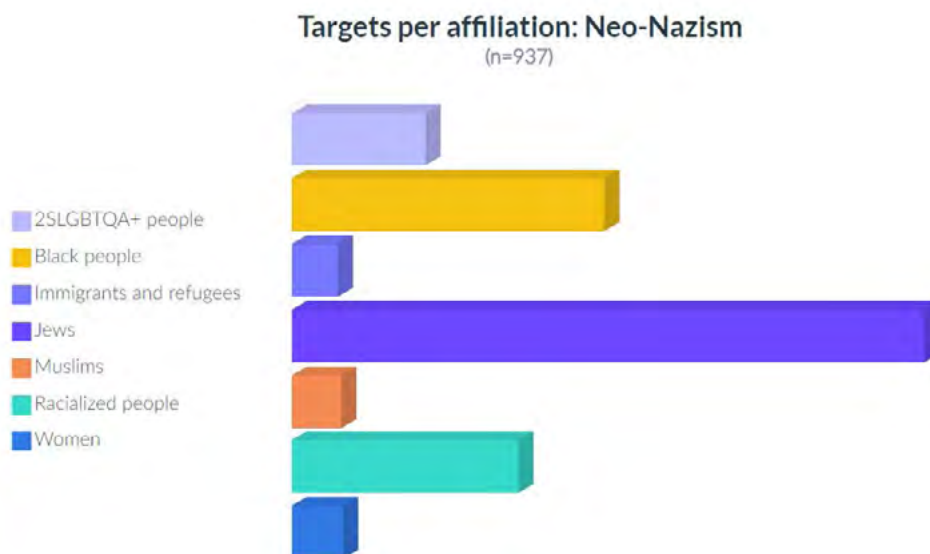


Figure 4.1: Neo-Nazi memes and their targets.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Smith, 2022.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jews were targeted in roughly 38.52% of neo-Nazi memes analyzed, making them the most common target. 19% of neo-Nazi memes collected targeted Black people, making them the second-most targeted after Jews. This is unsurprising, and parallels hate crime statistics trends in North America. For example, in Canada, police-reported hate crimes most often target Black people, followed by Jewish people.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, a significant portion of this data set, 24.65%, promoted a general sense of hatred without identifying specific target groups, most often through the use of Nazi imagery.



Meme depicting domestic terrorist Ted Kaczynski as a neo-Nazi, as indicated by a skull mask, threatening Black people, Jewish people, and capitalists.

Memes affiliated to neo-Nazism were primarily found on Telegram and 4chan. Given the extreme nature of neo-Nazi beliefs and rhetoric, these platforms offer the most stability to these accounts given their relaxed approach to policy enforcement.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Wang and Moreau. 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Trust & Safety Foundation, 2021.

# Diagolon

Diagolon is a Canadian far-right anti-government network that takes its name from a fictional, tongue-in-cheek meme separatist country spanning parts of Canada and the U.S. from Alaska to Florida. The network is informally led by Jeremy Mackenzie, a Canadian Armed-Forces veteran facing firearms and assault charges.<sup>35</sup> Before the name Diagolon, Mackenzie and other far-right streamers operated under the Plaid Army collective. Much of Plaid Army's brand, including the promotion of rather extreme conspiratorial antisemitism,<sup>36</sup> has been supplemented by Diagolon. Both the fictional country and the network are represented by a variety of symbols, the most common of which is "Ol Slashy", a black flag with a white stripe across its top-left and bottom-right corners.



Photograph of a Diagolon flag displayed over a rifle and an ammunition box. Retrieved from a Canadian Telegram channel.

As far as is publicly known, Diagolon does not have official membership, but rather a less formal, non-binding membership structure born from grassroots organizing and online engagement. Diagolon members refer to themselves as “bigots”, appropriating what is often perceived to be an insult and wearing it as a status symbol. The term allows them to brand themselves as unconfined by the social expectation that people shouldn't be proud of their bigotry, and also can be said to be used ironically as a means of coding the movement's overt hatred.

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<sup>35</sup> Book, 2022

<sup>36</sup> Yellow Vests Canada Exposed, 2020.

**THIS COUNTRY HAS  
A PROBLEM WITH  
INTOLERANCE.**

**THERE ISN'T  
ENOUGH OF IT.**

Retrieved from a prominent Diagonol influencer's Telegram channel.

As mentioned in the previous section, Diagonol members often engage with adjacent political movements, but that do not necessarily brand themselves as strict white nationalists or neo-Nazis themselves, as the movement's primary messaging is more fluid. In fact, despite white supremacist views expressed by figureheads of Diagonol in livestreams<sup>37</sup> and even in memes, the movement includes some people of colour who promote both Diagonol's anti-government and populist politics and the movement's strategies.

Diagonol's memes are more often branded and watermarked with Diagonol imagery than most other informal far-right movements. However, neither the culture or messaging is particularly unique. The movement draws influence from the alt-right, 4Chan culture, and accelerationist neo-Nazi groups, in particular with its reliance on memes from propagandizing purposes.

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<sup>37</sup> Phillips, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Smith and Kriner, 2022.



Meme in which prominent Jewish celebrities point to a wooden door to a gas chamber in a Holocaust concentration camp and laugh. Wooden doors are common imagery in Holocaust denial memes, as it is common myth that Zyklon-B would not work be deadly unless it was contained in a completely airtight room. Retrieved from a prominent Diagonol influencer's Telegram channel.

Despite the overlap of strategies and shared antisemitism,<sup>39</sup> it is worth noting that strict neo-Nazis in Canada sometimes do not consider Diagonol to be aligned to the same goals as they are. There have been hostile relationships between groups represented in neo-Nazi memes analyzed by OHREP and prominent members of Diagonol.

The most popular personalities in the movement target most sizable identifiable groups in Ontario, with Jews, 2SLGBTQA+ people and women being the subject of many promoted narratives. It is worth noting that anecdotally, the group's targeting of women can be more specific than their targeting of Jews and 2SLGBTQA+ people and that there are prominent women in the movement, which distinguishes them from broad male supremacist movements that draw from the same online far-right cultures of the 2010s.

In February 2022, an individual once described as 'head of security of Diagonol' by the movement's de facto leader<sup>40</sup> was arrested along with several others at a Freedom Convoy-linked border blockade, on charges of conspiracy to murder. Equipment seized during the arrests bore the insignia of the group.<sup>41</sup>

## What our data says about their propaganda:

Diagonol accounts observed in this study demonstrated hate speech most sizable minority groups in Ontario that are common targets of hate speech, with the absence of memes targeting immigrants to Canada and Muslims being exceptions. 2SLGBTQA+ people were targeted the most, accounting for 29.07% of Diagonol memes reviewed. Jews were targeted the second-most often, accounting for 17.10%. This is consistent with reporting highlighting Diagonol's antisemitic roots and their more recent focus on anti-2SLGBTQA+ activism.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Canadian Anti-Hate Network, Twitter post, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Tran, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Smith and Kriner, 2022.

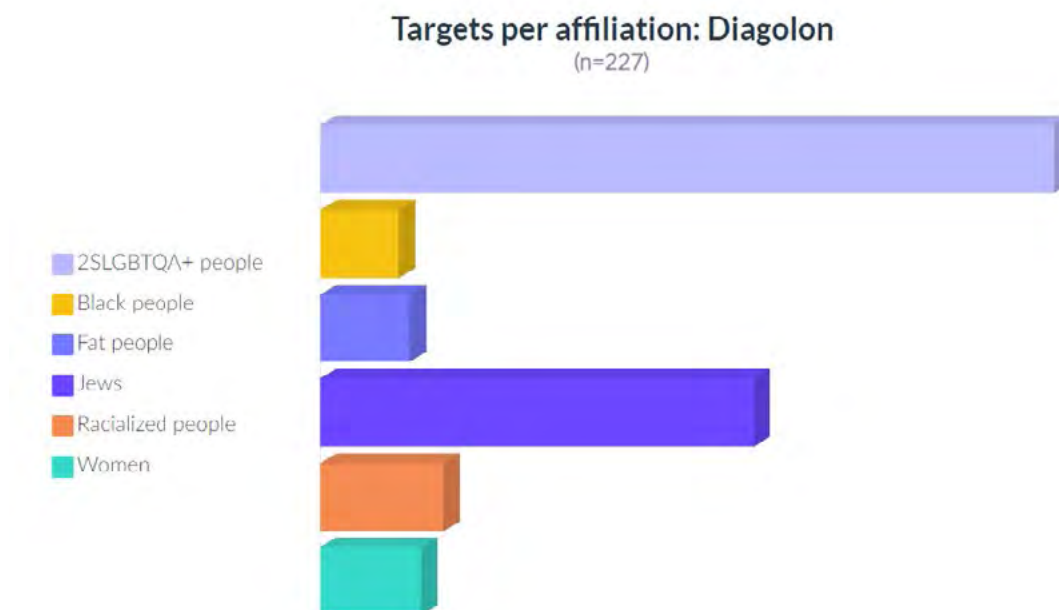


Figure 3.2: Diagonon memes and their targets.

Almost exactly half (114 of 227) of reviewed memes from Diagonon referenced Canadian themes, which is significantly higher than many other affiliations. As Diagonon is a Canadian movement with transnational influences, this is not inconsistent with the nature of the movement's message outside of internet memes.

Memes affiliated to Diagonon were found across a variety of platforms, but primarily on Telegram and Instagram.



# Radical Black Hebrew Israelism

Radical Black Hebrew Israelites are believers in a fringe interpretation of the doctrines of the new religious movement of Black Hebrew Israelism, a movement mixing Black nationalism with elements of Christian and Jewish theology.<sup>43</sup> While Black Hebrew Israelites believe that Black people are the descendents of the Israelites, their radical counterparts believe only they can claim this lineage, and direct vitriol towards Jews who they believe to be impostors.<sup>44</sup>

Adherents to the movement promote a worldview which merges strict Black nationalism, conspiratorial antisemitism – including aspects of Holocaust denial – and a deep-seated belief in traditional gender roles. As such, radical Black Hebrew Israelites tend to oppose so-called ‘race-mixing’, same-sex relationships, transgender identity, and performances of femininity deemed to be too provocative or promiscuous.

Canadian radical Black Hebrew Israelite groups are active on several platforms, including Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, and some alternative streaming and video-hosting platforms. However, memes were posted to Instagram at a much higher frequency than on Facebook. This was a common trend alongside a variety of hate movements, likely due to Instagram’s focus on static images and short videos that make it suitable as a medium for visual propaganda.

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## What our data says about their propaganda:

Unlike some other affiliations, our analysis of memes published by radical Black Hebrew Israelites is based on a small amount of data – 37 separate memes. As such, while the insights contained in this section have been deemed significant enough to be reported, they might not tell a full story in terms of what Black Hebrew Israelites believe, or who they target.

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<sup>43</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre, n.d.

<sup>44</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre, n.d.

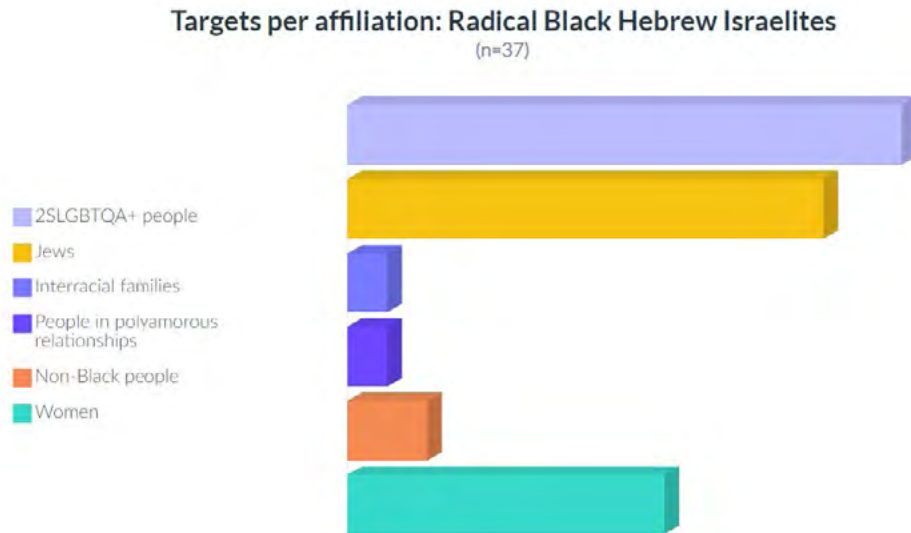


Figure 4.3: Radical Black Hebrew Israelite memes and their targets.

A plurality of memes published by Radical Black Hebrew Israelites collected through our research targeted one of three groups: 2SLGBTQA+ people (37.83%), Jews (32.43%) and women (21.62%). Other targets found in our data include non-Black ethnicities, interracial families, and people in polyamorous relationships. These memes more often than not presented different hateful beliefs as facets of Radical Black Hebrew Israelite theology, and sometimes quoted scripture to justify the exclusion of different communities. For instance, one such meme claimed that homosexuality was ‘un-African’ and a ‘white disease’.

Memes affiliated to Radical Black Hebrew Israelism were found on Instagram, though factions of the movement are active across a number of platforms.

# Radical Traditionalist Catholicism

Radical Traditionalist Catholicism is a radical interpretation of the beliefs of traditionalist Catholics which views Jews as an enemy of the Church. While Radical Traditionalist Catholics express a range of beliefs, most view the modern Catholic Church as having been co-opted by subversive Jewish, homosexual or communist infiltrators, and the current Pope as illegitimate. Jewish Deicide, or the belief that Jews are specifically and solely responsible for the killing of Jesus Christ, is also often embraced by adherents.<sup>45</sup> It should be clear, as well, that the views expressed by Radical Traditionalist Catholicism, form a marked departure from those of Catholics, and should not be ascribed to all Catholics or Catholicism as a whole.

The beliefs of radical Traditionalist Catholics are also rooted in a strict interpretation of gender roles according to which women should remain in the home and dress modestly. 2SLGBTQA+ identities, similarly, are entirely rejected, and depicted at times as a Jewish invention, or as an expression of evil in the contemporary world.

Radical Traditionalist Catholicism is, first and foremost, a religious belief, which can be hailed to support a number of political beliefs. As such, adherents to the doctrines of Radical Traditionalist Catholicism can also be believers in white nationalism, neo-Nazism, Qanon, or any other hateful ideology which is not directly contrary to Christian belief.

## What our data says about their propaganda:

Nearly half (46.15%) of the Radical Traditionalist Catholic memes collected through our research targeted Jews. This is consistent with the central nature of antisemitism to their beliefs. These memes more often than not allude to conspiracy theories depicting Jews as evil masterminds, in particular by associating them to communism as well as prominent social justice movements like Black Lives Matter. Several memes also peddled the 'Jewish deicide' trope, according to which Jews are responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

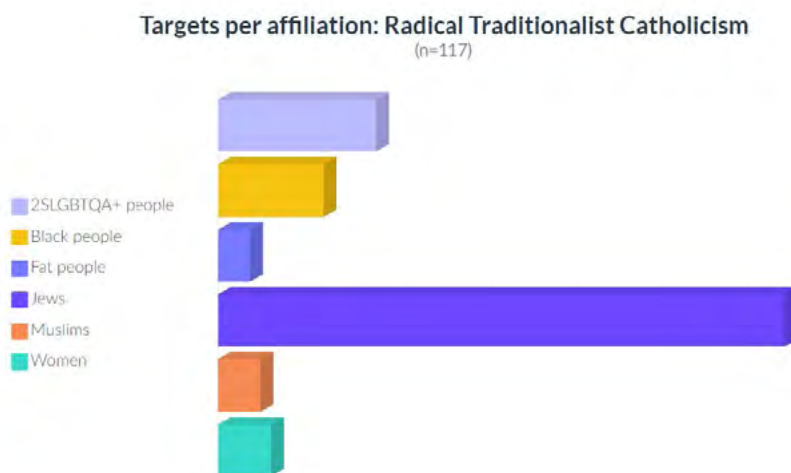


Figure 3.4: Radical Traditionalist Catholic memes and their targets.

<sup>45</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre, n.d.

Other target groups include 2SLGBTQA+ people, targeted in 12.82% of memes collected, Black people (8.54%), women (4.27%) and Muslims (3.41%).

Memes affiliated to Radical Traditionalist Catholicism were found across a number of platforms, but primarily on Facebook and Instagram.

# COVID-19 Conspiracism

The COVID-19 pandemic upended the lives of all Canadians, who were forced to shift to a new normal in which social distancing, masking, lockdowns, and vaccines rapidly became a part of our daily life. The fear and anxiety which marked this transition led many to absorb conspiracy theories flourishing online as part of their worldview. As the pandemic evolved, those who embraced these conspiracy theories came to form a more or less concise movement, building on the mobilizations of populist anti-immigrants and anti-Muslim groups which had taken place in recent years.<sup>46</sup> Today, the movement is particularly recognized for the Freedom Convoy, a series of demonstrations held in January and February of 2022, marked by the occupation of Ottawa's downtown core and the blockade of several border crossings by protesters.

While this movement is centered around belief in conspiracy theories which are not inherently hateful, this relationship with historical hate groups and the proximity of conspiracy theories and hateful tropes in online spaces has led to the targeting of a number of communities by adherents of COVID-19 conspiracism. This likely contributed in no small part to an increase in anti-Asian hate crimes<sup>47</sup> as the community came to be blamed by many elements within the movement for the inception of the pandemic, or for their allegedly insufficient loyalty to the Canadian state. Jewish organizations have also pointed to an acceleration in the spread of antisemitic conspiracy theories, and have called into question the use of Holocaust imagery by anti-vaccine activists throughout the pandemic.<sup>48</sup>



A meme promoting transphobic and Sinophobic theories about Canada's chief public health officer Theresa Tam, the de facto face of Canada's government's response to COVID-19. Retrieved from a Canadian COVID-19 conspiracy theory Facebook page.

<sup>46</sup> Smith and Simons, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Balintec, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Anti-Defamation League, 2020.



With COVID-19 now occupying a diminishing part of our daily lives, many thought pandemic-related conspiracism would too gradually fade away from relevance. Far from being the case, adherents to the movement are increasingly moving towards a number of new causes, including protesting ‘Drag Queen Story Hour’<sup>49</sup> events meant to introduce children to gender fluidity, and opposition to so-called ‘15 minute cities’ – an urbanism concept according to which one should be able to access most basic necessities within walking distance of their home.<sup>50</sup>

Many of the groups, movements and affiliations studied through our research held affinities with the COVID-19 conspiracism movement. For the sake of accuracy, memes considered a being affiliated to COVID-19 conspiracism had to primarily affiliate themselves to this movement, while not expressing other affiliations.

## What our data says about their propaganda:

Memes published by individuals affiliated with the COVID-19 conspiracism movement tended to target two groups above others: Jews, who are targeted in 43.14% of these memes, and 2SLGBTQA+ people, who are the target in 29.42% of cases.



Figure 3.5: COVID-19 conspiracism memes and their targets.

Surprisingly, only one of the COVID-conspiracism memes collected targeted people of Asian descent. It is likely that the relatively small number of memes identified as being affiliated to COVID-19 conspiracism (51) limited our ability to capture the full scope of the movement’s rhetoric. Collection was in part complicated by the restrictive scope of data included as part of this analysis, as well as by the fact that a majority of the content reviewed on accounts linked to the movement featured relevant themes for the purview of our research.

Memes affiliated to COVID-19 conspiracism were found across a number of platforms, in particular Facebook and 4chan. It should be noted, however, that the majority of affiliations considered for this project showed affinities with arguments made by this movement.

<sup>49</sup> Hume, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Guest, 2023.

# QAnon

QAnon is a political movement built around conspiracy theories according to which there is an ongoing struggle for world control between a cabal of evil international elites, typically referred to as ‘globalists’ or ‘the Deep State’, and certain far-right populist politicians, most notably Donald Trump. While this narrative lies at the core of the movement, QAnon is often referred to as a ‘big tent’ conspiracy theory,<sup>51</sup> as its supporters often invoke a number of additional conspiracy theories in expressing their affiliation to the movement. Despite its American-centric nature, QAnon’s reach extends beyond borders, and the movement has sparked offshoots in Canada. Some Canadian adherents to QAnon follow a woman from British Columbia who claims to be the true queen and current ruler of Canada.<sup>52</sup>

Supporters of QAnon initially followed an anonymous individual going by the nickname ‘Q’, who posed as a senior official US government official aiding then-President Trump in his fight against the Deep State. ‘Q’ would post cryptic entries on the infamous imageboard 4chan, which would then be interpreted by followers. A month after Donald Trump’s defeat during the 2020 Presidential elections, ‘Q’ went silent for 18 months. He has since resumed posting, and some polls have indicated that support for QAnon has increased since Trump left office.<sup>53</sup>

The beliefs associated with QAnon are often repackaged in a way that obscures the hateful premise of their beliefs. However, given the movement’s incorporation of a range of conspiracy theories, and its central narrative’s proximity to longstanding antisemitic tropes, QAnon supporters have been known to target Jews, the 2SLGBTQA+ community and racialized groups with varying directness, oftentimes depending on the literature and content most often consumed by individual adherents.



Translated from French: “Qanon targets sex traffickers, pedophiles and satanists. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and the media target Qanon.” Retrieved from a Canadian Facebook account.

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<sup>51</sup> Roose, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Smith, Peter, 2021.

<sup>53</sup> David Smith, 2022.

## What our data says about their propaganda:

An extraordinarily large portion (62.11%) of analyzed memes affiliated with QAnon targeted Jews. However, of the memes targeting Jewish people, 23.73% did so indirectly, for example by invoking antisemitic conspiracy theories in a veiled way, through mentions of prominent Jews as opposed to explicit references to Judaism. Other memes affiliated to QAnon distorted the Holocaust by using associated symbols - for example, the yellow Star of David star worn on the sleeve - to compare the issues faced by unvaccinated Canadians to the hardships faced by Jews during the Shoah.

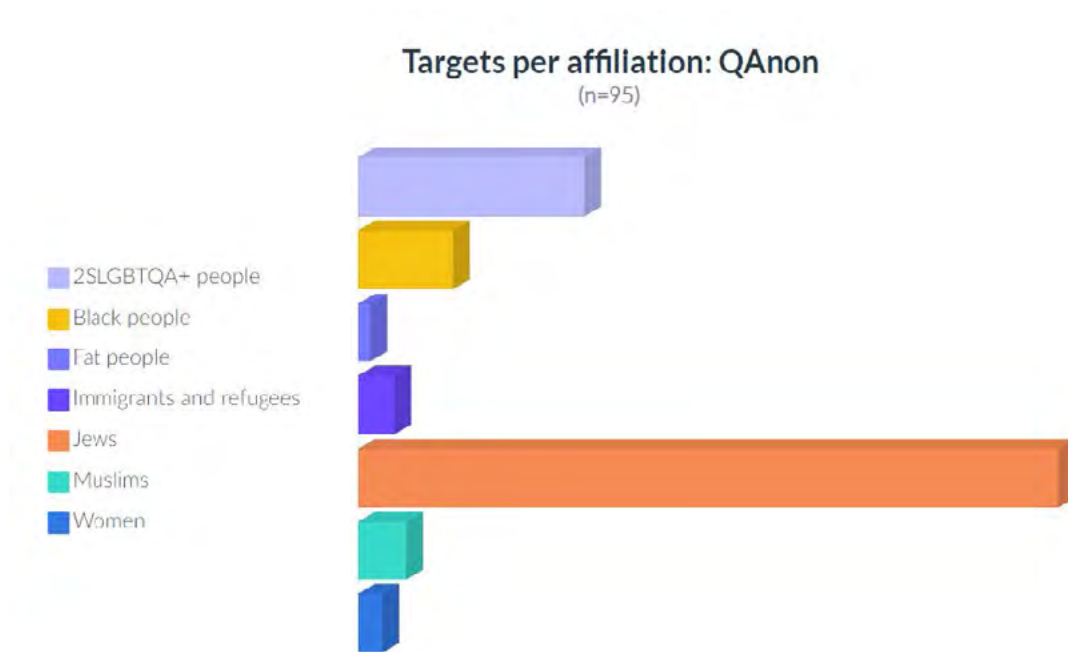


Figure 3.6: QAnon memes and their targets.

A smaller, but significant portion (20%) of the memes collected that were affiliated to QAnon expressed anti-2SLGBTQA+ beliefs, most often as part of conspiracy theories implying that things like homosexuality and transgender identities are being pushed on the population by powerful elites, in particular politicians.

Memes affiliated to Qanon were primarily collected from Facebook and Instagram.

# Québec Ultra-Nationalism

Movements promoting the sovereignty of Québec or wishing to create an independent, francophone state in the territory occupied by Québec today have existed in one form or another since the conquest of New France by England in 1760. The overwhelming majority of these movements are in no way hateful. However, there exist within the contemporary Québec sovereigntist movements elements which support their beliefs through ethnonationalism, racism, and other expressions of hate.

It is worth noting that Québec has long held different views than the rest of Canada regarding organized religion. Until 1960, the Catholic Church held considerable power in the province, and often rubbed shoulders with political elites. The reign of Québec Premier Maurice Duplessis, a strong-handed populist with strong ties to the Church, is often referred to as the ‘Grande Noirceur’ (Great Darkness),<sup>54</sup> and was marked by restrictive laws cracking down on communists, unions, and religious minorities including Jehovah’s witnesses and Jews.<sup>55</sup> As its name implies, the majority of contemporary québécois view this period as a dark time in québécois history. Following Duplessis’ death, the province undertook a period of great upheaval known as the Révolution Tranquille (Quiet Revolution), leading to a rise in secularism and nationalism,<sup>56</sup> as well as the emancipation of women. As such, many québécois view monotheistic religions as inherently misogynistic.<sup>57</sup>

These hateful elements within the broader sovereigntist movement are more often than not tied to other ideologies, but these affiliations take on a specific form due Québec’s status as the sole large francophone jurisdiction in North America, distinct culture as well as its unique relationship with organized religion.

Due to the general nature of the label, there exists several different expressions of Québec ultra-nationalism, which take on distinct shapes with different expressed opinions regarding important moments in Québec’s history. Some, for example, reject the legacy of the Quiet Revolution, and seek a return to the policies of the Great Darkness era. Those subscribing to this strain of nationalist thought more often than not ascribe to Radical Traditionalist Catholicism. Oppositely, other ultra-nationalists wholly endorse the Quiet Revolution, and view the targeting of religious minorities as a defense of a liberal, secular state. Lastly, some ultra-nationalists are less focused on religious issues, but oppose immigration, which they view as an obstacle to Québec sovereignty.

## What our data says about their propaganda:

Mememes collected as part of our research falling under this affiliation targeted a wide-range of groups, which reflects on the broad nature of beliefs falling under the umbrella of Québec ultra-nationalism. Racialized communities formed the most common target for these mememes (17.60%),

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<sup>54</sup> Durocher, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Canada’s Human Rights History, n.d

<sup>56</sup> Warren, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Warren, 2021.

followed by Muslims (16.74%) and 2SLGBTQA+ people (12.87%).

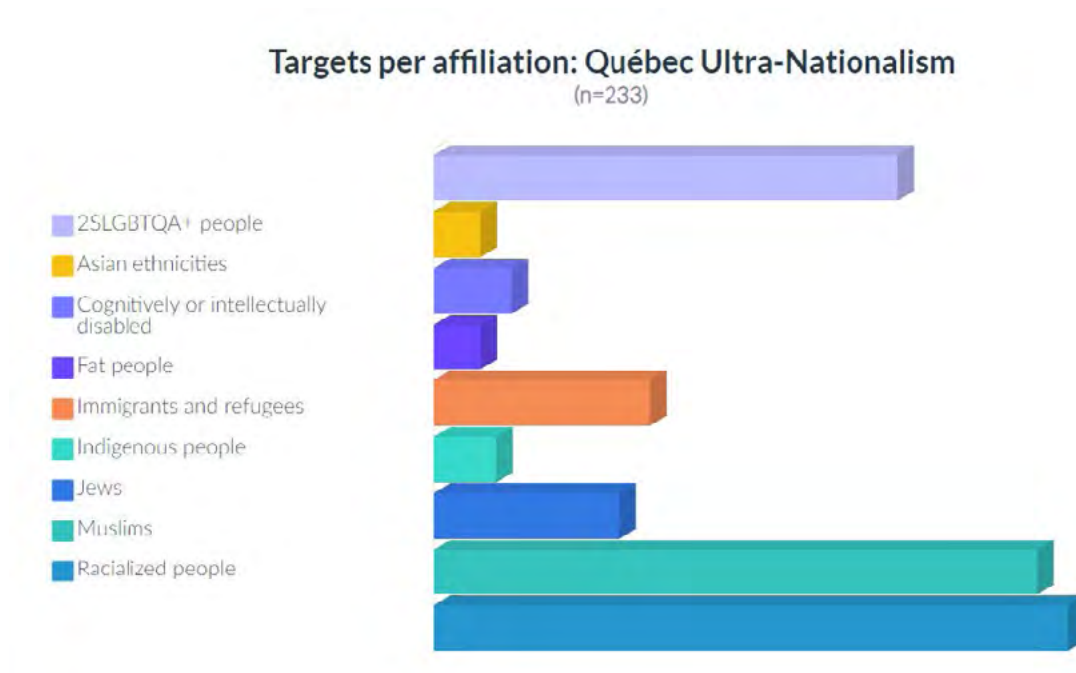


Figure 4.7: Québec ultra-nationalist memes and their targets.

A large number of memes (39.05%) used symbols in order to promote hate. Most prominent among these symbols are the likeness of former Québec Premier Maurice Duplessis, as well as Lionel Groulx, a nationalist catholic priest who, among other things, promoted the boycott of Jewish businesses.<sup>58</sup> Another prominent symbol used in memes falling under this affiliation was the Carillon Sacré-Coeur, a nationalist and religious flag once recognized as the provincial flag of Québec.

<sup>58</sup> Trofimenkoff, 2021.



# BIG STORIES

Expressions of hate are rarely isolated. An individual who professes antisemitic beliefs, for example, will more often than not carry similar biases against other communities. 38.65% of the memes collected through our research targeted more than one group at once. This is due at least in part to the fact that hateful beliefs are rarely adopted on their own, but rather as part of broader worldviews and ideologies. These might be more or less mature, and similarly more or less consistent, depending on their beholder. These worldviews nonetheless use some hateful beliefs to support other hateful beliefs, which are oftentimes bridged together through what our research team refers to as **'Big Stories'**. These Big Stories form overarching narratives which hold together and justify the different aspects of these worldviews. In practice, they form the ideological glue which binds together different hateful beliefs and define the form they take.

These Big Stories help those who believe them support their hateful beliefs and makes it easier for those who peddle hate to present their ideas through a more or less coherent narrative. In this sense, it stands to reason that most of these Big Stories are inherently conspiratorial in nature, as they fulfill a similar purpose to conspiracy theories: give their believers a capacity to both reason with the world around them, while giving them a feeling of agency about the direction of the world.

There is often significant overlap between these Big Stories. As conspiracy theories serve to explain another, so too do the hateful tropes which form these Big Stories. The central nature of antisemitism - or at least, the innate ability for many of these stories to be redirected towards antisemitic thought - cannot be ignored in this sense. If Big Stories like the Great Replacement do not necessarily always target Jews in how they are framed, they often leave the door open for an additional cast of boogeyman to be blamed for the ills of the world. As we know, Jews have historically been depicted as this boogeymen, and targeted on that basis.

# Jewish Global Control

**Target(s):** Jews, Racialized people, Refugees and Immigrants, 2SLGBTQA+ people.

## **Relevant Hallmarks:**

- 1 - The targeted group is portrayed as a powerful menace that is taking control of the major institutions in society and depriving others of their livelihoods, safety, freedom of speech and general well-being.
- 4 - The targeted group is blamed for the current problems in society and the world.
- 6 - The messages convey the idea that members of the targeted group are devoid of any redeeming qualities and are innately evil.
- 7 - The messages communicate the idea that nothing but the banishment, segregation or eradication of this group of people will save others from the harm being done by this group.
- 10 - The messages trivialize or celebrate past persecution or tragedy involving members of the targeted group.

Conspiracy theories alleging that Jews are either in control of, or seeking control of, major institutions across the globe are a central aspect of many hateful ideologies. Because of this, several other Big Stories listed in this report either stem from these antisemitic tropes or can often be linked to them.

These tropes can take many forms. Those peddling them will sometimes allege that Jews are behind shadowy secret organizations pulling the levers on world events, including the Illuminati or the Freemasons. Others will focus on specific international organizations, including the United Nations or the World Health Organization, which they depict as being controlled by Jews or by the Government of Israel. Similar allegations target Western governments, civil society organizations and prominent figures. Jewish politicians, on the other hand, are often depicted as holding “dual loyalties”, or in other words to be more loyal to their community and to the State of Israel than to their country.

Many of these allegations can be directly drawn back to centuries-old myths, including those detailed in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion,<sup>59</sup> a hoax novel cited by Adolf Hitler in Mein Kampf which continues to be promoted by antisemites today.

Major world events and issues are often blamed on Jews as a result of Jewish global control tropes. Most prominently, many conspiracy theories regarding the COVID-19 pandemic blame Jews for the spread of the disease,<sup>60</sup> whereas some anti-vaccine activists have pointed to Jews working for pharmaceutical companies as evidence that vaccines are dangerous.<sup>61</sup> In some cases, antisemites will allege that Jews and the State of Israel use both accusations of antisemitism as well as Holocaust education and remembrance as a way to hide these alleged wrongdoings.

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<sup>59</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2021, p.13.

<sup>61</sup> Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2021, p. 17.



Meme claiming vaccines are “poison” and that Jews are behind them. Retrieved from 4Chan.

Allegations of Jewish global control more often than not depict Jews as a powerful menace motivated by either selfishness, loyalty to their in-group, alleged hatred of non-Jews, or a combination of all three. References to Jewish Global Control were also often used to target other communities. For example, many of the memes we collected alleged that Jews were ‘using’ the 2SLGBTQA+ community, racialized individuals and immigrants in order to implement these nefarious plans. During the summer of 2020, as protesters took to the street to condemn anti-Black racism and violence after the murder of George Floyd, similar narratives gained prominence. Memes from this period collected through our research alleged, among other things, that Jews in the media sphere used their positions to push stories intended to rile up Black communities against white people, or blamed Jews for the existence of the Black Lives Matter movement. These depictions almost always resorted to the promotion of harmful stereotypes against these communities in order to support antisemitic viewpoints.



A meme showing a caricature of a Jewish man behind flags representing Black Lives Matter, Antifascist Action, and 2SLGBTQ+ Pride, in effect alleging that Jews are responsible for the existence of these movements. Retrieved from a Canadian Telegram channel.

Many of the antisemitic memes collected through our research did not explicitly refer to the Jewish community. Instead, they pointed to prominent Jews, all the while obscuring the Jewish identity of their scapegoats. Other memes used dog whistle terms in order to implicitly refer to antisemitic conspiracy theories. These implicit mentions can serve to protect the poster from consequences, including public condemnations and social media bans. In some cases, the individuals sharing memes implicitly referring to these tropes might not be aware of their antisemitic subtext.

However, regardless of intent, conspiracy theories alluding to Jewish global control are very dangerous, and were cited as a major motivation for anti-Jewish hate crimes. Notably, the perpetrator of the 2018 Tree of Life synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh frequently shared images alleging Jewish financier George Soros was behind an influx of refugees coming to the United States in the lead up to the massacre which led to the death of 11.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Burton, 2018.





Left: A meme using three common antisemitic dogwhistles: George Soros, “Rothschild”, and “Khazarian Mafia”. Right: A meme depicting a caricature of Justin Trudeau sitting on a caricature of George Soros’ lap. Both images retrieved from Canadian social media.

## Relevant Guide to Online Hate Entries:

**Dancing Israelis:** An antisemitic term used by white nationalists in reference to conspiracy theories involving 5 Israeli men who were detained for displaying "puzzling behaviour" during the 9/11 terror attacks.

**Early Life:** A meme used by antisemitic groups and individuals to call attention to the Jewish ethnicity of prominent individuals by pushing users to look at the ‘Early Life’ section of their Wikipedia page in the hopes of finding that the individual grew up in a Jewish family.

**George Soros:** George Soros is a Jewish Hungarian-American financier and philanthropist. Known for his outspoken support for various progressive issues, Soros has been the target of conspiracy theories depicting him as an insidious puppet master manipulating governments across the world.

**Happy Merchant:** Happy Merchant is an antisemitic meme depicting a stereotypical representation of a Jewish character with a large hooked nose, kippah, beard, and clasped hands.

**Jewish Question:** The "Jewish Question" is a term used to depict the existence of Jews, or the presence of Jews in certain countries, as a problem in need of being resolved. Though it originated in the eighteenth century, it was used during the Nazi regime to frame the Holocaust as the "Final Solution" to the Jewish Question.

**Pattern Noticer:** "Pattern noticer" is a self-descriptor used primarily by white nationalists online to justify antisemitic beliefs by tying them not to hateful beliefs, but rather to observations of 'patterns'. These 'patterns' are more often than not coy references to antisemitic conspiracy theories regarding the alleged control of societal, cultural, and governing institutions.

**Qui?:** ‘Qui?’ is an antisemitic meme, stemming from the 2021 televised interview of French ex-general Dominique Delawarde, during which he alluded to an unnamed group alleged to control the media in France and elsewhere. Delawarde was then pressed by another guest, Claude Posternak, who asked him ‘who’ (qui) he was referring to, over and over, to which Delawarde responded ‘the community that you know well’, prompting the host to end the interview. Posternak’s line of questioning has since come to be used by antisemites online as a tool to refer



to antisemitic conspiracy theories while maintaining plausible deniability. In this sense, it carries a similar connotation as the triple parentheses and other antisemitic symbols.

**Rothschilds:** The Rothschilds are a wealthy German-descending Ashkenazi family who made their fortune in banking. They are the subject of many antisemitic conspiracy theories that allege the family is in control of world governments and banks, enforcing racist tropes of Jewish wealth and control in modern society.

**Synagogue of Satan:** Synagogue of Satan is a term used by antisemites, particularly of a religious Christian background, to depict Jews as evil conspirators. It finds its origins in Revelation 2:9, a Biblical verse which refers to a group persecuting Christians.

**The Goyim Know(s):** “The Goyim Know(s)” is an antisemitic expression that imitates and mocks Jewish people. It is often meant to portray Jewish targets as though they are secretly in control of the world, but worried that non-Jewish people have found out about their plot.

**Triple Parentheses:** Triple Brackets Three sets of parentheses, also known as “echoes”, are used on social media and online forums and applied to words describing a person or people to communicate in a derogatory manner that they are Jewish. Since becoming a well-known hate symbol, Jewish social media users have appropriated the triple parentheses as a positive symbol of Jewish pride.

**ZOG:** ZOG is an acronym for Zionist Occupation Government which refers to conspiracy theories about Israeli, Zionist, or Jewish control of Western governments, along with the United Nations and other prominent intergovernmental and international organizations.

# The Great Replacement

**Targets:** Jews, Racialized people, Immigrants and refugees.

**Relevant Hallmarks:**

- 1 - *The targeted group is portrayed as a powerful menace that is taking control of the major institutions in society and depriving others of their livelihoods, safety, freedom of speech and general well-being.*
- 5 - *The targeted group is portrayed as dangerous or violent by nature.*
- 7 - *The messages communicate the idea that nothing but the banishment, segregation or eradication of this group of people will save others from the harm being done by this group.*

On the evening of August 11, 2017, a few hundred white nationalists gathered in the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, for Unite the Right, a protest in opposition to the removal of a statue honouring Confederate general Robert E. Lee. Walking through the campus of the University of Virginia's campus, they held lit tiki torches and chanted slogans like 'White Lives Matter' and 'Jews will not replace us'. Within less than 24 hours, this rally would turn deadly when a neo-Nazi drove through a crowd of antiracist protesters, killing a woman named Heather Hayer. The fear of being 'replaced' out of existence, expressed by the protesters in Charlottesville then, now forms one of the most important pillars of today's hate movements. At the base of this pillar is one central conspiracy theory: The Great Replacement.

The term 'Great Replacement' itself might originate from the French white nationalist writer Renaud Camus, but the conspiracy theory behind it takes many different forms. At their core, every version alleges that the white population of Western countries is in the process of being replaced, completely or partially, as part of a nefarious plan. Different versions of the theory will allege a different motivation, as well as different conspirators.<sup>63</sup> Its more standard iterations, for instance, blames the Great Replacement on a cabal of conspirators known as 'the globalists' - political and business elites across the globe - who are manipulating immigration patterns, either to increase their access to cheap foreign labour, or as part of a racist plan to destroy the white race entirely. While this version of the theory is not inherently antisemitic, 'globalist' is a popular dog whistle term used to refer to Jews, and many of those promoting it identify prominent Jews as the main culprits of the conspiracy.

However, all versions of the Great Replacement theory depict racialized people and immigrants as a threat to the well-being of the nation. Less extreme versions focus on the potential effect of shifting demographic weight on the survival majority culture - others portray non-whites as inherently dangerous, violent, criminalistic and/or predatorial, using debunked race science and out-of-context news articles to support their claims.

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<sup>63</sup> Wilson and Flanagan, 2022.



A meme depicting a 'Tradwife Wojak' who is a neo-Nazi (as indicated by a skull mask) preparing to kill a caricature of a Black woman, whom she calls an invasive species. Retrieved from a Canadian Telegram channel.

The Great Replacement is an incredibly adaptable story, which takes different forms in localized contexts: in Canada, for example, political parties in favour of immigration, in particular ones situated on the left of the spectrum, are often accused of 'importing' voters from abroad in order to ensure future majorities in Parliament. In Québec's unique linguistic context, the theory is often adapted to allege the existence of a plan by Canadian politicians to weaken the Province's francophone majority, and replace them with English-speaking immigrants.

Some versions of the theory merge racism and anti-2SLGBTQA+ hate by pinning the existence of Pride culture as propaganda against the procreation of the white nuclear family. In these cases, the representation of any same-sex relationships and relationships where women cannot give birth are considered part of the same scheme to erase the representation of cishnormative relationships, which are often the only socially acceptable relationships in white nationalist movements.

No longer just a conspiracy theory peddled in fringe chatrooms, the last few years have seen the Great Replacement become a mainstream talking point promoted on prime time television programs<sup>64</sup> and a fiercely debated topic, even in Canada. A 2022 poll by Abacus found that 37% of Canadians surveyed believed in a version of the Great Replacement according to which a certain group is replacing native-born Canadians with immigrants who 'agree with their political views.'<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Anti-Defamation League, 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson and Coletto, 2022.



A screenshot of former Ontario Member of Provincial Parliament implying that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he will “replace” “Old stock White Canadians”. The meme features a fabricated quote by Trudeau. Retrieved from 4Chan.

## Relevant Guide to Online Hate Entries:

**Anti-White:** Anti-white is a label used by white nationalists and other white supremacist hate movements to describe policies that favour diversity and immigration.

**Kalergi Plan:** The so-called "Kalergi plan" is a conspiracy theory tied to the concept of the Great Replacement. It alleges that an Austrian-Japanese politician, Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, devised in 1925 a plan to destroy Europe by promoting race-mixing.

**Natives should have total control over their homeland:** "Natives should have total control over their homeland" is an expression used to advocate for ethnonationalism by co-opting the language of Indigenous rights.

**White Lives Matter (slogan):** White Lives Matter is an expression used by racists to relativize, detract from, or oppose the Black civil rights slogan Black Lives Matter.

**You Will Not Replace Us:** "You will not replace us" is an expression sometimes used in hateful contexts as a dogwhistle for "Jews will not replace us", a neo-Nazi slogan.

# 2SLGBTQA+ ‘Grooming’

**Target(s):** 2SLGBTQA+ people, in particular transgender and non-binary people, gay men, and gender non-conforming people.

**Relevant Hallmarks:**

- 3 - The targeted group is portrayed as preying upon children, the aged, the vulnerable, etc.
- 6 - The messages convey the idea that members of the targeted group are devoid of any redeeming qualities and are innately evil.

Used to depict the 2SLGBTQA+ community and its allies as a danger to young people, the term ‘Groomer’ has become a mainstay in online political discussions in recent years. While the term itself is rather novel, it is in fact a modern manifestation of a decades-old trope used to justify the persecution of queer people.



A meme calling the Green Party of Canada the Groomer Party of Canada posted while Amita Kuttner, a non-binary person, was serving as interim leader of the party. Retrieved from Telegram.

The conflation of homosexuality with pedophilia and child abuse was prevalent in Nazi Germany. The Nazis believed that homosexuality was a form of sexual degeneracy which could lead to the ruin of their country.<sup>66</sup> Like a disease, they believed homosexuality could spread from person to person.<sup>67</sup> They were particularly worried that it could ‘infect’ children, who represented the future of the Aryan race. This fear fueled the Nazis desire to repress expressions of gay and transgender identities. In 1933, soon after the Nazis seized power in Germany, Hitler’s Brownshirts stormed the Berlin Institute of Sexology, managed by the Jewish-German physician Magnus Hirschfeld, destroying it and burning the contents of its library. Memes referencing this

<sup>66</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Vendrell, 2020, p.4.



book burning, collected over the course of our project, praised the Nazis and alleged the books in question were pedophilic in nature.

The depiction of LGBTQ+ individuals as posing a danger to youth did not end after the fall of the Nazi regime. Propaganda films released in North America from the 1960s onward warned parents that gay men would try and transform their children into becoming homosexual themselves.<sup>68</sup> While gay men are still depicted in a similar light in some spaces, transgender, non-binary people and those not conforming to gendered expectations are now the main targets of this moral panic. In 2022, dozens of events featuring drag performances have been targeted with protests under the guise that they contribute to the grooming of children.<sup>69</sup>

Education is a particular focus for those peddling this belief, who often argue schools are used to groom children into accepting so-called ‘gender ideology’, if not to downright make them identify as 2SLGBTQA+.<sup>70</sup> A school in Oakville, Ontario, has been targeted by multiple violent threats,<sup>71</sup> after the controversial appearance of a transgender woman on staff led to waves of online harassment, followed by the organization of protests opposing the perceived grooming of children in schools.

The term ‘Groomer’ sometimes holds a dual meaning. In most cases, it is used to allege that 2SLGBTQA+ people are pedophiles, and that their allies are therefore enabling the abuse of children. In other cases, the term instead refers to perceived ‘ideological grooming’, or in other words to the idea that 2SLGBTQA+ people and their allies are attempting to force their opinions regarding gender and sexuality on children, typically through education. While the latter meaning is often assumed to be less extreme than the former, both rely on the belief that any exposure to sexual and gender diversity is inherently harmful to young people, and are used to justify the targeting of 2SLGBTQA+ people.

As 2SLGBTQA+ continue to successfully campaign for their rights to be respected, their targeting by hateful communities is becoming increasingly conspiratorial. Some versions of this Big Story blame Jews for the increasing normalization of 2SLGBTQA+ identities, as did the Nazis. Other versions allege the existence of a ‘Gay lobby’ or a ‘Gay mafia’, which wields disproportionate control over the levers of power in Western societies, not unlike antisemitic conspiracy theories. In each of these cases, the antisemitic implications of this trope are quite explicit, and should serve as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all forms of hate.

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68 Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2022.

69 Janzer, 2022.

70 Kruesi and Phan, 2022.

71 Rocca, 2022.



A meme alleging Loxists (an antisemitic word for Jewish people) are “behind every pride flag”. Retrieved from a Canadian neo-Nazi group’s social media.

## Relevant Guide to Online Hate Entries:

**Autogynephilia:** A term referring to a controversial categorization of transgender identities devised by sexologist Ray Blanchard. The term refers to alleged sexual motivations for gender transition. These categorizations have faced extensive criticism from transgender rights activists. Accusations of ‘autogynephilia’ are used by anti-transgender activists to depict transgender individuals, particularly transgender women, as potentially dangerous sexual abusers.

**Drag Queen Story Hour:** Drag Queen Story Hour, a program in which drag queens read to children in public libraries, started in 2015 and quickly became the target of speculations rooted in homophobia. It is invoked in hate memes to perpetuate a homophobic stereotype that gay men are child predators and that 2SLGBTQ+ movements are actively trying to indoctrinate youth into becoming gay, queer, or transgender. This is based on the incorrect and harmful misconception that gender and sexual orientation are conscious decisions.

**Dyed Hair:** In hateful online spaces, individuals and meme characters sporting dyed hair, typically in non-natural colours including purple and pink, are often used to embody negative stereotypes about 2SLGBTQA+ and gender non-conforming individuals. These depictions act as a sort of visual dog whistle, which allow users to attack members of these communities without facing social media bans or backlash.

**LGB:** An acronym used to refer to lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals, of which the use was prominent before the 1980s when the letter T, which refers to transgender individuals, was added. Today, it is primarily used by activists attempting to exclude transgender individuals from the 2SLGBTQA+ community in order to further marginalize them.

**Minor-Attracted Person (MAP):** A term used by a very small number of academics to refer to pedophiles. Though its use is extremely limited, it is the object of a moral panic targeting 2SLGBTQA+ individuals, alleging that the objective of the Pride movement is to ultimately normalize pedophilia, notably by referring to it as a legitimate sexual orientation.

**Okay Groomer:** Okay Groomer (or OK Groomer) is a meme used to target LGBTQ2S+ individuals and depict them as ‘groomers’ who are inherently dangerous to the safety of children, building

on decades-old libel directed towards men and transgender women primarily. Accusations of 2SLGBTQA+ people being groomers escalated in Spring 2022 and have been promoted by mainstream Republican activists and politicians in the United States. The meme is a play on Okay Boomer, a meme that first appeared in 2019 used by millennials and members of Generation Z to mock members of the Baby Boomer Generation.

# Diversity is Dangerous

**Target(s):** Racialized people, Immigrants and refugees, 2SLGBTQA+ people

**Relevant Hallmarks:**

- 5 - The targeted group is portrayed as dangerous or violent by nature;
- 7 - The messages communicate the idea that nothing but the banishment, segregation or eradication of this group of people will save others from the harm being done by this group;

In recent years, the term ‘diversity’ has grown into a ubiquitous term, which refers to the full scope of differences encompassed within societies, which oftentimes once were relatively homogenous. Beyond its ethnic and cultural connotations, the term is increasingly used in reference to sexual orientations and gender identities which differ from pre-established norms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who oppose diversity are increasingly seeking to present it as a direct danger not simply to the continued existence of a specific way of life, but to the livelihood of those whose identities have long been considered the norm.

Oftentimes through the same tropes that form the basis of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, white nationalists frequently use gradual demographic changes as evidence that their lives are in danger simply by virtue of being less common over time. This most often treats expressions of Christian faith and European ancestry as default identity factors. These tropes include repeated messaging that the concept of whiteness is under attack, and as an extension, white people are in danger.



Meme claiming that “diversity is a codeword for White Genocide.” Retrieved from Canadian Telegram account.

This messaging often twists attacks on structural racism, such as an Harvard lecturer's call to 'end whiteness' as a social construct leading to better outcomes for white ethnic groups over others<sup>72</sup> – as though they are calls to end the existence of white people. This framing justifies especially hostile behavior and the promotion of violence by white nationalists as though it is a necessary response to the same behavior that targeted them first.



Antisemitic meme that presents a quote attributed to Harvard lecturer Noel Ignatiev as evidence that Jewish people are trying to eliminate white people. Retrieved from a Canadian Telegram account.

Some expressions of this Big Story depict the risk posed by immigration as much more physical than the previous ones. During the global migrant crisis linked to the Syrian Civil War, those opposing the intake of refugees took to the streets and online spaces to decry the arrival of 'rapefugees', making an association between sexual violence and the primarily Muslim nations from which migrants emanated.<sup>73</sup> Over the course of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protest movement, similar depictions of Black people as being inherently violent became prominent, both as a way of justifying the death of George Floyd and to condemn protesters.

Likewise, this idea justifies a gradual escalation of hostility and potential violence towards open displays of 2SLGBTQA+ pride, positioning Pride imagery as an "attack" on cissexual and heterosexual identity. The overlap is relevant because queer identity is often seen by hate movements as a cultural extension or a "lifestyle choice". Similarly to demographic changes in religion and ethnicity, statistics on the sexual orientation and gender identities of populations in which cissexual, cisdgender, heterosexual people appear to decline over time are often cited as evidence of these attacks.<sup>74</sup> In reality, there are a variety of factors that may affect an increase in the appearances of gender identities besides cisdgender. In hate propaganda, this context is – expectedly – seldom included.

<sup>72</sup> Levine, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Nasr and Inverardi, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Moreau, 2021.



Although Pride exists in a wide variety of societies, hate movements will point to governments that are known to dismiss or attack Pride as safer places because they are sheltering people yet to be exposed to queer identity from what is merely a symptom of diversity.



Meme depicting Bethesda Russia and Bethesda Middle East as Yes Chads for not making their logos rainbow coloured during Pride month. Retrieved from a Canadian white nationalist's Instagram.

## Relevant Guide to Online Hate Entries:

**13/50:** Number codes like 13/50 are used by white supremacists to perpetuate a racist myth that black people are inherently prone to crime or violence. 13/50 is a code for the false claim that Black Americans commit 50% of violence crime despite making up 13% of the population.

**Cultural Enrichment:** 'Cultural enrichment' is a term sometimes used as a dogwhistle to depict diversity and multiculturalism as harmful to Western societies. In hateful online spaces, it is used to make generalizations about various ethnic groups, oftentimes as a sarcastic response to allegations of wrongdoings by members of these groups.

**Dindu Nuffin:** Dindu Nuffin' is a racist expression used to depict Black people as criminalistic, violent or predatorial. Originating from 4chan's infamous /pol/ board, known for the virulent racism of its members, the expression is derived from a stereotypically racist phonetic spelling of the phrase "I didn't do nothing" which mocks AAVE speakers.

**Diversity = White Genocide:** A slogan used by white nationalists and other white supremacist movements, typically in arguments alleging that diversity and immigration are part of a conspiracy to replace the white population of Western countries, otherwise known as the Great Replacement conspiracy theory.

**Jogger:** Memes in far-right online spaces attacking "joggers" are references to Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man who was murdered in a racially-motivated attack while jogging in 2020. Numerous memes were made spreading disinformation about Arbery in the aftermath of his murder and during the ensuing trial. Jogger is sometimes used as a coded anti-Black slur to describe Black people, to invoke the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, and to evade censors made for hate speech.

**Globohomo:** Globohomo is a term used by white nationalists and other hate movements to refer to conspiracy theories alleging the existence of a global plot to promote the so-called "LGBTQ+ agenda" and groom youth into identifying as part of the community.

**Large Canadian Cities:** In online hate memes, large Canadian cities, including Brampton, Mississauga, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver are often negatively mentioned, due to their multicultural populations, and perceived left-wing leanings, particularly on issues of diversity and inclusion. Such memes will often depict the cities as uninhabitable or dangerous, or call for their destruction.

**Rapefugee:** Xenophobic slur used to equate refugees to rapists. It most often relies on racist tropes that people of certain ethnicities are inherently violent or predatorial by nature.

**You Deserve What You Tolerate:** A seemingly innocuous expression popular among neofascists. It presents tolerance of specific groups as a cause for mistreatment and is used to lament the inclusivity of targeted groups in society by arguing that society will suffer as a result of diversity.

# Impending Societal Downfall

**Target(s):** Several groups

**Relevant Hallmarks:**

- 4. *The targeted group is blamed for the current problems in society and the world.*
- 6. *The messages convey the idea that members of the targeted group are devoid of any redeeming qualities and are innately evil.*

Conspiracy movements, hateful and otherwise, are historically known for their relationships with the idea of societal collapse. A prominent example in recent history are conspiracy theories the so-called ‘Year 2000 problem’, which centered fears around the failure of technology at the turn of the millenium.<sup>75</sup> More recently, the North American anti-Muslim movement often used scare tactics invoking the possibility of “Sharia Law” taking over America as an argument to resist demographic change and, more specifically, to justify hatred towards Muslim Americans.<sup>76</sup> Just as anti-Muslim voices pushed narratives that allowing Muslim immigrants would lead to the a drastic societal change, adjacent hate movements have since popularized more narratives that the changing nature of our world is assuredly leading us towards disaster. Both inside and outside of hate movements, narratives of a societal collapse are also driven by the realities of climate change, as denial of its impacts on future generations have become harder to deny in recent years.

Among the most central themes pertaining to a societal downfall in hate movements is an aversion to the state of the modern world or “modernity” in general. Memes attacking modernity often invoke nostalgia for past time periods that were typically less accepting of diversity. Contempt for what can be blamed on the modern world is central to the continued popularity of fascist writers like Julius Evola,<sup>77</sup> the author of foundational traditionalist books like *Revolt Against The Modern World*.

Narratives promoting the idea of a collapse through demographic change target a variety of racial and religious groups as well as immigrants in general. Sometimes, they also target 2SLGBTQA+ people. This messaging often uses the fact that the proportion of people who identify as such has never been greater without addressing the societal norms that likely led to the circumstance.

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<sup>75</sup> Uenuma, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> Gunther and Kieffer, 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Upchurch, 2021, p.27.



A 'fashwave' meme telling the viewer to reject Modernity, as represented by a taxi with Pride branding, and to embrace Tradition, as represented by George Lincoln Rockwell's 'Hate Bus'. "We Hate Race-Mixing" is displayed on the side of the bus. Retrieved from a Canadian Instagram account.

In the far-right, collapse narratives are often rationalized by framing them as part of the inevitable end of our current era. By treating the supposed decline as part of a larger system, fascists can maintain a belief in the power of natural order. This is sometimes represented in appropriation of the Kali Yuga, which has long been referenced by esoteric fascists.<sup>78</sup> However, many modern fascist movements still promote accelerationism: the practice of strategically accelerating what they see as inevitable collapse of society. Though some fascist ideologies promoted these strategies before the term accelerationism was coined,<sup>79</sup> accelerationism is used internally and externally to define movements that prioritize the acceleration of societal collapse. Much like any other strategy, hate movements that promote accelerationism (such as Canada's Diagonol<sup>80</sup> or the international neo-Nazi "Terrorgram" network<sup>81</sup>) often do so in a variety of different forms of propaganda, including internet memes.

Among the most prominent and most extreme movements advocating for this are followers of neo-Nazi James Mason's Siege (sometimes stylized as SIEGE or "SIEGE!"). Mason, who was influenced by his personal mentor William Luther Pierce, took the Turner Diaries' message to further extremes and advocated for specific violent means to bring about the end of liberal democracy. Though his writings collected in Siege saw a surge of popularity in the 1990s, his

<sup>78</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, 2001, p.57.

<sup>79</sup> Beckett, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> Smith and Kriner, 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Boorman, 2023.



ideas' modern resurgence was made possible by users of the website Iron March, a 2010s neo-Nazi forum filled with young men.<sup>82</sup> Mason's work was evidently influential to a young generation of neo-Nazis who felt disenfranchised by movements like the alt-right that focused efforts on social acceptability and electoral politics and instead saw a less optimistic view of the future.

Though not always mutually exclusive, accelerationist memes often celebrate Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber. Memes representing Kaczynski are unique as he is one of the few influential figures in neo-Nazi accelerationism who was not strictly a fascist. Though uncommon, some Unabomber memes shared in far-right spaces sometimes invoke ecofascism.



A meme in which several Wojaks, including Marx-Leninists, cyborgs, Muslims, and two varieties of Nazis hug to celebrate the end of civilization. Among them is a Ted Kaczynski Wojak with an armband depicting an ecofascist symbol (a Life Rune over an Anarcho-Primitivist flag).

## Relevant Guide to Online Hate Entries:

**Accelerationism:** Accelerationism is a process of fast-tracking what is believed to be an inevitable collapse of modern capitalist society.

**Boogaloo:** The "Boogaloo Boys" movement is a far-right accelerationist movement with messaging and branding influenced by internet meme culture. Boogalo Boys focus on militant preparation in the hopes of an upcoming civil war in the United States.

**Day of the Rope:** Day of the Rope is a call for violence taken from the 1978 white supremacist novel *The Turner Diaries* written by American Neo-Nazi William Luther Pierce, which depicts a fictional overthrow of the United States government and ensuing race war.

**James Mason:** James Mason is best known as the author of *Siege*, a newsletter and book advocating for radical violence and since-dubbed accelerationist strategies in the name of

<sup>82</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre. n.d.



National Socialism.

**Kali Yuga:** The Kali Yuga is a concept in Hinduism and is not inherently hateful. However, in far-right political spaces the Kali Yuga most often appears due to its appropriation by anti-Christian traditionalist fascists. It is invoked in a wide variety of fascist movements to argue either that a war leading to a societal collapse is inevitable and predictable, or that said war needs to be invoked and that they are part of a warrior class meant to invoke it.

**Revolt Against the Modern World:** Revolt Against The Modern World is a slogan taken from the title of traditionalist and fascist author Julius Evola's influential book. The phrase is used to signify support for anti-modern traditionalism or esoteric fascism.

**Skull Mask:** Balaclavas and bandanas displaying the lower jaw of a skull over the wearer's mouth, often dubbed 'skull masks', are the unofficial uniform of the modern far-right accelerationism movement. Their use in extremist circles was popularized by white supremacist groups associated with the Iron March Network, such as Atomwaffen Division, who featured it extensively in their propaganda.

**Ted Kaczynski:** Ted Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, is an American domestic terrorist who killed 3 and injured 23 in a spree of bombings conducted between 1978 and 1995. His manifesto, *Industrial Society and Its Consequences*, detailed Kaczynski's anti-industrial and primitivist beliefs.

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# APPENDIX

Figure 5: Memes targeting Jews and the Hallmarks of Hate

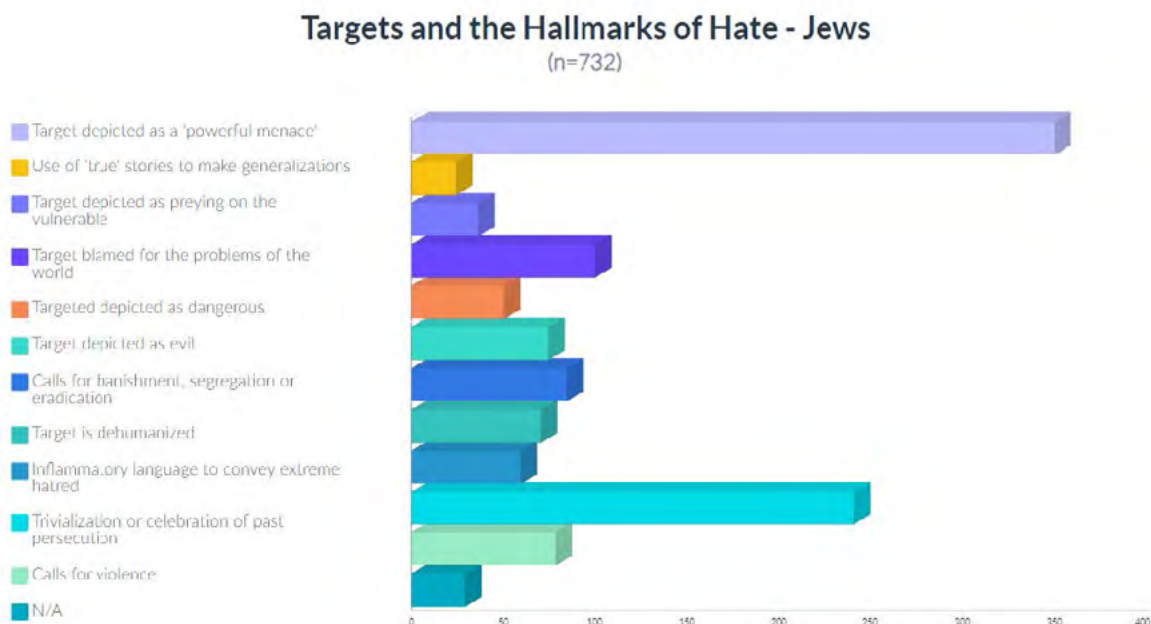


Figure 5.1: Memes targeting Black people and the Hallmarks of Hate

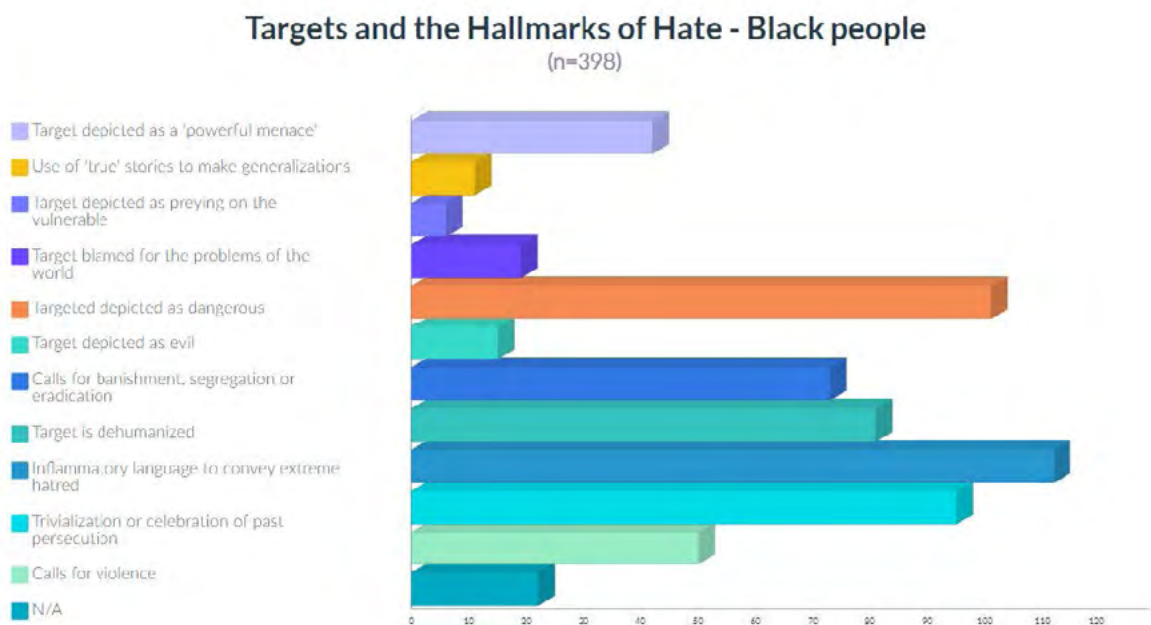


Figure 5.2: Memes targeting Muslims and the Hallmarks of Hate

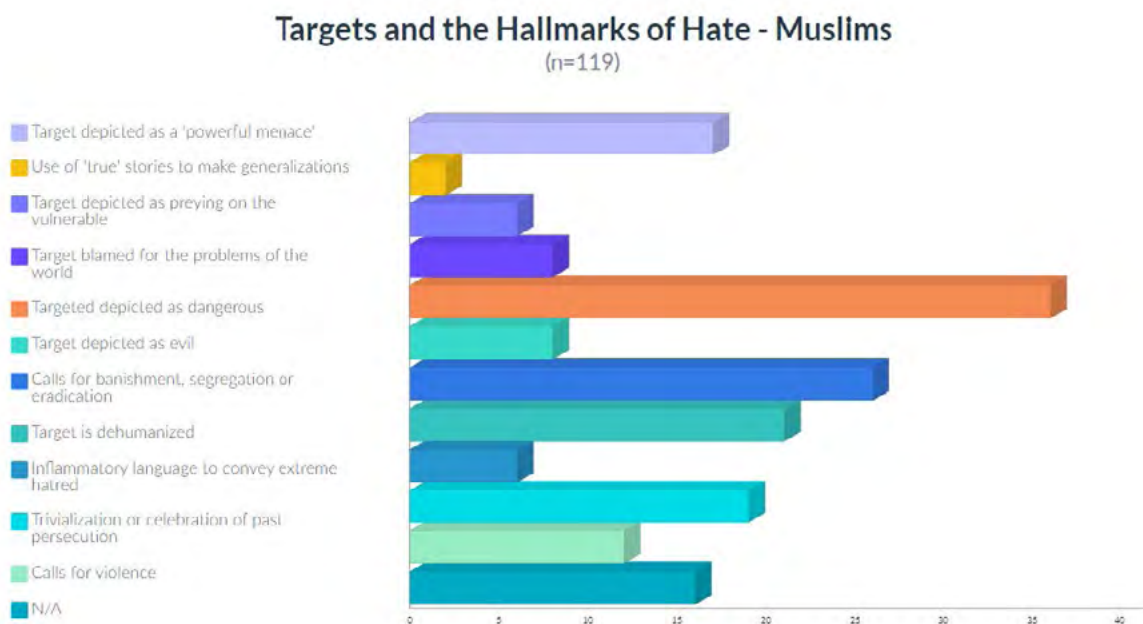


Figure 5.3: Memes targeting 2SLGBTQA+ people and the Hallmarks of Hate.

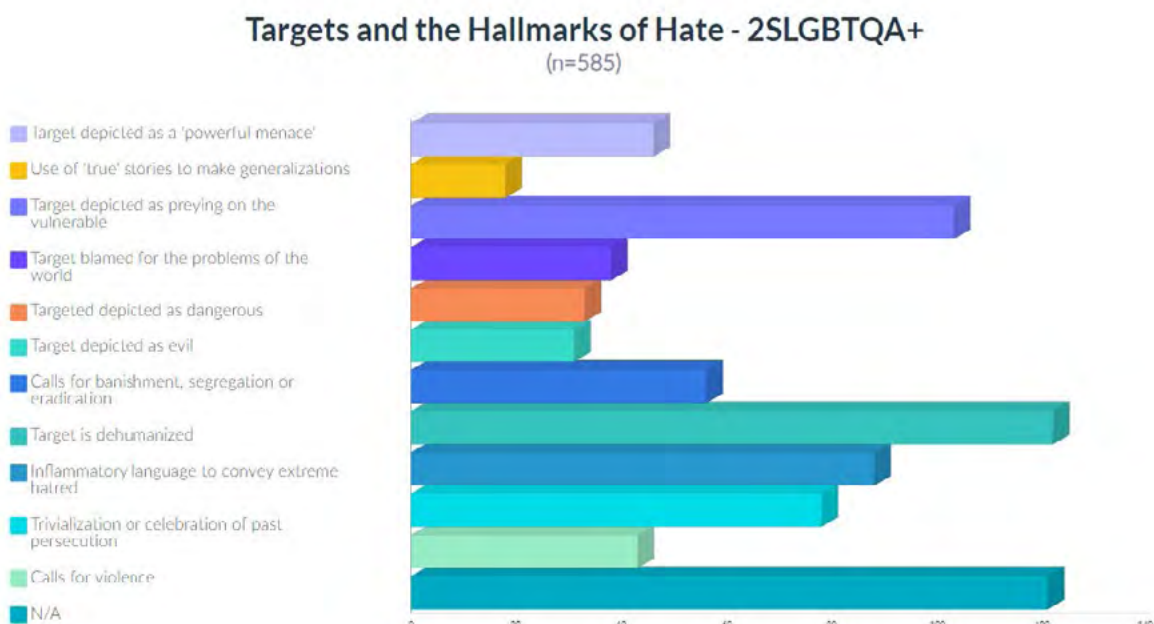


Figure 5.4: Memes targeting transgender and non-binary people and the Hallmarks of Hate.

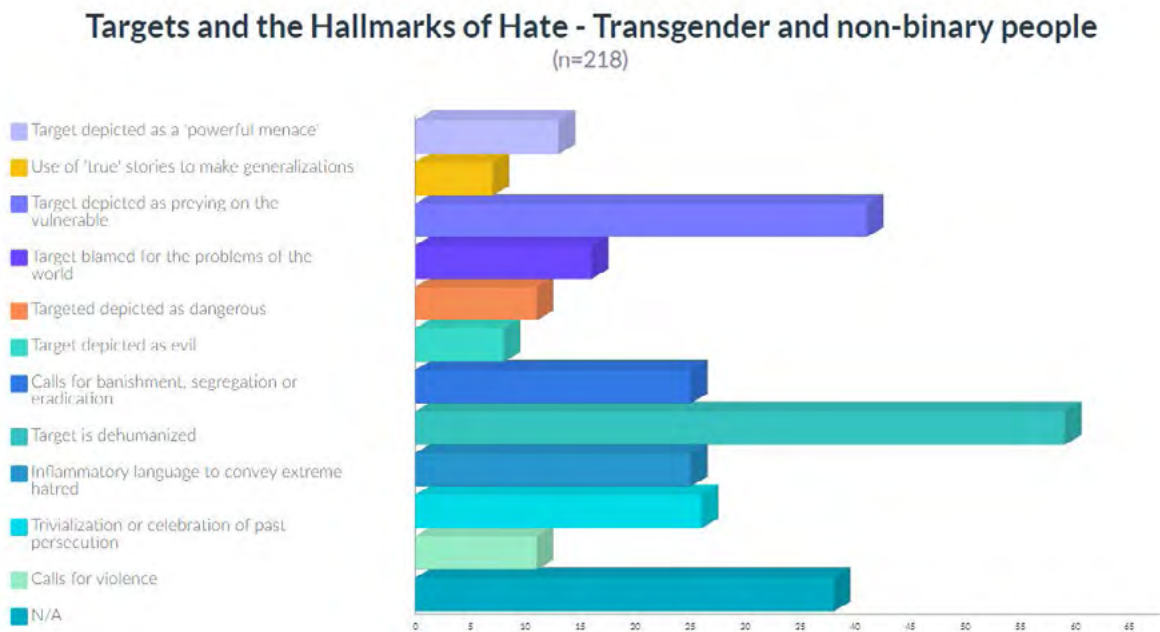


Figure 5.5: Memes targeting same-sex attracted people and the Hallmarks of Hate.

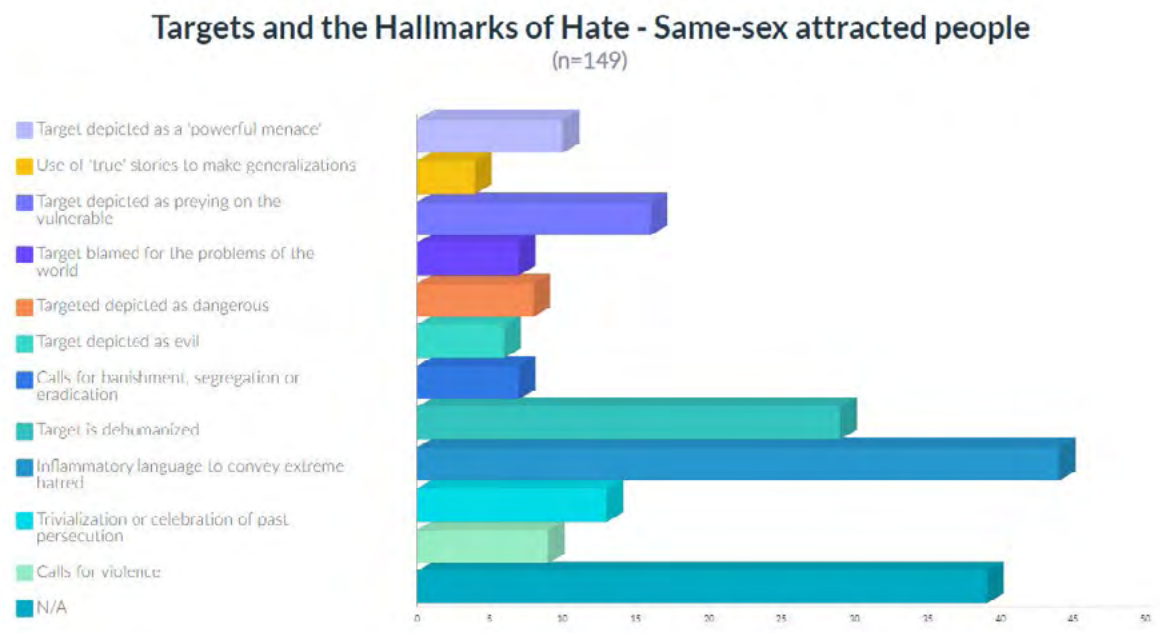




Figure 5.6: Memes targeting women and the Hallmarks of Hate.

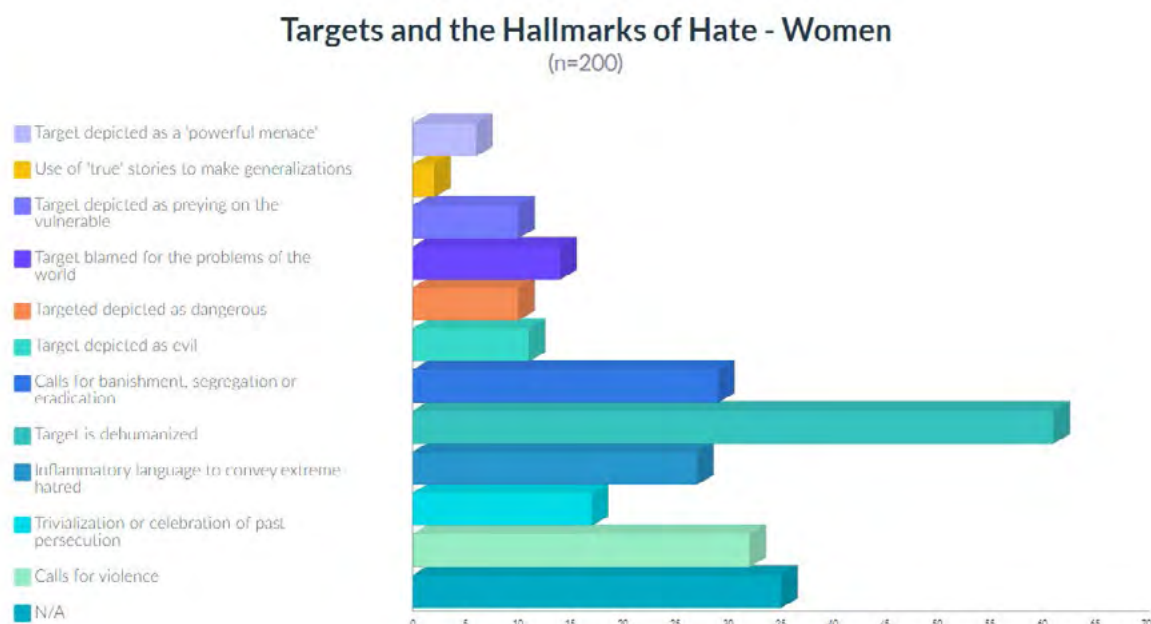


Figure 5.7: Memes targeting people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities.

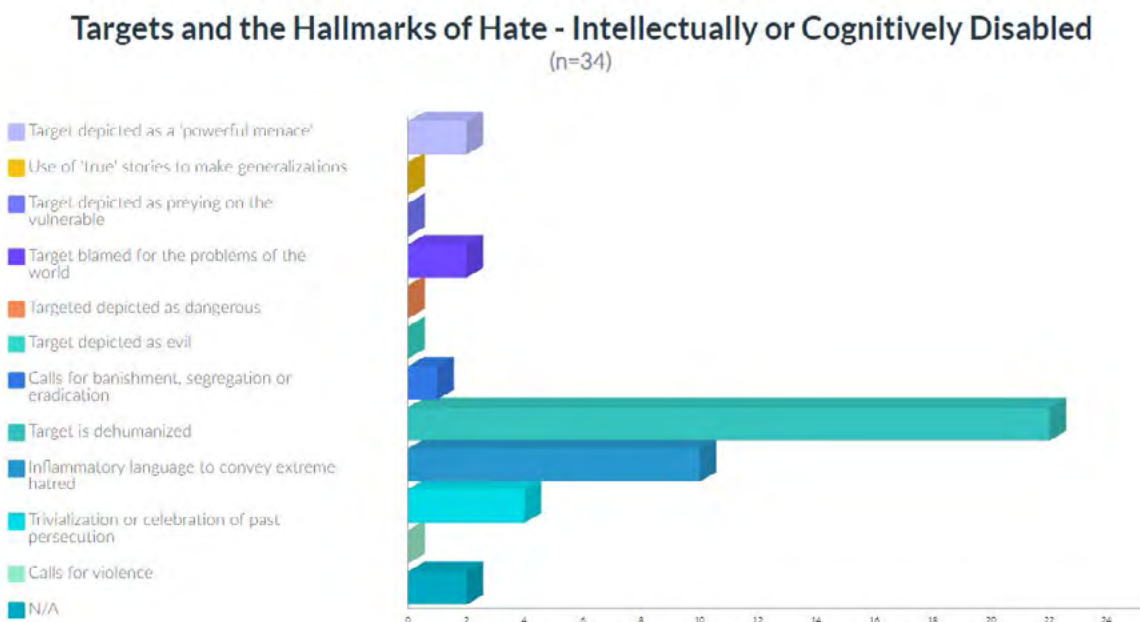


Figure 5.8: Memes targeting fat people and the Hallmarks of Hate.

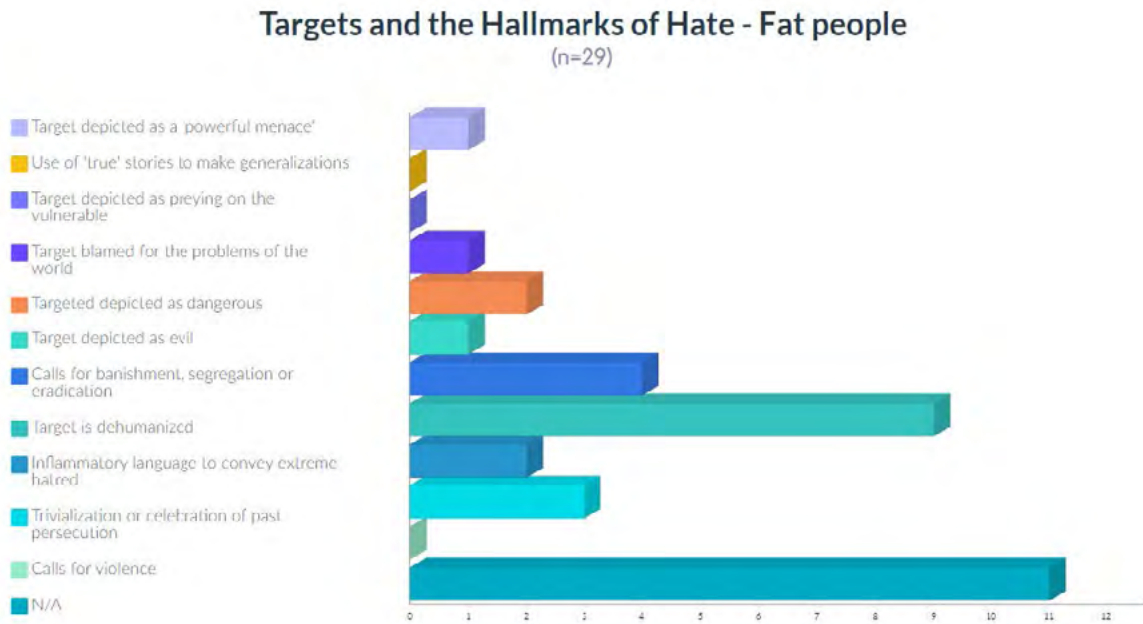


Figure 5.9: Memes targeting people of Asian descent and the Hallmarks of Hate.

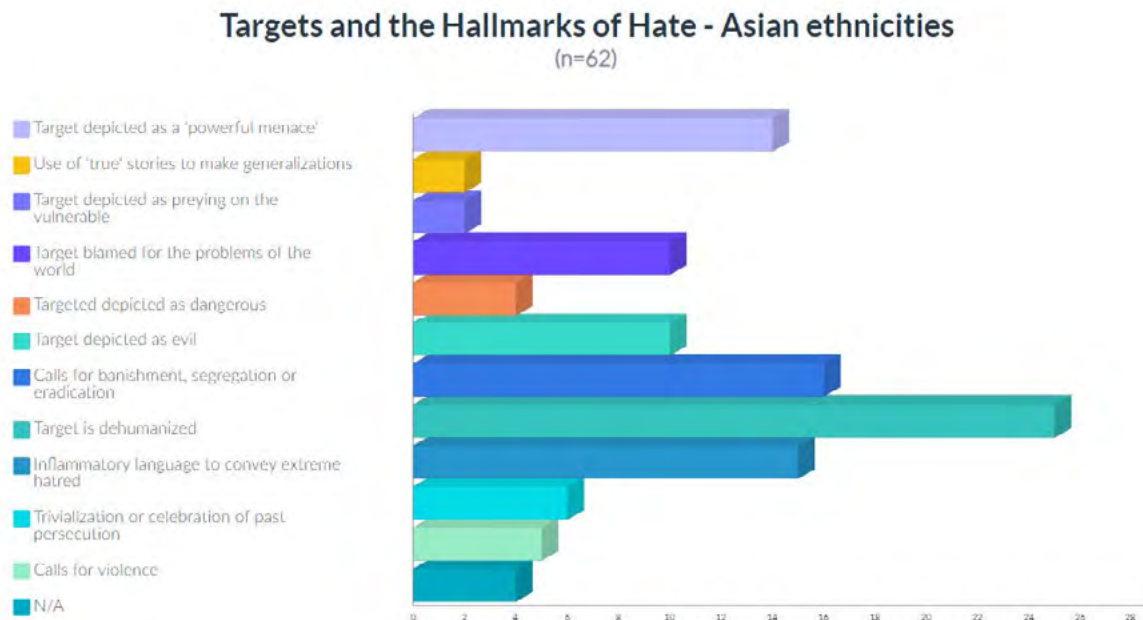
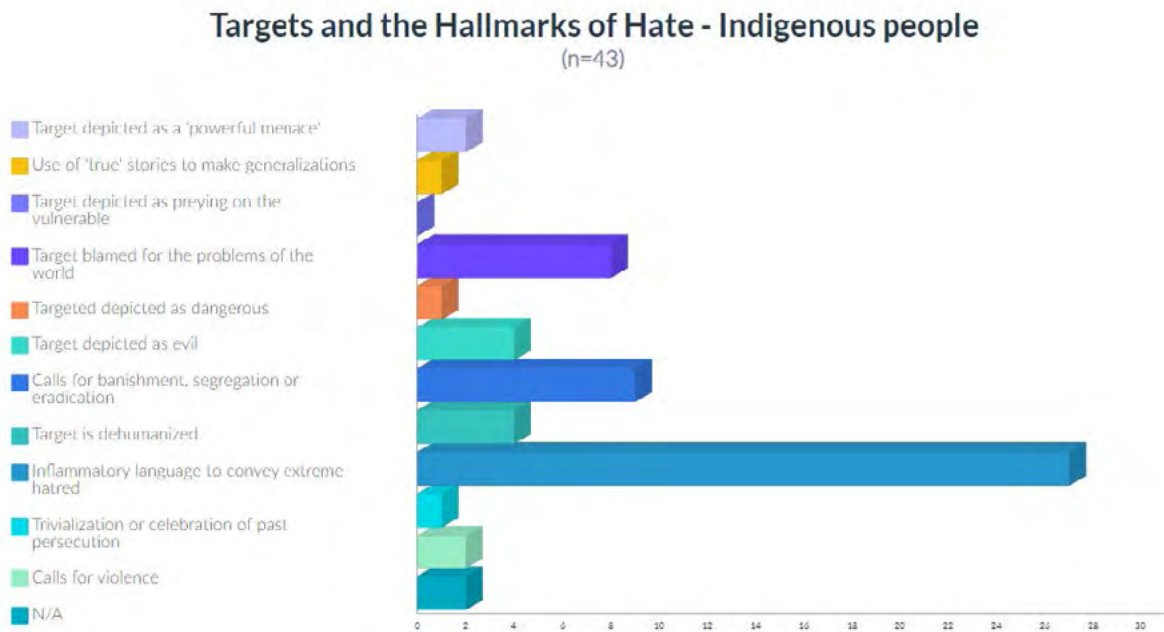


Figure 5.10: Memes targeting Indigenous people and the Hallmarks of Hate.





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