

New Rutgers Miller Center Research: Russian Disinformation Campaigns and Online Conspiracy Networks Are Weaponizing Food Supply Anxieties

New Brunswick, N.J. (August 15, 2022) – New research conducted in partnership by Rutgers University’s Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience and the Network Contagion Research Institute found that Russian disinformation actors and online conspiracy communities like QAnon are shifting their focus from anti-COVID vaccines to the looming food crisis.

“The efforts of hostile state actors and extremist groups to destabilize our institutions have exploited each new crisis, from the 2020 election to the Covid pandemic, to undermine confidence in our institutions,” explained Miller Center Director John J. Farmer, Jr. “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is the latest example. There is no question that the Russian invasion has exacerbated global food insecurity. But Russian disinformation actors are using their online platforms and tactics to shift the blame to Western nations, and they have been joined by online conspiracy networks that had previously been associated with QAnon’s election conspiracy theories and anti-vaccine and anti-masking messaging.”

“With a mounting famine AND refugee crisis coming to Europe, Africa and the Middle East, this disinformation can be weaponized to rapidly destabilize nations. Governments need to be taking this seriously because the disinformation and extremism associated with this looming crisis will eclipse that associated with COVID, and these narratives can be deployed to inflame tensions rapidly and responsively in ways few are prepared to manage,” said Joel Finkelstein, Chief Science Officer and Cofounder of the Network Contagion Research Institute, who is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Miller Center.

The research reveals that the online rhetoric is spreading disinformation about protests around the world (such as the farmers in the Netherlands), and inaccurately linking the motive of the protests to the New World Order.

Key findings include:

1. Russian media, Kremlin Proxy sites, and pro-Putin trolls are amplifying narratives to pin blame on Western countries and international aid agencies for the looming food crisis
2. Explicitly pro-Putin propaganda networks on Twitter amplify New World Order themes in conjunction with the food supply crisis. This messaging shows a sharp uptick since July
3. Online conspiracy communities and influencers linked to QAnon are notably shifting from COVID conspiracy theories to food crisis disinformation, often linking rising food

insecurity to a shadowy cabal

4. Concurrently, on Twitter, globalist and “New World Order” conspiracies are surging in reaction to the “farmers protest” in the Netherlands and now appear to target food supply mandates and mobilizations

[Learn more.](#)

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ABOUT THE MILLER CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PROTECTION & RESILIENCE

The Miller Center was established to assist vulnerable communities, particularly communities of faith, to enhance their safety and their standing in society by improving their relationships with law enforcement, with other government agencies, and with other vulnerable communities. The Miller Center seeks to honor, through remembrance, the human capacity to rebuild, even to flourish, after unspeakable horrors.

ABOUT THE EAGLETON INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University—New Brunswick studies how American politics and government work and change, analyzes how the democracy might improve, and promotes political participation and civic engagement. The Institute explores state and national politics through research, education, and public service, linking the study of politics with its day-to-day practice.

ABOUT RUTGERS—NEW BRUNSWICK

Rutgers University—New Brunswick is where Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, began more than 250 years ago. Ranked among the world’s top 60 universities, Rutgers’s flagship university is a leading public research institution and a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. It is home to internationally acclaimed faculty and has 12 degree-granting schools and a Division I Athletics program. It is the Big Ten Conference’s most diverse university. Through its community of teachers, scholars, artists, scientists, and healers, Rutgers is equipped as never before to transform lives.

ABOUT THE NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI) is a neutral and independent third party whose mission is to track, expose and combat misinformation, deception, manipulation and hate across social media channels.