# From anti-vaxxers to antisemitism: Conspiracy theory in the COVID-19 pandemic

October 2020



The Office of HM Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism

### Overview

This report analyses the role of antisemitism in 'anti-vaxxer' conspiracy theories, a movement that has grown significantly in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Looking at private and public groups on Facebook, this report evaluates the saturation of antisemitism in the anti-vaxxer and anti-lockdown movements.

### Background

As the COVID-19 pandemic forced countries into lockdown, several medical research laboratories began expedited clinical trials in a race to develop a COVID-19 vaccine that would limit the infection rate, death tolls and allow societies and economies to return to some normalcy. More than 150 coronavirus vaccines are in development across the world, including in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Germany, China, Brazil, Australia, Russia and Israel. For many governments and populations, the ability to vaccinate against COVID-19 would be considered a celebration for public health.

Whilst clinical trials usually take between ten and fifteen years to bring a vaccine into public circulation, the global spread of COVID-19 has required vaccine manufacturers to speed up their clinical trial process, before the vaccines are sent to health regulatory agencies such as NICE for approval. Whilst many remain hopeful for the development of a functioning vaccine, decisions to compress the clinical process by running trial phases simultaneously has generated anxiety about the vaccine's safety among segments of the population.

Country-wide and regional lockdowns have exacerbated some individual's levels of anxiety, mental health issues and loneliness, in addition to an increasing amount of time spent on the internet and social media. For many with concerns about public health measures, Facebook groups promoting conspiracy theories provide easy answers to users desiring certainty. A recent study by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate found that the 147 largest anti-vaxx social media accounts gained at least 7.8 million followers since 2019, an increase of 19%, despite Facebook announcing new policies to tackle anti-vaccine misinformation on its platform in March 2019.<sup>1</sup> On Twitter, hashtags including #coronahoax, #scamdemic and #plandemic trended. In both cases, COVID-19 conspiracists attributed the 'hoax' to the 'global elite' naming the Rothschilds, George Soros, 'Zionists', as well as Bill Gates and the Rockefellers. Numerous posts included links to videos on BitChute, a video hosting website that are claiming to expose the plan for a 'new global order'.

### Antisemitism and conspiracy theory

Conspiracy theorists divide the world into the manipulators and the manipulated. Believers of conspiracy theory, sometimes described as 'truthers', feel satisfaction for having deciphered the manipulation. Conspiracy theories often provide comfort and reassurance by explaining world events in a simplistic fashion; they are able to justify the complexities of society and provide explanations for an individual's grievances or anxieties. Whilst conspiracies do exist, conspiracy theories feed on untruths, misinformation and prejudices that already exist in society. Some people who have suffered from financial losses, disease or natural disaster, lean on conspiracy theory to explain the origins of their suffering, finding terrifying explanations to be preferable to uncertainty.

 $<sup>^{1} \</sup>underline{https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9\_8d23c70f0a014b3c9e2cfc334d4472dc.pdf$ 



Pre-dating the anti-vaxxer movement, conspiracy theories about Jews have existed for hundreds of years. The late-nineteenth century pamphlet 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion' has been heralded by antisemites as proof that Jews are plotting to take over the world. Though the document was exposed as a forgery, it's alleged secret plans of Jewish leaders seeking to attain world domination were recirculated after the 1917 Russian Revolution, by Nazi leaders including Adolf Hitler, and contemporary antisemites.

Starting in the 1990s, 'New World Order' conspiracists believe that Western freedoms are under attack from a dictatorial, socialist conspiracy to establish a new global order, with many attributing its orchestration to Jews. Of significance, 'New World Order' conspiracists believed that the 'New World Order' would be established through repressive measures manufactured by crises such as pandemics.

Antisemitism often surfaces in conspiracy theories about power and control. The Rothschilds family, a wealthy family of bankers in the early nineteenth century, regularly appear in anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, to depict Jews as 'shadowy' and 'sinister'. Since 2016, the image of George Soros, a Holocaust survivor born in Hungary, has been used in a similar manner to depict ideas about Jewish wealth, power and fraudulent intentions.

### The anti-vaccination movement

Vaccination is the process by which the immune system of an individual is stimulated by an attenuated or inactive form of a bacteria, virus or their toxins, in order to stimulate an 'imitation' infection; thus, conferring a memory to the immune system allowing it to more easily combat the disease in the future.<sup>2</sup>

Although debated, sources claim that the process of vaccination dates back as far as 200 BCE. More recently, several accounts from the 16<sup>th</sup> century describe a technique of small inoculation practised in India and China whereby smallpox scabs were ground up and blown into the nostrils; other techniques have described scratching matter from a smallpox sore into the skin.<sup>3</sup> In the west, Edward Jenner is considered the founder of vaccination, famously inoculating a 13 year-old-boy with cowpox in 1796, and thereby demonstrating immunity to smallpox. Systematic implementation of a global immunisation programme for smallpox over the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, culminated in its eradication in 1979.

Similar to the process of vaccination, opposition to the principle of vaccination is not a new phenomenon either, with hostility being traced back to around the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1772, the Reverend Edmund Massey (England) referred to vaccines as diabolical operations in his sermon 'The Dangerous and Sinful Practice of Inoculation' due to their ability to prevent the will of God to punish man for their sins. Similar opposition to vaccination can be found in the US even earlier than this, with Reverend John Williams from Massachusetts referring to the process as the devil's work.<sup>4</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-vaccination sentiment transcended religious ideology and entered the political hemi-sphere following the introduction of the Vaccination Act of 1853. This Act mandated the compulsory vaccination of all infants against smallpox, resulting in imprisonment or large fines for parents who dissented. Violent riots and widespread resistance to these measures erupted almost immediately, with Anti-vaccination groups forming to disseminate pamphlets and literature relating to the dangers of vaccination. Counter-editorials were published in medical journals such as the British Medical Journal expressing frustration, a pattern that continues today.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/conversations/downloads/vacsafe-understand-color-office.pdf</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> <u>https://www.historyofvaccines.org/timeline#EVT 1</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1181850/



More recent examples of anti-vaccination movements can be observed in the 1970s coinciding with the introduction of the Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis (DTP) vaccine. A report issued from the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children alleged that 36 children had suffered neurological conditions following vaccination with DTP. The publication of this report led to international controversy, with television and newspapers drawing widespread public attention leading to a decrease in vaccination rates. In an attempt to ameliorate public concern, the independent Joint Commission on Vaccination and Immunization (JCVI) confirmed the safety of the vaccine, but public anxieties continued.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most publicised anti-vaxxer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the medical doctor and scientist, Andrew Wakefield. In February 1998, Wakefield and 12 co-authors published a study in the Lancet, falsely linking the measles mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine to autism in children.<sup>6</sup> The study, which followed 12 developmentally challenged children, eight of whom had allegedly developed autism associated to the MMR vaccine, lead to a significant drop-in vaccination rates.<sup>7</sup> The journal article remained in circulation for over 10 years, before The Lancet retracted the article following a judgement by the General Medical Council that Wakefield was not fit to practice, however it took a further four years before vaccination rates reached 1998 levels.<sup>8</sup> Wakefield moved to America where he has been embraced by those who share his views.<sup>9</sup>

A recent study examined the psychological factors that might motivate people to reject scientific consensus around vaccination.<sup>10</sup> They found that scientific evidence and facts do not change vaccine deniers' attitudes as they are simply regarded as incorrect or corrupt. The study found that participants who displayed more conspiratorial thinking had greater anti-vaccination attitudes. This correlation was strongest in Western nations. The study also found that people with anti-vaccination attitudes were more likely to believe that their freedom was under attack. Finally, the study found that participants who subscribed to an individualistic or hierarchical worldview held stronger anti-vaccination beliefs. In addition, polling of 2,861 US and UK adults commissioned from YouGov by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate found that those who use social media more than traditional media to access news and updates about coronavirus were less likely to get a vaccine than respondents who rely greater on traditional media.<sup>11</sup>

The conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the propensity of conspiratorial thinking as distrust of vaccinations have been coupled by restrictions on everyday freedoms.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> <u>https://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/history-anti-vaccination-movements</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/20/andrew-wakefield-father-anti-vaccine-movement-sticks-his-story-305836.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.c5347

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> <u>https://www.vaccinestoday.eu/stories/measles-vaccination-rates-in-uk-recover-after-14-years;</u> <u>https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)60175-4/fulltext</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jul/18/how-disgraced-anti-vaxxer-andrew-wakefield-was-embraced-by-trumps-america <sup>10</sup> https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2018-03974-001

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9\_8d23c70f0a014b3c9e2cfc334d4472dc.pdf



The association between infectious diseases and antisemitism has a long and deep-rooted history. Evidence of the merging of these themes emerged during the bubonic plague in the mid-14th century. As the black death swept through Europe in many places, Jews were blamed for causing the plague through their alleged poisoning of wells. Thousands of Jews were expelled, put on trial, tortured and even killed during this period for non-existent crimes. The scale of persecution was so vast that western Europe largely became devoid of Jews, with many travelling to the east.

This theme re-emerged in the 20th century, where Adolf Hitler compared Jews to "harmful bacillus" and referred to them as viruses. These sentiments were echoed in Nazi propaganda, perhaps most famously in the film "Der Ewige Jude" ("The Eternal Jew"), where Jews were depicted as rats spreading infections across Europe.<sup>12</sup>

These antisemitic tropes are regularly spread by conspiracy theorists and antisemites today and this forms the basis of our report. Our aims are to measure antisemitism in the anti-vaccination movement and determine the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the growth of conspiratorial thinking.



Our aims therefore are to determine the link between the rise of COVID-19, particularly from the perspective of anti-vaxxers, and their tendency to adopt or spread antisemitic posts online.

### Methodology

This report is based on qualitative research found on the social media platforms: Twitter and Facebook, in September and October 2020. The report contains screenshots of updates or comments posted on either social media site, which at times link to antisemitic videos, documents and blogs hosted by BitChute, YouTube and other websites.

Research was carried out on Twitter by typing the word 'vaccine', 'coronavirus' or 'covid' and 'Jew', 'Jewish' or 'Zionist' into the Twitter search bars. This generated a vocabulary of COVID-19 conspiracy terminology; in particular, the terms 'plandemic' and 'scamdemic' and 'coronahoax'. These terms were searched into the Twitter search bar.

On Facebook, we joined Facebook groups by searching the terms 'vaccine', 'pandemic', 'covid'. We joined groups suggested by the Facebook algorithm as well as groups that were suggested by members and admin of each of these groups.

Group name	Group created	Members (on 6 October 2020)	Antisemitic identified (or October 2020)	posts n 6
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<sup>12</sup> https://cst.org.uk/data/file/d/9/Coronavirus%20and%20the%20plague%20of%20antisemitism.1586276450.pdf

Piers Corbyn - Stop New Normal UK Official group	3 September 2020	9400	Yes
Truth Seekers UK		1400	Yes
Truthers against Zionist lobbies	10 September 2017	1300	Yes
VACCINE HATERS	25 April 2016	3200	No
Bill Gates Can Stick His Vaccine Up His Ass	15 April 2020	625	Yes
Covid-19 Protest	3 April 2020	1300	Yes
We refuse the Bill Gates vaccine and micro chip	17 May 2020	1600	Yes
!!Fake Pandemic: The Truth Behind Coronavirus!!	8 April 2020	1200	Yes
5G-NWO-CONspiracyFACTs?	13 July 2018	3500	Yes
Anti Vaccine International	12 February 2019	1500	Yes
No Mandatory Vaccines - Worldwide	8 June 2020	149	No
COVID-19 Pandemic: Biggest Hoax In Human History	23 July 2020	811	Yes
No Vaccines No Bill Gates No Fauci	10 May 2020	314	Yes
Corona Virus Hoax Resistance	17 May 2020	1300	Yes
parents against vaccination	28 April 2019	3500	No
RISE UP TOGETHER	16 September 2019	4300	Yes
Against Covid19 Vaccine	29 August 2020	631	Yes
Truth Seekers Hampshire	1 June 2020	319	No
Anti vax moms 2.0	21 June 2020	482	No
Anti Mask Anti vaccine Pro Freedom	16 July 2020	355	No
No vaccine no 5g Oxfordshire	18 June 2020	471	Yes
Truther News	11 Aug 2020	2200	Yes
The real UK truth movement	15 May 2016	227	Yes

Truth Seekers South Yorkshire	20 May 2020	220	Yes
Bill Cooper - Exposing The New World Order	12 December 2011	12000	Yes
VACCINE TRUTH	10 March 2018	2100	Yes
No consent to mandated vaccinations.	12 December 2018	917	Yes
LIGHT UP Gates ANTI-VAX Group	11 April 2020	1100	Yes

In these groups we searched the words 'Jew', 'Jewish' and 'Zionist' and took a sample of posts that included antisemitic tropes. This piece of research is by no means exhaustive, but rather illustrative of a growing problem on social media sites since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It does not include posts that have been deleted by authors or admins or may be defined as antisemitic but were not identified due to the choice of search terms.

### Where is antisemitism emerging?

Antisemitism has appeared on social media in several formats in relation to the anti-vaccination movement. Some users post antisemitic content themselves. On Facebook, these posts are often shared by the same users in numerous conspiratorial Facebook groups set up since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the groups themselves are rarely established to spread antisemitism, they become a hotbed for antisemitic conspiracy theories.

Antisemitic comments often appear in the reply comments to posts about the COVID-19 pandemic, most often in relation to posts about Bill Gates and vaccination programmes. Whilst posts that are directly and explicitly antisemitic are most often shared by users with a history of antisemitic posts and a pattern of conspiratorial thinking, conversation within the comments section often includes other users, including attempts at radicalisation. These users are often invited to visit antisemitic blogsites and watch antisemitic videos on YouTube or BitChute.



As Facebook has been pressured to clamp down on 'fake news' relating to the COVID-19 pandemic that could hamper public health, users have expressed fear that anti-vaccination groups may be removed by Facebook. On 6 October 2020, Facebook announced a ban on QAnon Facebook Pages, Groups and Instagram accounts, that share an often antisemitic conspiracy theory that says President Trump is waging a war against elite Satan-worshipping paedophiles. As a result, several Facebook groups have asked their members to move to other platforms including VK, MeWe, Parler and Telegram. Some local groups have opted to also organise in person meetings. Whilst the movement of antisemites, racists and conspiracy theorists to alternative platforms is by no means a new trend, it is worrying that anxieties about COVID-19, and opposition to governmental measures to stop the spread of the virus, are driving new audiences onto platforms which often promote far-right content, antisemitism, and conspiracy theories.

A small number of anti-vaxxer Facebook groups proactively removed antisemitic posts. For example, the admins of VACCINE HATERS removed members who shared antisemitic posts, but evidence of this elsewhere was scant. A larger number of Facebook groups warned

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Anyone know if truth seeker UK has been taken down gone grey on me?				
	13 comments Seen by 50			
🖒 Like	Comment			
View 4 more comments				
https://t.me/truthseekersuk				
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Like · Reply · 12 h				
https://mewe.com/join/truthseek	ersuk 🥝			
MEWE.COM You're invited: J Like · Reply · 12 h	i oin this group			

members in the group's code of conduct, that they would be removed from the group if they reported offensive posts to Facebook. Several group admins posted antisemitic conspiracy theories themselves and included antisemitic images as their cover photo.

### **Findings**

Research by the World Health Organization on beliefs in the anti-vaxxer movement identified a range of mythologies relating to the safety of vaccines, including their side effects such as cancer and autism, dangerous ingredients such as mercury, as well as conspiracies about their hidden purpose, with many believing that vaccines can contain microchips enabling governments or others to track the whereabouts of an immunised person.<sup>13</sup> This latter charge was most often accredited to the establishment of a 'New World Order', supposedly orchestrated by Jews and Zionists, providing a space for antisemitism to grow within the movement.

The CST report 'Coronavirus and the plague of antisemitism', published in April 2020 identified five antisemitic tropes that have emerged in the COVID-19 pandemic:

- The virus is fake it's a Jewish conspiracy
- The virus is real but it's still a Jewish conspiracy
- Jews are the primary spreaders of the virus 'The Jew Flu'
- Celebrating Jewish deaths
- Let's spread it to the Jews the 'Holocough'<sup>14</sup>

The accusations that the pandemic is fake and that Jewish conspirators created the virus are the most dominant in anti-vaxxer communities. Whilst the majority of anti-vaxxers do not express antisemitic beliefs, these claims have become more prevalent since the start of restrictions enforced by governments to limit the spread of COVID-19. These charges are directed at Jewish figures George Soros and the Rothschild family, or at non-Jewish figures including Bill and Melinda Gates and the Rockefeller family,

<sup>13</sup> http://www.euro.who.int/ data/assets/pdf file/0005/339620/Myths-and-facts.pdf?ua=1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> https://cst.org.uk/data/file/d/9/Coronavirus%20and%20the%20plague%20of%20antisemitism.1586276450.pdf

Public Health figures including Neil Ferguson and Anthony Fauci and politicians, who are either accused of being Jewish or in the pay of the Jewish orchestrators of the 'New World Order'.

#### Anti-vaxxers (pre COVID-19)

A small number of antisemitic posts in anti-vaccination groups predated the COVID-19 pandemic, connecting vaccination programmes to antisemitic beliefs about Jewish evil.

I hate the evil thats behind vaccines...and all the other atrocious inhuman acts in this world. I blame the zionist jews and thier evil bloodline ... And thier soulless meat puppets for all of it.
Like · Reply · 2y

#### "Plandemic"

The origins of the 'plandemic' conspiracy theories can, in part, be traced back to a short documentary video featuring the former scientist Dr Mikovits.<sup>15</sup> In her 26-minute 'documentary', she attributes the COVID-19 pandemic to the World Health Organisation, big pharma and Bill Gates. She claims that the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, headed by Dr Anthony Fauci, concealed her research demonstrating that vaccines weaken immune systems.<sup>16</sup> Whilst Mikovits does not directly attribute blame to Jews, the term 'plandemic' has gained significant traction on social media with many posts directing users to the documentary on BitChute. Facebook and Twitter users have expanded 'plandemic' conspiracy theories to emulate long standing antisemitic tropes.

Many of these examples suggest that Jews created coronavirus, and that Jews are colluding behind the scenes to destabilize banks and countries through the spread of the virus.



#### Replying to @rickygervais

Except that the Jews in the camps were working for Large Pharma,.... the people funding the war... and also the same people funding the current plandemic.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> <u>https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9\_8d23c70f0a014b3c9e2cfc334d4472dc.pdf</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/23/how-the-plandemic-conspiracy-theory-took-hold





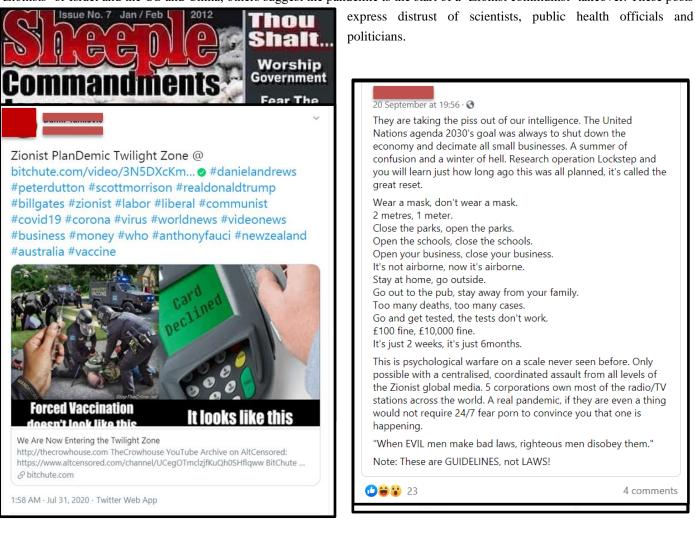
### **New World Order**

Very much connected to claims about Jews creating coronavirus are posts or discussions about the pandemic's 'true purpose' in establishing a 'New World Order'. These conspiracy theorists promote the antisemitic trope that there is a there is a 'Zionist agenda' to destabilise the world and restrict people's freedoms. Coronavirus is therefore part of a plot involving the United States, Israel and sometimes China. Figures such as the Rothschilds, George Soros and the Maxwell's as well as the Rockefeller's and Bill Gates are evoked as the masterminds of the global plan, sometimes believed to be disguised behind the United Nations 2030 agenda.

For example, the 'Sheeple' magazine, originally posted in forums in 2012 and 2013, has been reshared in several anti-lockdown groups to attack mask-wearers and suggest that the lockdown is the first step towards a 'Zionist New World Order'. Lockdown measures to protect public health are therefore discredited or disbelieved by Facebook and Twitter users. One post suggests that Sweden has followed an alternative approach to the spread of coronavirus because it was home to the Rothschild family. Other posts see the lockdown measures as proof of the 'New World Order' and conspiracies about the United Nations Agenda 2030.



Other posts consider the role of the pandemic in foreign affairs and global relations. Whilst some posts allege links between 'Zionists' or Israel and the US and China, others suggest the pandemic is the start of a 'Zionist communist' takeover. These posts

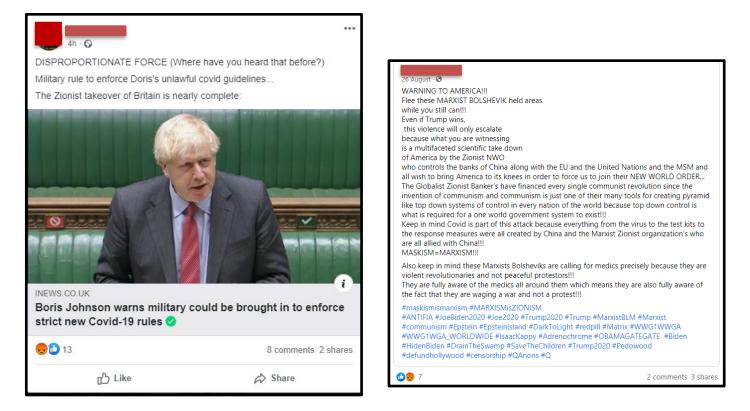














#### 3d · 🞧

#### https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UHPC15FPbM

Its very heart-warming to read the comments on here. A big thank you to all of those brave souls who have seen through these lies the Zionist controlled governments and their propaganda media are pushing into our lives. Agenda 20/30 is now undeniable, and almost everyone knows it. But if the world is to see any real change and a permanent end to wars, ignorance and lack, then we must destroy the root cause and that is: "The parasite banking system", we MUST bring an end to wealth production and investment being held and directed by private criminal organisations who serve the interests of the 1%. THIS IS THE KEY TO ALL OF THE WORLDS PROBLEMS.



YOUTUBE.COM

Spain: Thousands protest against newly-imposed COVID restrictions in Madrid region ⊘

🖒 Like

Comment

Share

#### #WW3

...

ROTHSCHILD's FAKE israhell & the FAKE jews are the neo-NAZIS.

Christians think the orange POS & Jesus will save them. Germans are going to stop this plandemic. Let's hope they take down the NWO gang.

acu2020.org/wp-content/upl...

acu2020.org/english-versio....

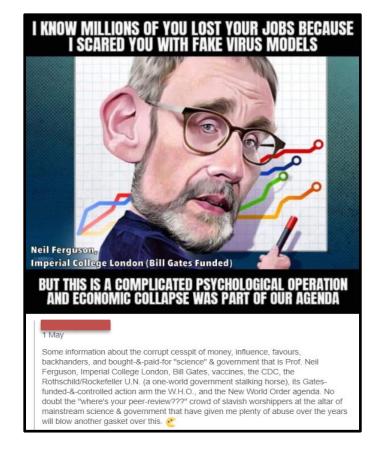
1:21 PM · Aug 9, 2020 · Twitter Web App

1 Like



We Are Currently in Step 2 of the Jewish New World Order Agenda Promoting Race Riots Between The Blacks And The Whites Funded By The Jews. Step 3 Is The Second Wave Of the Plandemic. Step 4 Will Be The Engineered Famine

1:28 AM · Jun 27, 2020 · Twitter for iPad





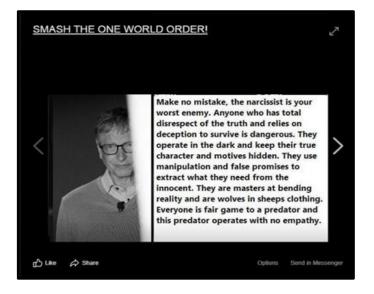


#### **Bill Gates**

Bill Gates is at the centre of many anti-vaccination and coronavirus conspiracy theories. Facebook and Twitter users claim that Gates knew about the COVID-19 virus prior to the outbreak and that he expanded his vaccine programme to make money and has paid government officials and scientists to spread fear about the virus. Other posts claim that he invented the coronavirus himself and is using the vaccine as a method to reduce the world's population, or has implanted microchips within the vaccine in order to track individual's movements.

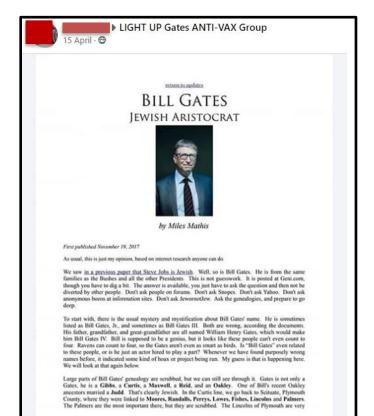
Whilst Gates is not Jewish, many posts believe that he is, referring to Gates as a 'Jewish aristocrat'. Other users frequently suggest that Gates is paid by Jewish 'puppet masters', sharing links to videos and websites that promise proof of his supposed connections to the 'New World Order'.

6 September	•••			
Ever wonder who is behind Bill Gates ?				
TRUISTS.ORG	i			
Chasing the Deepest State: Who's Behind Gates?				
Trūists.õrg 📀				
This video details how Starbucks, Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods, Microsoft, and the Gates family are all tied to an elite, shadowy consulting firm. These mini-documentaries are always completely sourced. Every				
2				
🖒 Like 💭 Comment 🖒 Share				



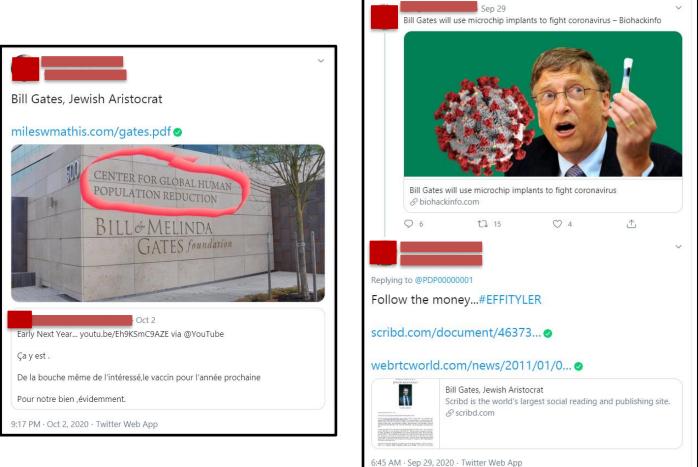
Tewish Bill Gates: Crypto-Jew, Pseudo-Christian CORRUPTICO.COM Jewish Bill Gates: Crypto-Jew, Pseudo-Christian Top Level Source Reveals Bill Gates is Jewish According to John Bolton's nephew, Greg T Dixon, a Me











#### **George Soros**

George Soros is a Hungarian Jewish Billionaire, widely recognised for his philanthropy in funding progressive political and social causes. This philanthropy is often the basis for unsubstantiated conspiracy theories, particularly focusing on Soros as a global mastermind, manipulating the world events to further his goals. A substantial number of these conspiracy theories are centred on longstanding antisemitic tropes that Jews work behind the scenes to control counties and orchestrate global crises for their benefit.<sup>17</sup>

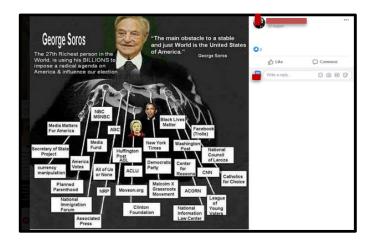
It can be difficult to determine whether a person is intending to disseminate antisemitism when sharing a Soros conspiracy theory online, however, owing to widespread knowledge of Soros's Judaism, it can be difficult to assume otherwise. This is particularly true when the theory relates to typical antisemitic content such as Jews controlling the media, financial system or destabilising countries.<sup>18</sup> Classical antisemitic posts relating to George Soros, such as the examples below, are frequently posted in anti-vaccination and anti-lockdown Facebook groups. Soros is regularly depicted as the 'puppet master' controlling politicians, news agencies and other groups within the United States of America. In some instances, these classic tropes have evolved to place Soros as the mastermind behind the COVID-19 pandemic. Facebook users allege that Soros owns the 'Wuhan lab' in which some conspiracists believe COVID-19 was manufactured. This repurposing of Soros conspiracy theory is substantiated by classic antisemitic tropes. In contrast to antisemitism directed at Bill Gates, which commonly revolves around a nefarious view of his anti-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> https://www.adl.org/blog/the-antisemitism-lurking-behind-george-soros-conspiracy-theories

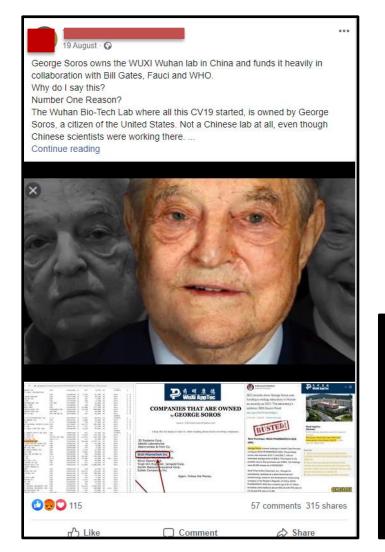
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> https://www.adl.org/blog/the-antisemitism-lurking-behind-george-soros-conspiracy-theories



vaccination programmes, George Soros is frequently depicted as the mastermind behind the COVID-19 pandemic but is rarely referenced in posts relating to COVID-19 vaccinations.











### **Holocaust imagery**

Protesters against measures to curtail the spread of coronavirus have appropriated Holocaust imagery. Anti-vaxxers have worn and shared the yellow Star of David badge since 2019, which some European Jews were required to wear during the Holocaust, to symbolise their 'persecution' at the hands of government vaccine rules.<sup>19</sup> This allegory has grown in 2020 as protestors have likened coronavirus restrictions to the treatment of Jews during the Holocaust. This inappropriate use of Holocaust imagery minimises and trivialises the experiences of the survivors and victims of the Holocaust.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> https://www.adl.org/blog/anti-vaccine-protesters-misappropriate-holocaust-era-symbol-to-promote-theircause?fbclid=IwAR2jEbFw\_3VU5nv\_OTIJurjA3jAGwgtS7koa8hy804hzJJhjcQj827epy7s

## Conclusion

This report identifies the prevalence of antisemitism within the anti-vaccination groups on social media. Whilst not all anti-vaxxers share antisemitic attitudes, it is probable that their propensity to conspiracy theory reduces their resilience to antisemitic beliefs and attitudes. In nearly all the Facebook groups identified this study, users were able to see and interact with antisemitic content, including links to extremist content on sites such as BitChute. Even when initial posts relating to the pandemic did not include any antisemitic content, conversations within the post's comments section were often openly antisemitic and provided an opportunity for others to be radicalised.

As conspiracy theories provide comfort when faced with uncertainty and adversity, it should come as no surprise that antivaccination groups have grown and multiplied during the COVID-19 pandemic. This report identified the emergence and growth of local anti-vaccination and anti-lockdown groups on Facebook and their movement to 'alternative' social media platforms popular with the far-right. Members of these groups were often very active, organising local meetups and anti-lockdown actions, including targeting local and national businesses that were complying with Public Health England guidelines.

The UK Government must not be complacent about the levels of misinformation on social media and its infiltration into local communities. The Government needs to urgently tackle the growth of conspiracy theory during the pandemic if the public are to remain trustful and confident in public health guidelines and recommendations. As temporary restrictions on individual freedoms look set to be prolonged or extended as the United Kingdom enters a three-tier system of coronavirus controls, the need to address antisemitic and anti-vaccination conspiracy theory will become more acute.

Most people are desperate for a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19, as are governments across the world. Once a vaccine becomes available it will be essential to quickly sideline the conspiracy theories and misinformation of the antivaxxers. Exposing their links to antisemitism and age old conspiracy theories can only assist the public health message, but in doing so government and civil society organisations must also combat the resurgence of antisemitism that, as this report evidences, is present in 79 % of antivaxxer networks. The attempts to blame 'the other' for the economic and health problems of COVID-19 will inevitably mean an increase in antisemitism at precisely the moment that nations will need to be at their most united. Exposing the level of antisemitism amongst the anti-vaxxer movement now is therefore of the utmost importance.

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