

An Analysis of the Potential Influences of Misinformation on
Alberta's Public Health Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and What This Tells Us About
Policy Creation in the Age of Social Media.

by

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed a variety of previously unrecognized problems and showed how new aspects of our growing culture and world have complicated all aspects of our lives. One issue that was both an old problem we learned more about and a new evolution that we were rudely awakened to is misinformation. This paper through the use of a literature review, analysis of government actions, and covid era misinformation, sought to examine if misinformation affected the pandemic response from the Canadian province of Alberta. After reviewing what misinformation was present with several trends in public health response as well as data related to the efficacy of the Albertan public health response and criticism of its failures, this paper believes that there is a high likelihood that there was an influence from misinformation. This influence started early on, causing hesitation to put in place health orders, and an extreme eagerness to lift them. It then slowly grew and mutated, potentially resulting in the ousting of one premier and their replacement with a leader who is significantly more beholden to misinformation.

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Table of contents

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of contents.....	3
Introduction.....	13
0.1 Introduction.....	13
0.2 Thesis organization.....	15
0.3 Methodology.....	20
Chapter 1: Misinformation.....	25
1.1: Introduction to misinformation and its variants.....	26
1.2: How Misinformation Spreads.....	30
1.3: Misinformation’s impact on indoctrinates people.....	32
1.3.1: Trust.....	33
1.3.2: Understanding and Recollection.....	35
1.3.3: Risk Perception.....	39
1.4: Pandemic and Misinformation Interactions.....	47
1.4.1: How do pandemics breed misinformation.....	47
1.5: Covid Misinformation.....	51
Timeline of Canadian covid misinformation.....	51

<i>Before the Covid conspiracy inroads</i>	51
2017.....	52
<i>The beginning of the pandemic and Covid misinformation</i>	53
2020.....	53
January.....	53
March.....	55
April.....	55
May.....	57
June.....	58
July.....	58
September.....	59
November.....	60
2021.....	62
February.....	62
March.....	62
April.....	63
May.....	64
August.....	64

October.....	65
November.....	65
December.....	66
2022.....	67
January.....	67
March.....	68
July.....	68
August.....	68
October (Start of Smith Era)	70
November.....	72
December.....	74
2023.....	75
January.....	75
February.....	75
March.....	77
April.....	77
May.....	78
1.5.1: Misinformation and a Pandemic.....	79

Chapter 2: Public Health and Pandemics.....	84
2.1: Introduction to Public health response and Orders.....	85
2.1.1: Definitions and distinctions in the Alberta context.....	85
2.1.2: Public Health during a Pandemic.....	93
2.1.3: Policy and Misinformation.....	97
2.2: What was Alberta's public health response?.....	101
2.2.1: Timeline of Alberta’s public health response.....	101
2020.....	101
January.....	101
February.....	101
March.....	101
April.....	102
May.....	103
June.....	103
July.....	105
August.....	105
September.....	105
October.....	105

November.....	106
December.....	107
2021.....	107
January.....	107
February.....	107
March.....	108
April.....	108
May.....	109
June.....	110
July.....	111
August.....	112
September.....	112
October.....	114
November.....	114
December.....	115
2022.....	115
January.....	115
February.....	116

March.....	117
April.....	117
June.....	117
July.....	118
August.....	119
October.....	119
2023.....	119
January.....	120
February.....	120
March.....	120
April.....	121
May.....	123
2.3: How effective was Alberta’s public health strategy?.....	124
Chapter 3: Misinformation’s Effect on Alberta.....	139
3.1: Merged timeline breakdown.....	139
#1 Lack of Guidance.....	140
#2 Masks.....	141
#3 Youth/Schools.....	148

#4 QAnon.....	153
#5 Mandates.....	156
#6 Shifting the blame.....	165
#7 Experts and the Government disagree.....	167
#8 Vaccines.....	167
#9 Vaccine Passport.....	171
#10 TBA Trucks.....	173
3.2: Notable cases.....	182
3.3: In summary.....	187
Conclusion.....	189
4.1: Introduction.....	189
4.2: Hypothesis.....	190
Bibliography.....	195
Appendix A: Merged timeline.....	223
2017.....	223
2020.....	224
January.....	224
February.....	226

March.....	226
April.....	228
May.....	230
June.....	232
July.....	232
August.....	233
September.....	234
October.....	235
November.....	236
December.....	238
2021.....	238
February.....	238
March.....	240
April.....	241
May.....	244
June.....	244
July.....	244
August.....	245

	September.....	246
	October.....	248
	November.....	249
	December.....	250
2022.....		251
	January.....	251
	February.....	253
	March.....	254
	April.....	255
	June.....	255
	July.....	256
	August.....	256
	October (<i>Smith Era</i>).....	259
	November.....	261
	December.....	263
2023.....		264
	January.....	264
	February.....	266

March.....267

April.....268

May.....271

Introduction

0.1 Introduction

This thesis asks: did misinformation undermine the Government of Alberta's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic and, if so, how? To begin to address those questions, we must identify the meaning of the word 'misinformation'. For our purposes, misinformation is defined as information that is claimed to be factual while being contrary to the broader scientific consensus, and which does not hold up to review or criticism.¹

Misinformation as a force acting upon our world has become ever more prevalent as our methods of communication have advanced, and communication with the rest of the world has become quicker, easier, and more profitable in new ways. Due to this, we have seen a rise in both the impact and spread of misinformation.² As such, when studying the field of politics, it would be shortsighted for those in the field to move forward without studying the way that the rising force of misinformation interacts with policy creation.

One of the most damaging and prevalent types of misinformation is health-related misinformation.³ This suggests that looking at the issue of misinformation using the lens of public health policy will give us the greatest amount of relevant data to examine, especially considering recent events in global health. On that note, at the time of writing, we find ourselves in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's most intense period, meaning that we have at our

¹ Swire-Thompson, Briony, and David Lazer. "Public Health and Online Misinformation: Challenges and Recommendations."

² Wang Yuxi, Martin McKee, Aleksandra Torbica, David Stuckler. "Systematic Literature Review on the Spread of Health-related Misinformation on Social Media". *Social Science & Medicine* Volume 240, November 2019. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953619305465> .

³ Wang Yuxi, Martin McKee, Aleksandra Torbica, David Stuckler. "Systematic Literature Review on the Spread of Health-related Misinformation on Social Media".

disposal a slew of timely and relevant examples of misinformation interacting with public health policy. This surplus of information will be needed in approaching the question of misinformation's impacts on public health policy during a pandemic, as the COVID pandemic's tenure has included new and extreme misinformation narratives and frequent policy decisions to combat the virus. The recent COVID-19 pandemic allows us plenty of examples to examine. While it's true that there have been examples of mass infections and illness outbreaks that overlap to some degree with the modern era of mass communication, COVID's extreme recency allows us to examine the effects of the most contemporary examples of misinformation being spread through the most relevant means of communication to the current political reality. For example, while there might be some value in examining the spread of misinformation through flyers handed out door to door from past health emergencies, this would not allow for a proper understanding of modern misinformation and how new systems and technologies, such as social media, have amplified its effects. In contrast, during the Covid-19 pandemic, a modern example where many impactful communication mediums including Twitter and Facebook exist and spread misinformation, we are provided with a cornucopia of historically unique and relevant data about misinformation, that can be studied for future policy creation and public health responses.

Finally, why use Alberta as a context? There are beneficial aspects to choosing Alberta as a context for the topic of a thesis on misinformation during the pandemic over other locations, such as the legal challenges to some of the province's public health actions where there was a claimed influence of misinformation,^{4 5} or the multiple direct accusations of the influences of

⁴ CM v Alberta, 2022 ABKB 716.

https://albertacourts.ca/docs/default-source/qb/judgments/cm-v-alberta-2022-abkb-716---decision.pdf?sfvrsn=38b46182_5

⁵ Lee, Jennifer. "Documents show politics drove Alberta's decision to lift COVID restrictions, critics argue"

misinformation on the government, directed at both the UCP Premier Jason Kenney⁶ ⁷who held office during most of the pandemic, as well as those directed to the subsequent UCP Premier, Danielle Smith⁸. These factors combined make Alberta a useful context for this research. While some of these factors found in Alberta can be found in other provinces, Alberta has one of the largest convergence of factors that are of interest to studying misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, Alberta's congregation of factors make it quite easy to approach the question raised in this thesis.

Additionally, looking at Alberta can be especially helpful due to the unique nature of its new premier, Danielle Smith, who has been upfront in expressing many views that have been criticized as being directly influenced by misinformation and whose decisions can be compared to the previous government's decisions allowing us to have a better ability to compare the private beliefs of both administrations through contrasting the two. Finally, there is a benefit of familiarity with this context, owing to the fact that the author of this work was born and raised in Alberta, near Smith's birthplace of Calgary, and raised in the Town of High River which Premier Smith calls home. Hopefully, this means that personal familiarity may lead to a greater understanding of the dynamics which could deepen and inform the examination of the question.

CBC News, Jul 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/documents-alberta-decision-covid-restrictions-1.6520363>.

⁶ Small, Kaylen. "COVID-19: Alberta doctors, mayors react to Kenney removing vaccine passport, restrictions" Global News, February 8, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8604623/covid-19-alberta-doctor-mayors-react-kenney-removal-vaccine-passport-restrictions/>

⁷ Lee, Jennifer. "Documents show politics drove Alberta's decision to lift COVID restrictions, critics argue" CBC News, Jul 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/documents-alberta-decision-https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-cmoh-hinshaw-cabinet-mask-schools-1.6554525-covid-restrictions-1.6520363>.

⁸ Thomson, Eden. "Scary" misinformation is the foundation of Alberta's public health policy" Canada today, November 1, 2022. <https://canadatoday.news/ab/scary-misinformation-is-the-foundation-of-albertas-public-health-policy-38849/>

With that said, the value of this work is influenced by the number of contexts in which one could use what is learned. However, Alberta has some factors that might make its population unique, such as traditional political leanings aligning with populist and libertarian views. As such, it is right to ask if those factors make this paper's exploration irrelevant to most other contexts. This paper argues that while unique, Alberta is not so unique that what we learn here cannot be used in most parts of the world that have access to the internet.

One factor that we will explore later is the universal susceptibility to misinformation that all humans share. While one piece of misinformation will not work for every person or context there is no person or place on earth which some piece of misinformation cannot affect. As such, even though factors, such as distrust and hatred of the federal government, may be a useful inroad for misinformation in Alberta though maybe not to the same degree in other Canadian contexts, the way that misinformation manipulates people, through social media and our emotions, are the same no matter where you are.

This means that, while the exact misinformation narratives we examine in this work may not ever be seen in other places or times, emotions like fear, confusion, and anger can universally preyed upon no matter the time, place, or people. By examining if and how these universal factors were manipulated and to what extent they impacted policy creation, we can potentially learn a lot about any context that has access to the means of misinformation employed in this context, whether it be social media, mainstream media coverage or any other type form of communication.

0.2 Thesis organization

To begin to answer this question, it is important to first understand what misinformation is if we wish to determine its effect on public health policy. As such, the first chapter shall explore the topic of misinformation, starting with determining the basics of misinformation by defining basic terminology and examining its fundamental elements and attributes so that when discussing categories of misinformation, we might correctly differentiate between misinformation, disinformation, and simple differences of opinion. This serves to help us better understand how the intention to spread false information or not impacts our topic. As misinformation alone is a very broad subject, it will be important to understand both what it is and what type(s) of misinformation might be important to answering our question of its impact on public health response.

In the first chapter, there will be several questions covered, whose answers might affect how events and evidence can be interpreted, so these questions will be examined to reduce the effects of bias on the examination of the possible effects of misinformation. One notable query of this sort concerns the ways that misinformation can affect people. One might be unsure initially if misinformation can affect any person, given the chance, to a degree akin to brainwashing as seen in numerous fictional stories, or if it has a limited effects of a state of heightened suggestibility like hypnosis or drunkenness, in that it may only allow people to act out what they already wanted to do? One would assume that the answer would be a shade of grey in between the two extremes, but attempting to answer the question of misinformation's effects on public health policy based on assumptions without an understanding of how it affects the common person is only going to lead to a shortsighted conclusion. Furthermore, we must examine how our context of both the pandemic and any unique features of the Alberta population might play a role in our question, if we hope to not obscure the answer to the question of this work behind our

own misunderstandings and assumptions, a result which would be truly ironic considering our topic is misinformation.

Notably, misinformation affects important factors in the political sphere such as trust. Important for our purpose, this influence is heightened in the case of the public's trust in the media and institutions⁹. This is worrisome for policy creation during a pandemic, as effective communication relies on the media and is not only essential for public health policies to function but also important when you need the public to self-report cases of infection and work with mandates requiring distancing and masks in public.¹⁰ Trust is just one example of the factors which can be altered by the influences of misinformation. As such, it is necessary to understand the effect on them for our purposes.

Finally, this chapter ends by presenting a timeline of misinformation known to have been spreading in Alberta during and just before the pandemic. A completely comprehensive list of all misinformation spread inside Alberta would be impossible to present without obtaining personal information on the web browsing habits of all Albertans, as such, what this list will be able to do is cover any misinformation that was notable and impactful enough that it was prominent in the public sphere, shared either by politicians, medical professionals, or the public. An understanding of the misinformation in Alberta during this timeframe will arm us with the ability to examine certain public health actions/policies more easily as we can determine when specific misinformation narratives were observed at times relevant to a potential impact on the health

⁹ Kalogeropoulos, Antonis, Jane Suiter, Linards Udriš, and Mark Eisenegger. "News Media Trust and News Consumption: Factors Related to Trust in News in 35 Countries." *International journal of communication* (Online) (2019): 3672-.

¹⁰ MacAulay, Margaret, Anna K Macintyre, Aryati Yashadhana, Adèle Cassola, Patrick Harris, Caroline Woodward, Katherine Smith, et al. "Under the Spotlight: Understanding the Role of the Chief Medical Officer in a Pandemic." *Journal of epidemiology and community health* (1979) 76, no. 1 (2021): 100-104. [https://jech-bmj-com.uml.idm.oclc.org/content/76/1/100](https://jech.bmj-com.uml.idm.oclc.org/content/76/1/100)

response. This should provide a solid base to approach answering this question in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 will cover the topic of public health responses. This will build upon the groundwork laid in the previous chapter concerning misinformation by clarifying and distinguishing the second topic of interest that is part of the question this work asks. Being able to say what misinformation is will only be valuable to us if we know what a public health response is, and how it normally works, both during and outside of an emergency like COVID-19 so as to determine what is part of its general framework, what is added during times of crisis and what behavior is outside of what should be seen as part of a public health response. What will be covered in the chapter concerning public health responses will be the typical and emergency powers of the Alberta government representatives and health personnel as well as legal definitions and legal acts relevant to the topic. This will be covered in order to properly lay out the basic framework from which public health officials draw their power and responsibilities. Next, the chapter will cover what Alberta's public health response was to the Covid-19 pandemic. This will be done in a timeline to show the steps taken through the pandemic along with explanations of what situation each response was in reaction to. Additionally, this chapter will start to cover any praise and criticism directed at Alberta's public health response in general or to specific public health orders. This will only be possible because the previous chapter has already defined misinformation, meaning that criticism based on political ideology and disagreements can be separated from criticism based on misinformation. Alternatively, if praise of public health orders is linked to misinformation narratives, it may suggest a self-reinforcing ecosystem of misinformation among certain groups including political figures and experts from both relevant and irrelevant backgrounds who are part of the public discourse.

To attempt to answer our question the third and final chapter will examine any criticism levied at the Alberta public health response which claims that misinformation influenced Alberta's government during the pandemic. These observations will come from an examination of the misinformation and public health timelines after they are merged, as well as from experts in the medical or public policy fields, political figures in and outside of Alberta, and others in the media. Then, using these critics in tandem with the understanding of misinformation in Alberta laid out in the first chapter and the record of the public health actions in Alberta discussed in our second chapter, this chapter will examine the evidence and claims. Based on our examination and the evidence found, the chapter will conclude by hypothesizing on the effects of misinformation on public health policy during this time. The hypothesis of the effect misinformation had will be based on documentation of known misinformation narratives at the time, Alberta's public health orders, as well as any internal government documents available to the public which may show a connection or lack thereof, of what experts have deemed to be misinformation. Furthermore, in cases where there is a possible effect of misinformation, this chapter will examine the resulting public health orders and, where possible, use the criticism of experts or information out of comparable counterpart regions when public health orders took a route divergent from the path recommended by the expert consensus to attempt to quantify the effects of misinformation from the public health order, where that task is realistic to do so. There may be cases of unique situations or decisions in Alberta in which we will not be able to fully determine what might have been the result without the possible influence of misinformation.

0.4 Methodology

To approach the question of misinformation's influence on Alberta's public health policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, this work starts by conducting a literature review of recent

academic articles and other notable writings that have discussed misinformation and its effects, on the public and specific systems and groups.

While most examinations of misinformation function primarily to determine the best ways to deter or reverse the influences of misinformation, this is less important for our question. This is due to our focus being on confirming/hypothesizing the influence of misinformation. While knowing how to protect against misinformation is an important topic to approach, if you cannot identify the areas where misinformation exists and where it has been most impactful, a large amount of effort will be wasted on low and no-impact areas. As such the initial literature review in the first chapter will cover what misinformation is and how it works, to provide us with a framework to build upon not to answer the question itself directly.

Next will be a similar review of articles, government Acts, and other sources covering the topic of public health actions, and the actors involved in the typical and emergency processes. This once again serves to grow our framework further, while the topic of the review will be narrowed to focus on the Chief Public Health Officer and the roles of elected officials outside of and during a pandemic as they are the ones able to make decisions and able to have said decisions affected by misinformation. To finish off this chapter, there will be a review of the literature that suggests how and where misinformation can have the most impact on the process.

Understanding the roles of those involved in public health actions and orders according to Alberta law, in addition to understanding the specific legislation unique to the context of Alberta such as the Alberta Public Health Act,¹¹ will create a solid basis of understanding to approach the question of Alberta's public health actions not assuming the rules or norms of any other system.

¹¹ Province of Alberta. "Public Health Act" Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37, November 16, 2022, <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/p37>.

Because of how the responsibilities and laws connected to any governmental action or role differ between different regions and times, the inclusion of a review of Alberta's Public Health Act, examining the sections most directly connected to the Covid-19 pandemic, allows the scope of this research to be narrowed to the time and place in question, rather than using broad analysis of the responsibilities of public health officers or the powers allowed to other governing bodies, which may not be relevant to the Alberta or Covid-19 pandemic context.

In addition to the review of publications and government documents related to misinformation and public health in Alberta, we will also be examining news articles, public health orders, and internal government documents to establish two timelines which will be used, in unison and on their own, outlining the known misinformation and public health actions taken during the Covid-19 pandemic. This gives us the ability to compare and determine what narratives were at play and if they correlate with any public health orders or public comments given regarding the pandemic, which might provide indications of the influence of misinformation on public health actions. We will also be able to review the documents produced by the Alberta government from a recent court order which outlined internal justifications for several public health actions and alternative options for said actions they considered.

With the review and summarization of all the above documents finished and the framework properly established, our final chapter will analyze the two timelines, criticism of the public health actions from experts, other political figures, and advocacy groups, along with the internal documents of Alberta's decision, which came out of the court case regarding the decision to lift the mask mandate in schools. From this analysis, the hope is to find any evidence of the influence of misinformation as well as any trend showing a correlation between health orders and misinformation which, together with other evidence, could create a strong case for the influences

of misinformation. Alternatively, it might show that there was no influence or an unsubstantial amount of influence of misinformation on the Albertan government's actions and decisions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

To create a metric to determine the scale of any impact found, it must be first determined if the impact observed exists either on a direct level where the influence was on politicians and how/why they crafted public health orders the way they did, or on an indirect level where misinformation influences the public's actions, leading them to ignore or subvert public health policies. An example of an indirect influence would be events such as the Alberta border protest¹², a campaign tied to the widely known trucker convoy protest which sought to remove health orders based on misinformation¹³. While this is an extremely prominent example and there are no easy direct influence examples, an indirect influence like the border protest does not preclude the existence of any direct influence, because those with decision-making power in the Alberta government are just as capable of being misled by misinformation or capable of co-opting misinformation for political gain when making public health decisions.

While the observation of either the direct or indirect influence of misinformation will in a manner answer the question asked by this work, what this paper wishes to determine more specifically is the question of direct influence. As such, the metric used to measure the potential direct impacts of misinformation will be done by looking at misinformation campaigns and narratives around the times of health orders and public statements and compare them to see if

¹² Grant, Meghan. "Accused in Coutts blockade concerned over 'bias' if faced with vaccinated jury" CBC News, May 16, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/coutts-border-blockade-charges-joanne-person-jury-vaccine-1.6455521>.

¹³ Duhatschek, Paula. "Most Albertans did not support Freedom Convoy, University of Alberta survey suggests" CBC News, Sep 02, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/freedom-convoy-opinions-alberta-1.6571653>

there is any overlap. Then, using internal documents and statements, we will look for internal justification relying on misinformation which suggests a direct level influence or any suggestion that a misinformed population pressured or coerced the policy creation on an indirect level. Using these inferences in sum, we will hypothesize as to the influence of misinformation on the public health policy creation of the Alberta government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After hearing the upfront rhetoric of current Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, some might feel that this exploration might not be useful, as the answer to our question might seem to be an obvious, “Yes” or “No” depending on whether you believe the same "information" that she does. Attending to the information, which would not be explored if one ignored the different types and levels of misinformation that might have influenced the decisions behind the public health orders, or comparing what influences on Smith might have carried over from the previous government may provide us with substantial amounts of useful information to help rectify any issues with our current systems or allow us to be better able to not only identify and, at best, curtail the influence of misinformation during a pandemic but also to limit the influences of it in the future of political debate and policy creation. This reasoning is why this thesis paper asks the question as to whether misinformation undermined the Government of Alberta's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic and explores the qualities and effects of any influence found.

Chapter 1: Misinformation

Recently a basic understanding of the concept of misinformation has worked its way into the zeitgeist, due to several notable recent world events and narratives, such as public health-related events associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a surface-level recognition of misinformation is not adequate to approach the issue, as the public still lacks a complete understanding of exactly what misinformation is, how it is different from concepts like disinformation, and how it can affect and manipulate our actions and beliefs. When examining some misinformation narratives, it is not unreasonable to deem them to be ridiculous claims about COVID-19, such as a descriptive narrative claiming that ingesting garlic is preventative of viral infections or that consuming chemical cleaners might help cure oneself of COVID-19. The impulse for someone, without a proper understanding of misinformation, might reasonably be that those who have been indoctrinated into these beliefs only fall victim due to some inherent stupidity of the individual, or solely from lack of higher education. Their assumptions leave them unaware of their own risk of falling prey to similar schemes. This chapter will explore the intricacies of misinformation, how it is born and spreads, and how it can affect people and populations. We do so in order that we may properly address the question of how misinformation might have influenced Alberta's policy-making process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving beyond our assumptions, we will no longer be trapped with the idea that a ridiculous bit of misinformation could never have a direct impact on policy creation, or that that no one capable of being placed in a position of political power might be confused or convinced by misinformation. We must understand that misinformation is a powerful weapon for those seeking to achieve greater political influence and power. Overcoming these assumptions and being able

to reflect on the actions taken by Alberta's government is what this chapter helps us with. Building on these reflections and realizations will help inform the chapters which will follow this one, to create a better view of the events and actions taken during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.1: Introduction to misinformation and its variants

Starting from how it can be most easily described, misinformation is a type of lie or falsehood. To be more specific, misinformation is information that declares itself as truthful while being contrary to the broader scientific consensus.¹⁴ It may claim scientific legitimacy through the citation of a handful of articles or statements by self-proclaimed "experts", whether or not their credentials are credible or whether or not those articles and "experts" have been panned by their broader community, or if the articles have been retracted after being proven false, like the case of the claimed link between vaccinations and autism¹⁵. Despite their claimed legitimacy, what marks information as misinformation, is that its conclusion or methods are agreed to be inaccurate by the larger body of information and disputed by experts in relevant fields. When looking at this definition in the context of the scientific process, some issues arise. It could be said that any minority view in a field could be declared to be misinformation. This is especially the case at the genesis of a new field or topic of research. Many fringe ideas are held and debated, and any consensus view held by those in the field may be incorrect¹⁶. To illustrate the difference between an incorrect or fringe view and misinformation, the case of the possible use of the drug Ivermectin as a COVID treatment is an apt example. As research into treatments for Covid-19 began, some studies found evidence that Ivermectin, an effective anti-parasitic

¹⁴ Swire-Thompson, Briony, and David Lazer. "Public Health and Online Misinformation: Challenges and Recommendations." *Annual Review of Public Health* 41, no. 1 (2020): 433–451.

¹⁵ Eggertson, Laura. "Lancet Retracts 12-Year-Old Article Linking Autism to MMR Vaccines." *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)* 182, no. 4 (2010): 332.

¹⁶ Kuhn Thomas S, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" *FOUNDATIONS OF THE UNITY OF SCIENCE VOLUME II*, Second Edition, Enlarged, 1970: 24-17.

drug, might be effective in the treatment of Covid-19¹⁷. While this information soon became misinformation, at this beginning point, it was simply a minority view in the research community. Once this data was made public, groups such as the Scientific Advisory Group, Health Canada, The Food and Drug Administration, The World Health Organization, as well as other professional regulatory groups and experts relevant to the context of Alberta including the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta and the Alberta College of Pharmacy, reviewed the claims of Ivermectin's effectiveness. What these groups found was that the studies had small sample sizes, were poorly designed, and did not have appropriate controls. Furthermore, the results of these studies could not be replicated after correcting the errors made in those studies.¹⁸ At that point, the idea that Ivermectin was an effective treatment for COVID-19 became implausible or decidedly incorrect, but it was not yet misinformation. Even if the researchers who published the original studies continue to claim their findings were accurate, if they continue to try and prove and argue their case, they will still not be spreading misinformation. The change occurs as they or others treat these fringe claims like they are gospel. It is the act of a person taking these claims and adding on extraneous facts or fiction to change the claim that 'Ivermectin may have some benefits for treating Covid-19 but there is no high-quality evidence suggesting such' into the claim that 'Ivermectin is a Nobel prize-winning drug that has been shown to treat Covid-19 by several studies.' This second claim is the point where a minority idea becomes misinformation. While Ivermectin is a Nobel prize-winning drug, it did not win the award for its use with Covid-19. In addition, while some studies show it is effective, in the

¹⁷ Alberta Health Services, "Ivermectin: A useful drug, but not a treatment for COVID-19" Alberta health services.ca, 2021.

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/news/releases/2021/Page16218.aspx#:~:text=There%20is%20no%20high%2Dquality,be%20used%20for%20COVID%2D19.>

¹⁸ Alberta Health Services, "Ivermectin: A useful drug, but not a treatment for COVID-19" Alberta health services.ca, 2021.

context of the greater scientific body of work the claim without context is misleading. Lastly, this is not to say that there is no space for debate on scientific subjects in the public sphere and, as we have stated, this is not to say that there cannot be fringe beliefs in science worth being studied. Scientific claims refuted by the larger scientific body, which continue to claim to be the most accurate interpretation of the data while not presenting any new evidence of their claim or that providing analysis that the other's interpretation of them was faulty outside of anecdotal examples and the idea that the scientific elites are suppressing this information to hurt the public, become misinformation by being emphatic in their claims while not properly addressing criticism or seeking to prove their findings true.

So, to change our definition to account for this context, misinformation can be defined as information that declares itself as truthful while being contrary to, neglectful and dismissive of the broader scientific consensus.

Misinformation can flow even from a proper application of the scientific method as newly published studies, before peer review, can become the subject of news articles despite the journalist lacking expertise in the field. While one study may find a link between, for example, eating chocolate daily and a reduced risk of cancer, that may not agree with the broader consensus of the time or what will be determined to be inaccurate after others replicate the study. Despite the shortcomings of these articles, for the average person scrolling through their news feed who may only imbibe the headline toting the findings of the unverified study, or even if

they go as far as reading the full article, the reader is likely to not follow up on the article and continue to verify the claim as it is investigated further by the scientific community.¹⁹

The information spread in the articles about new science can create misinformation without any intention of doing such and without any malice. When this misinformation is accepted as fact by another individual or group, it serves to distort their knowledge, beliefs, and even memory of the topic all the same²⁰. As misinformation is a broad term, to identify misinformation made to harm or manipulate, we need some additional categories, such as the subcategory of disinformation. Disinformation differentiates itself from the general category of misinformation by being deliberately made to misinform others, for some type of gain. This gain is not limited to any specific benefits but is commonly a gain in the realms of, wealth, political power, or social status.²¹ As an example of disinformation, we can look to the lies about the health effects and demonization of fat, perpetrated by the sugar industry.

This narrative, funded by the sugar industry, sought to, using misleading and false scientific research, blame unwanted weight gain on the consumption of fat and promote sugar as a healthy alternative to boost sales of sugar²² making their claims 'disinformation'. In contrast, we can look at the case of the falsehood that sugar can make children hyperactive. While this idea is as

¹⁹ Lee, Jiyoung. "When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 50, no. 1 (2022): 70–90.

²⁰ Swire-Thompson, Briony, and David Lazer. "Public Health and Online Misinformation: Challenges and Recommendations." *Annual Review of Public Health* 41, no. 1 (2020): 433–451.

²¹ Swire-Thompson, Briony, and David Lazer. "Public Health and Online Misinformation: Challenges and Recommendations."

²² Kearns, Cristin E, Laura A Schmidt, and Stanton A Glantz. "Sugar Industry and Coronary Heart Disease Research: A Historical Analysis of Internal Industry Documents." *JAMA internal medicine* 176, no. 11 (2016): 1680–1685.

equally untrue as the claims of sugar health benefits, the hyperactivity claim does not benefit any obvious group or individual, making this claim a case of misinformation, not disinformation.²³

1.2: How Misinformation Spreads

So how then does misinformation spread? The answer to this question does include the mediums by which misinformation generally flows, such as social media and television. However, the aspect of this flow that is the most useful for our purposes is how misinformation implants itself into people's beliefs and thoughts. Understanding how and why people's beliefs are impacted can let us assess if Alberta is at any greater risk than other populations, or the degree to which the contexts of the Covid-19 pandemic aggravated the situation. While a known fiction can spread rapidly, as seen with the spread of any of the millions of fictional stories in media, when most people know something to be false, a false narrative is substantially less likely to hinder public policy. For example, there are no widespread issues with segments of the population believing that politicians should be doing a better job defending us from the forces of Sauron, however, we do have many in our world who believe the equally fictional and absurd ideas such as the idea that a secret cabal of loosely veiled anti-Semitic stereotypes known as "The Globalists" are trying to use vaccines among other methods to depopulate and control the world²⁴. While the idea of either story being believed to be real may seem absurd to those who recognize them to be fictional, to those who have been indoctrinated by misinformation

²³ Swire-Thompson, Briony, and David Lazer. "Public Health and Online Misinformation: Challenges and Recommendations."

²⁴ Flores, Myles. "The New World Order: The Historical Origins of a Dangerous Modern Conspiracy Theory" Middlebury Institute of International Studies, May 30, 2022.
<https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/new-world-order-historical-origins-dangerous>.

narratives, the absurdity is not as clear, begging the question of why and how so many come to the belief that their absurd fiction is logical fact?

To understand how this can be, we must first accept that anyone can fall victim to misinformation of some kind. Misinformation may not take root as a tightly held belief or even impact your day-to-day life at all, but the possibility of unknowingly internalizing a mistruth still exists. While we are all susceptible, some factors seem to increase the risk of falling prey to misinformation, such as one's frequency of social media use, political partisanship, psychological factors yet to be fully identified, the quality of a person's physical and mental health, levels of education, and being of either of extremely high or low social class/income bracket²⁵. However, these are just factors that increase one's risk of falling for misinformation. Even those who have none of the added risks can still be manipulated into believing misinformation.

Beyond individual risk factors, we must also consider risks born from our easily bored minds, such as the desire for novelty and emotional resonance when we approach new information. This is a risk as people tend to fill gaps in our knowledge and, in doing so, we have a preference to internalize the novel, the heart-wrenching or the exciting and the generally fun information we find along the way.

This behavior also leads us to prefer comforting and easy ideas or solutions. So, when we are worried about a stressful event like a pandemic, we may find comfort in narratives that say all

²⁵ Kim, Seoyong, and Sunhee Kim. "The Crisis of Public Health and Infodemic: Analyzing Belief Structure of Fake News About COVID-19 Pandemic." *Sustainability* (Basel, Switzerland) 12, no. 23 (2020): 9904–.

will be fine, or that we are special and protected from harm. Or in extreme cases, that there is some villain in the world that only we can stop, that we can be a hero ²⁶.

While real information can bring us to tears or beg us to act, real events have greater trouble creating narratives that are enticing, complete, or comforting to all people in all situations especially when compared to those that can be made into misinformation. At the start of the pandemic, you may have mourned the suffering and loss of life and wondered what you could do, you may have listened to recommendations to stay home, social distance and wear a mask, but when presented with the idea that you are safe and can go back to normal because you are young and healthy, many will be drawn to this easier and self-aggrandizing option. The solutions presented to you may even seem more fun or novel when contrasted with the solutions in the mainstream dialogue that are boring and mundane ideas, that will require long-term effort and that are uncomfortable, not requiring a blaze of glory to solve the problem. This dichotomy helps us understand that fiction and thus misinformation can easily be tailored to be more exciting and have easier solutions that don't require the audience to change their way of life. Because of this, misinformation can spread much quicker than normal information, and the right person in the right moment can affect how they relate to the world.²⁷

1.3: Misinformation's impact on indoctrinates people

Next, this paper shall explore the symptoms of misinformation's impact on a person. The impacts of misinformation are significant for this conversation, as we must account for the minds of the population when analyzing misinformation's impact on any policy a government attempts

²⁶ Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz, and John Cook. "Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing."

²⁷ Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz, and John Cook. "Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing."

to create and enforce. It may be that there are several potential situations which could arise from an indirect influence of misinformation born from an indoctrinated population. Some impacts may not interfere with policy creation and there are mitigating factors that may reduce the impact of misinformation to a negligible level. However, what will be covered in this section suggests that misinformation's impacts are significant and directly important to public policy creation. Understanding them will help to answer the question posed by this thesis, as tracking the effects of disinformation in our context requires a level of recognition of what impacts it has, to not ignore when other influences may be more prominent.

1.3.1: Trust

Trust for our purposes will be defined as an individual's or group's confidence that the information shared with them by a specific source is accurate and as free as possible from bias.²⁸ Trust is needed when anyone wishes to communicate information. Without trust, communication devolves into an argument or the attempt to share information being ignored and, as such, public trust in a government or in media sources who deliver governmental statements is essential for a society to function effectively.²⁹ By eroding trust in mainstream media or government, misinformation could affect public health policy creation³⁰ by limiting public cooperation and attention, and by decreasing how much trust is placed in institutions.

As misinformation can affect individuals' or groups' trust, to properly enact any political action, overcoming misinformation is essential as the misinformation may end up making a

²⁸ Zimand-Sheiner, Dorit, Ofrit Kol, Smadar Frydman, and Shalom Levy. 2021. "To Be (Vaccinated) or Not to Be: The Effect of Media Exposure, Institutional Trust, and Incentives on Attitudes toward COVID-19 Vaccination" *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 24: 12894.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182412894>

²⁹ Zimand-Sheiner, Dorit, Ofrit Kol, Smadar Frydman, and Shalom Levy. 2021. "To Be (Vaccinated) or Not to Be: The Effect of Media Exposure, Institutional Trust, and Incentives on Attitudes toward COVID-19 Vaccination".

³⁰ Zimand-Sheiner, Dorit, Ofrit Kol, Smadar Frydman, and Shalom Levy. 2021. "To Be (Vaccinated) or Not to Be: The Effect of Media Exposure, Institutional Trust, and Incentives on Attitudes toward COVID-19 Vaccination".

public health policy irrelevant because the policy is ignored. This is especially worrisome when an electorate is dependent on social media for their news, as this has been shown to increase both rates of acceptance of misinformation and distrust in mainstream sources³¹, and as trust in mainstream media is highly related to trust in political institutions³². If there are issues of trust in public health policies such as mask mandates and vaccination requirements, those in power, especially those trusted by a large segment of the populace must take care not to reduce trust in such public health options or the levels of trust in the other governmental bodies needed to respond to a situation, to not further erode trust in public institutions.

Mistrust over vaccines, for example, undermines an important tool for combatting public health emergencies. Mistrust tends to be born from institutional mistrust more than any other reason.³³ So, for a government to hope for compliance with public health orders, then first and foremost they must build the levels of trust between their constituents, media, health services, and themselves³⁴. Even when we look back at the H1N1 pandemic of 2009 we can see that most of the noncompliance with health orders stemmed from the skepticism of the severity of H1N1 and that the mistrust of the media prevented this misconception from being disabused³⁵. This effect of skepticism leading to noncompliance was also seen during the Covid-19 pandemic.

³¹ Kalogeropoulos, Antonis, Jane Suiter, Linards Udris, and Mark Eisenegger. "News Media Trust and News Consumption: Factors Related to Trust in News in 35 Countries." *International journal of communication (Online)* (2019): 3672–.

³² Kalogeropoulos, Antonis, Jane Suiter, Linards Udris, and Mark Eisenegger. "News Media Trust and News Consumption: Factors Related to Trust in News in 35 Countries."

³³ Zimand-Sheiner, Dorit, Ofrit Kol, Smadar Frydman, and Shalom Levy. 2021. "To Be (Vaccinated) or Not to Be: The Effect of Media Exposure, Institutional Trust, and Incentives on Attitudes toward COVID-19 Vaccination" *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 24: 12894. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182412894>

³⁴ Zimand-Sheiner, Dorit, Ofrit Kol, Smadar Frydman, and Shalom Levy. 2021. "To Be (Vaccinated) or Not to Be: The Effect of Media Exposure, Institutional Trust, and Incentives on Attitudes toward COVID-19 Vaccination".

³⁵ Taha, Sheena Aislinn, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman. "The 2009 H1N1 Influenza Pandemic: The Role of Threat, Coping, and Media Trust on Vaccination Intentions in Canada." *Journal of Health Communication* 18, no. 3 (2013): 278–290.

Essentially one of the most important predictors of compliance with public health policy or conversely acceptance of misinformation was a person's trust in mainstream media and government institutions.³⁶ This trust serves not only to lead people to accurate information to protect them from misinformation but also to prevent passive noncompliance, born not from rejection of the facts altogether but from a belief that the risk is not worth the effort of following public health orders.

1.3.2: Understanding and Recollection

Misinformation can also have the effect of altering a person or group's perception and memory. In general, people will alter their beliefs when their prior views are shown to be false.³⁷ However, there are factors that misinformation can take advantage of that can make the false narrative once accepted, sticky and less likely to change. One factor is that false information can fill a coherency gap in a narrative, meaning that if misinformation is proven to be such, but no real alternative story is given, people are likely to revert to the misinformation later as our mind abhors an incomplete narrative³⁸.

For example, consider the case where a news personality reporting on the nightly news tells their audience that a person was murdered. The talking head shares the information that police have announced that "Person A" was the killer. However, the same news personality later comes back with an update. Now they share that the police no longer believe that "Person A" was involved at all, but that they do not have any other suspects yet, so the public should be wary

³⁶ Jiang, Xiaoya, Juwon Hwang, Dhavan V. Shah, Shreenita Ghosh, and Markus Brauer. "News Attention and Social-Distancing Behavior Amid COVID-19: How Media Trust and Social Norms Moderate a Mediated Relationship." *Health Communication* 37, no. 6 (2022): 768–777.

³⁷ De keersmaecker, Jonas, and Arne Roets. "'Fake News': Incorrect, but Hard to Correct. The Role of Cognitive Ability on the Impact of False Information on Social Impressions." *Intelligence (Norwood)* 65 (2017): 107–110.

³⁸ Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz, and John Cook. "Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing." (Page 12-13)

as the real killer is still at large. While many would accept the correction, some out of renewed fear or fear that never went away would revert to casting blame on "Person A" to end the story and not be left afraid and wondering.

Gaps of information such as this can lead the audience to be more suggestable to alternative theories of events, such as a story that suggests "Person A" committed the murder but then paid off the police to let them go. This is done in part because of fear of the unknown but also because without being able to blame "Person A" for the crime, there is a narrative and coherence gap as to the identity of the killer. So, in contrast, if the newscaster had told the audience that Person A had been let go and proven innocent and that the police now knew that "Person B" was the killer and explained the reason for the original error, then less of the audience would tend to be accepting of the misinformation. However, to clarify, there must be transparency to create a proper narrative. The correction that "Person B" was the killer can still allow many narrative gaps, and the public may be concerned and curious as to the reasons for "Person A's" original arrest if the reasons are not properly explained.

Another factor misinformation can benefit from is the overkill or backfire effect.³⁹ This effect can occur when an overabundance of information or competing arguments affects a person's ability to discern truth from noise. This may increase distrust or misunderstanding of legitimate sources. An overabundance of both information and misinformation, which is presented in a highly technical or otherwise hard-to-understand manner, can overwhelm people, and increase the risk that they accept the simplest solution. Misinformation, which is highly

³⁹ Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz, and John Cook. "Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing." (p. 12-13)

malleable, can be tailored to be simple in order to fill this niche⁴⁰. This effect is part of what is known as an infodemic. This term refers to a media landscape oversaturated with information where the overkill effect is common.

The overkill effect can also clash poorly with a lack of scientific literacy. As experts learn more and rush to set up and update systems to aid with relief efforts and spread prevention information to give guidance to a confused public, information given to the public can change rapidly leading to a couple of problems. First, when a mistake or false assumption or hypothesis is publicized, those who consume that accidental misinformation may not return to the now-updated article to see the retraction and correction. So, after the immediate news blitz, you leave the public with a divided understanding, allowing false narratives to build upon the fertile soil of that confusion.

A final factor relevant to our uses is the guarantee of relevance. When listening to a speaker of whom the audience has an initially neutral opinion, the guarantee of relevance suggests that the audience is likely to be biased toward accepting the speaker's statements as facts unless their message conflicts with something the audience knows to be true or conflicts with their tightly held beliefs. Even if we do not believe the topic to be directly relevant to us, we may remember the information without any critical thought as to its validity. At a later moment we may repeat it as truthful when it has become more relevant to our lives or a problem in someone else's life. For example, you are lazily scrolling social media, and you see a friend's post about how cleaning her gardening tools with hair conditioner has helped remove hard-to-dislodge dirt from them. This information may be useful or not to you but let's say it is not

⁴⁰ Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz, and John Cook. "Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing." (p.12-13)

relevant to you. Perhaps you don't like to garden or your friend lives in another part of the world and you are outside of your planting season. This does not mean you will forget this factoid. As you trust your friend, this factoid then gets filled in your mind as being as trustworthy as your friend (the speaker). Life circumstances change over time, so at some point, you may be starting a garden or know someone else who is, at which point the idea of cleaning gardening tools with hair conditioner pops into your head. You may not remember where you read it or who told you, but it still feels as trustworthy as before. So, you then try it yourself or tell another to, and come to learn that conditioner has no benefit in this task (I assume. I made this example up, so I have no idea if this is helpful) even though it felt like a real fact. Furthermore, if you aren't reading and considering this thesis and its contents carefully, you may spread or rely on this hair conditioner misinformation at some point in the future. The same can happen with any misinformation that is not relevant to you at a given moment. Consider, for example, any lies spread about COVID before we knew that it had arrived in Canada.

The guarantee of relevance can impact a listener when the audience starts with no opinion of the speaker. However, if the speaker is believed to be trustworthy by the listener, the guarantee of relevance mutates into something significantly more impactful. The trustworthiness of the speaker can come from familiarity with someone in a specific role, for example, being a university professor or a reporter for a large news organization. Or it can be a person whom you put your trust in based on personal interactions, such as family members or friends whom you have deemed to be credible in the past. So, it then follows that when a government or a political figure spread or endorses misinformation, either directly or not, misinformation can be accepted without much thought. In addition, partisan bias can strengthen the belief in a piece of information, this is in part because partisan bias strengthens the effects of the guarantee of

relevance, both by making speakers on your side of the aisle extremely trustworthy and can lead you to reject other information in defiance of it being shared by members of the other side of the aisle. Pairing these factors with the vast information-gathering capabilities of a governmental body, who are understood to have better access to information than the general population, can further snowball a person's strength of belief in the information shared.

1.3.3: Risk Perception

Risk perception is a factor in the decision-making process. This step in the decision-making process is skipped in benign decision-making, however in situations where risk is evident, it becomes a vital step in the process. So, when looking at a pandemic where there is a clear hazardous element, risk perception plays a clear role in decision-making. During a pandemic, a low perception of risk can lead to a lack of compliance with health orders. So, if the low-risk assessment is then promoted, encouraged, or suggested by governmental actors or misinformation, then the effectiveness of any public health orders would be diminished as the population sees them as unnecessary and burdensome for their potential benefits. So, for our purposes, understanding how misinformation affects this process will help recognize its effects during a pandemic.

Risk perception for our purposes consists of two approaches. The first is approaching the subject through fear which, while a natural emotional reaction, exists apart from intellectual examination. And second is threat appraisal, which is a willful and personal examination of the threat and the chances of oneself incurring harm.⁴¹ Both the emotional and willful aspects of risk assessment are informed by risk communication, which occurs when individuals or groups

⁴¹ Lee, Jiyoung. "When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 50, no. 1 (2022): 70–90.

exchange information regarding factors that may contribute to some potential risks as well as their evaluation of theorized risk factors and how they relate to the potential risk of different groups of individuals⁴².

A personal perception of risk based on one's appraisal of possible threats can become distorted by misinformation, as misconceptions are no different from substantiated facts in their influence on behavior and belief as part of risk assessment. A lower perception of risk to one's self or others can result in an attitude or belief that the virus is less deadly or spreads less frequently than it does, however, it can also create a flippancy and lack of care for others, such as the meme of the "Darwin awards" which was "awarded" by some online communities to those who did not believe in the virus and died as a result. The award was meant to suggest that the deceased followed the Darwinian evolutionary principle of survival of the fittest as they were "too mentally deficient" to survive while ignoring the fact that those "awarded" had also put others at risk, people who may have become sick even though they did not put themselves in a position of risk by choice⁴³. Beyond simple internet memes, misconceptions can also mean that people who once took the virus seriously stop doing so.

As the pandemic continues, people's risk perception will change because the more people that are vaccinated the lower the rates of infections and the seriousness of outcomes will be. This can implant the idea that the virus is no longer or never was as dangerous as experts claim it to have been. What this suggests is that the vaccine uptake itself, if the information is not properly

⁴² Kim, Seoyong, and Sunhee Kim. "The Crisis of Public Health and Infodemic: Analyzing Belief Structure of Fake News About COVID-19 Pandemic."

⁴³ Antonova, Natalia. "Satanic" Vaccines And Satire Gone Wild: COVID-19 Disinfo Meets Religion" Bellingcat.com. April 15, 2020. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/04/15/satanic-vaccines-and-satire-gone-wild-covid-19-disinfo-meets-religion/>

disseminated, may lead to greater belief in misinformation and more people ignoring other public health orders⁴⁴.

As we previously discussed, trust is important to protect against misinformation, as it follows that misconceptions can be born from a general erosion of public trust, resulting in segments of the population, who constantly refuse to believe any information given by their government or by academic sources,⁴⁵ viewing these sources as untrustworthy leading them to make their risk assessment with that information disregarded.

While misinformation can increase feelings of risk it can also lead to a higher perception of risk than is reasonable in a situation, which can cause runs on essential supplies, such as toilet paper, and cause people to refuse to come out of isolation despite the new safety of their situation. So high or low, risk perception can have a dramatic impact on the situation during an emergency, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and understanding how accurately risk is communicated can help us understand if health policy matches risk-related rhetoric. This might provide us with an answer to the question posed if misinformation was altering risk perception in Alberta and if the government promoted this discordant risk level. Then even if the public policy was superficially helpful, the risk narrative may have undermined it.

While fears of infection can become exaggerated, such fear at least signals that a person is likely to follow new preventative guidance to protect themselves and others. However, fear, no matter how reasonable, can be caused by and used as a foothold to manipulate the risk perception

⁴⁴ Arede, Margarida, Maria Bravo-Araya, Émilie Bouchard, Gurlal Singh Gill, Valerie Plajer, Adiba Shehraj, and Yassir Adam Shuaib. "Combating Vaccine Hesitancy: Teaching the Next Generation to Navigate through the Post Truth Era." *Frontiers in Public Health* 6 (2019): 381–381.

⁴⁵ World Health Organization. "GLOBAL VACCINATION SUMMIT" September 12, 2019. https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-11/ev_20190912_mi_en_0.pdf.

of an audience with what is known as fear arousing misinformation (FAM).⁴⁶ Simply put, this is misinformation that can induce or capitalize on feelings of fear in its audience. This could be done to increase fear of the pandemic and blame it on some demonized group or individual that a purveyor of misinformation has targeted. It can be used to scare people into buying survival gear, gold, and food buckets, or conversely to promote helpful actions meant to fight the virus, such as vaccines or mask-wearing.

Alternatively, FAM can be used to move people's fear to a new target. For example, misinformation could target the indoctrination of the elderly or other at-risk people to convince them that there is no virus, telling them that they won't be at risk and that the "lie" of the pandemic is just a way for some other group to control or hurt them. Whatever the case, it has been shown that those in a fearful state tend to be more open to any information that may assuage those fears.⁴⁷ So, while those at higher risk of infection tend to follow health orders more closely than others,⁴⁸ they are also at greater risk of falling for misinformation meant to quiet their fears⁴⁹.

While risk perception can be an effective inroad for the manipulation of misinformation, the opposite is also true, as a risk perception complemented by high levels of knowledge of the

⁴⁶ Lee, Jiyoung. "When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 50, no. 1 (2022): 70–90.

⁴⁷ Lee, Jiyoung. "When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 50, no. 1 (2022): 70–90.

⁴⁸ Majid, Umair, Aghna Wasim, Simran Bakshi, and Judy Truong. "Knowledge, (mis-)conceptions, Risk Perception, and Behavior Change During Pandemics: A Scoping Review of 149 Studies." *Public Understanding of Science*. 2020;29(8):777-799. doi:10.1177/0963662520963365.

⁴⁹ Lee, Jiyoung. "When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 50, no. 1 (2022): 70–90.

risks may be the most important factor in a person adhering to public health orders.⁵⁰ Three studies observed a positive statistically significant correlation between proper risk assessment calculation and personal adherence to public health orders during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵¹ That said, not all risks are as persuasive, as seen in a similar study on the perceived risks of influenza which did not find the same correlation between perceived risk and actions taken to protect themselves from infection as was found in studies about COVID-19.⁵² That said given the strong correlation between risk assessment and action taken during Covid, it is likely there are some confounding variables affecting the differences in reaction to possible infection from the two, such as social norms or the frequency at which flu season arrives versus the novelty of Covid or a combination of variables. And again, misconceptions may be at the base of this issue. For example, while properly informed of their risk of infection, a person may believe that the flu is less harmful than it is. So, while their perception of the risk of infection is proper, their risk assessment of the effects of the illness may be warped by misconceptions either born from misinformation or the reduction of worry accompanying its repetitive yearly outbreak cycle which has little of the same fear and surprise as Covid-19 media coverage. In addition, the ubiquity of seasonal vaccinations has reduced influenza's spread and impact, leading to a reduction of risk prevention behavior.⁵³

So far, the majority of what we have covered are outside factors that can affect individual risk perception. While outside factors are important, there are personal individual factors that can

⁵⁰ Majid, Umair, Aghna Wasim, Simran Bakshi, and Judy Truong. "Knowledge, (mis-)conceptions, Risk Perception, and Behavior Change During Pandemics: A Scoping Review of 149 Studies."

⁵¹ Majid, Umair, Aghna Wasim, Simran Bakshi, and Judy Truong. "Knowledge, (mis-)conceptions, Risk Perception, and Behavior Change During Pandemics: A Scoping Review of 149 Studies."

⁵² Majid, Umair, Aghna Wasim, Simran Bakshi, and Judy Truong. "Knowledge, (mis-)conceptions, Risk Perception, and Behavior Change During Pandemics: A Scoping Review of 149 Studies."

⁵³ Majid, Umair, Aghna Wasim, Simran Bakshi, and Judy Truong. "Knowledge, (mis-)conceptions, Risk Perception, and Behavior Change During Pandemics: A Scoping Review of 149 Studies."

alter how a person's risk assessment calculation is undertaken, similar to how we previously stated that one's health conditions and risk of contracting a virus such as Covid-19 can affect a person's risk assessment and compliance with public health orders.⁵⁴ In that vein, factors such as the political beliefs that a person ascribes to are a continuing influence on an individual's perception of risk concerning the virus.⁵⁵ However political beliefs as an influence on risk perception is a mixed story, as it is both an individual and social factor. It is an individual factor in so far as a political belief is internally ingrained into a person, versus the degree to which beliefs are created and updated through interaction with others. The way it is, in part, a social factor comes from the ever-growing partisan political divide in North America, as political belief leads to identification with and support of one side of the political spectrum and the political parties associated with it. Especially in the case of the partisan divide surrounding the acceptance and rejection of some scientific conclusions and a lack of faith in experts, this divide has carved out a vast chasm between what each side of the political spectrum uses in risk assessment calculations.⁵⁶ This divide in trusting experts has especially impacted those who have conservative beliefs. Conservatism, for our purposes, will be defined as "an aversion towards radical change, reflecting a belief in the imperfection of human nature."⁵⁷ In terms of what conservatism means in Canada, "historically Canadian conservatism has been derived from the Tory tradition with its balance between individual rights and communitarian principles as

⁵⁴ Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. "Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology." *Applied cognitive psychology* 36, no. 1 (2022): 19–31.

⁵⁵ Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. "Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology."

⁵⁶ Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. "Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology."

⁵⁷ Callahan, Gene. "Understanding Conservatism, Old and New." *History* 47, no. 5 (2019): 103–106.

meditated through a traditional and religious standard of morality”⁵⁸ which pushes back against the support for topics such as “multiculturalism, LGBT rights, hate speech codes, and liberal policies on drugs, abortion, and euthanasia”⁵⁹ as they constitute a radical change in societal norms and power structures. This is not to say there is no debate or divide in conservatism, but what we have laid out is a definition of the basic beliefs contained in what we refer to as conservatism. Conservatism is a great factor in causing a person's risk assessment calculation to disregard scientific consensus and allows for a greater dismissal of danger. This dismissal of danger was seen as well in the Covid-19 pandemic. The effect conservatism has had on the assessment of danger when connected to expert information was amplified for the Covid-19 pandemic when the now former US President Donald Trump, a right-winged conservative politician, downplayed the threat of the virus such as when he referred to it as 'not even as bad as the flu.'⁶⁰

A person's political ideology's influence on risk assessment, whether right or left leaning, can be broken down into three ways. First, ideology can affect what sources of information a person trusts, selecting what framing of information they are subject to⁶¹. Second, political ideology can affect how a person sees the risk of a pandemic in their country regarding the chances it will spread or be an issue, even when it has been devastating in other areas⁶². Lastly,

⁵⁸ Trepanier, Lee, and Richard Avramenko. “Canadian Conservative Political Thought” Edited by Lee Trepanier and Richard Avramenko. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023.

⁵⁹ Trepanier, Lee, and Richard Avramenko. “Canadian Conservative Political Thought”.

⁶⁰ Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. “Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology.”

⁶¹ Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. “Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology.”

⁶² Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. “Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology.”

ideology can also influence a person's threshold for risk⁶³. This means that a difference in ideology can result in otherwise similar individuals having conflicting understandings of a situation, different understandings of the resilience of their nation or community, the risk posed to their nation's most vulnerable, and finally, it can result in two otherwise similar people being willing to expose themselves to wildly different levels of risk.

As such political leaning in a population can be an important factor to account for when drafting public health orders in our political climate, as those governments in highly conservative areas must work with a public that is more susceptible to distrusting experts and discounting risks posed to themselves and others, and who are more likely to turn to media sources laden with misinformation, especially in the case of highly politicized events such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Policymakers and public health officials must account for the increased susceptibility in their population when deciding on how to best communicate with and garner trust from the public. While no population is without risk of falling for misinformation, conservative governments need to be mindful of misinformation and rhetoric spread by other political leaders, like former US president Donald Trump, who hold similar beliefs to their population during a crisis period such as a pandemic.⁶⁴ Donald Trump's misinformation-laden rhetoric and ideology can be described as a cloak of populism, fascist⁶⁵ or fascist lite⁶⁷, laden with racism, misogyny,

⁶³ Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. "Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology."

⁶⁴ Weil, Audrey M., and Christopher R. Wolfe. "Individual Differences in Risk Perception and Misperception of COVID - 19 in the Context of Political Ideology."

⁶⁵ Foster John Bellamy, "This Is Not Populism" (Volume 69, Number 2) June 2017. <https://monthlyreview.org/2017/06/01/this-is-not-populism/>.

⁶⁶ Kagan Robert, "This is how fascism comes to America", The Washington Post, May 18, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/this-is-how-fascism-comes-to-america/2016/05/17/c4e32c58-1c47-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html.

⁶⁷ McGaughey Ewan. "Fascism-lite in America (or The Social Ideal of Donald Trump)" *British Journal of American Legal Studies* 7, no.2 (2018): 291-315. <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjals-2018-0012>.

and extreme nationalism⁶⁸ with a “dislike of state intervention...embrace of welfare provision for insiders (not ‘outsiders’), and... that associations are key actors in a class conflict.⁶⁹ This neo-fascist ideology of Trumpism has found a foothold in Canadian and Albertan conservatism which can be seen in polling done in 2016, 2022, and 2023. These polls showed that, from 2020 to 2022, 41% of Canadian conservative voters supported Donald Trump. This was the only group whose support for the former president was unaffected by the insurrection of January 6, 2021, and ongoing rhetoric⁷⁰. In 2016, Albertan voters gave Donald Trump a 47.8% approval rating⁷¹ which increased in a 2020 poll to 68% of Albertan voters saying they would vote for Trump if allowed.⁷² Furthermore, Premier Daniel Smith would go on to seek advice, as part of a "qualified and diverse group of medical experts," from a former advisor to the Trump administration who had pushed for the discredited "herd immunity approach" to combating the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷³

1.4: Pandemic and Misinformation Interactions

1.4.1: How do pandemics breed misinformation

Misinformation and public health orders during a pandemic might feel like they are related. However, leaving our assumptions in place will neglect the complexities of their interactions as both complex subjects, meaning that as they overlap, they will have a myriad of

⁶⁸ Foster John Bellamy, “This Is Not Populism” (Volume 69, Number 2) June 2017.

⁶⁹ McGaughey Ewan. "Fascism-lite in America (or The Social Ideal of Donald Trump)".

⁷⁰ Fournier Philippe J, “338Canada: Trumpism is alive and well on Canada's right”. Maclean’s, March 13, 2022. <https://macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/338canada-trumpism-is-alive-and-well-on-canadas-right/#:~:text=When%20L%C3%A9ger%20asked%20Canadians%20about,barely%20moved%20on%20Canada's%20right>.

⁷¹ CBC News, “Albertans are the outliers when it comes to Trump, poll suggests” CBC.ca, Nov 25, 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-poll-trump-presidency-1.3868677>.

⁷² Fournier Philippe J, “How much do Canadians dislike Donald Trump? A lot.”, Maclean’s, October 1, 2020. <https://macleans.ca/politics/how-much-do-canadians-dislike-donald-trump-a-lot/>.

⁷³ Short Dylan, “Former Trump medical adviser has been invited to meet with Alberta officials: Premier Smith” Calgary Herald, Nov 05, 2022. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/former-trump-medical-advisor-has-been-invited-to-meet-with-alberta-officials-premier-smith>.

effects on one another. So, understanding the dynamic between misinformation and a pandemic is too complicated to leave unexplored in this work as its complexity will, in no small part, dictate the answer to the question of how misinformation affected Alberta's public health policy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The dynamic of how misinformation and pandemics interact is quite interesting since pandemics create both fear and confusion. These emotions are factors that enhance the effects and spread of misinformation. Misinformation then can affect the severity of suffering in the pandemic by affecting efforts to resolve it, creating an unholy cycle of lies and suffering. In times of crisis such as a pandemic it is natural for people to be unsure, afraid for the safety of themselves and others, and seek answers about the severity of the risk and what they can do to mitigate any risks. However, when they do go looking, many will be exposed to a mix of accurate and inaccurate information.⁷⁴ This misinformation pipeline is ever more present in our modern age of social media, as people naturally check their social media feeds for information and friends' reactions concerning new world events. Sadly, this habit can also increase the transmission of misinformation⁷⁵ and thus exacerbate the negative effects of the pandemic by leading people away from effective preventative measures and can lead them to dangerous alternatives such as ingesting unproven medicines or even home cleaning products.

Generally, there has been a consensus, based on science, among political elites about the subject of COVID-19, but despite this, we still have many people including some political elites

⁷⁴ Greenspan, Rachel Leigh, and Elizabeth F. Loftus. "Pandemics and Infodemics: Research on the Effects of Misinformation on Memory." *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 3, no. 1 (2021): 8–12.

⁷⁵ Lee, Jiyoung. "When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation."

during the pandemic, who nonetheless fervently followed misinformation⁷⁶. The reason for this divide between government and public belief can be found in the malleability of misinformation and the fear inherent to a crisis, the intersection of which creates an environment where misinformation can spread quickly and fill in any questions or narrative holes people have. At the beginning of the pandemic, there were many questions unanswered for the public which those in power, with the large information-gathering mechanism behind them, may not have had. There were information holes as to how it began and what people should do, left unanswered. These questions the average person had about COVID-19 existed as experts on the pandemics and COVID-19-like viruses had yet to have a chance to properly examine the situation. In that time, purveyors of misinformation were able to quickly plaster social media with misinformation which provided answers tailored to prey on and enflame people's fears. Additionally, in the panic at the beginning of the pandemic, fear and anxiety will have led some to misread or misunderstand some accurate information, which then led to them intentionally spreading misinformation which may have complimented and reinforced intentional disinformation.

An overabundance of information and a high-stress, emotionally charged time are key factors that can exacerbate the spread and effects of misinformation.⁷⁷ Pandemics by their nature contain and amplify these two factors. As the complex scientific process races to keep up with the demand for information, solutions, and suggestions, those with negative intentions race ahead of them to manipulate people using the pandemic for their own gain. This leads to waves of information, both real and false, washing over the population. Meanwhile, the remaining unanswered questions as well as the severity of the spread and symptoms of the virus will

⁷⁶ Lee, Jiyoung. "When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation."

⁷⁷ Majid, Umair, Aghna Wasim, Simran Bakshi, and Judy Truong. "Knowledge, (mis-)conceptions, Risk Perception, and Behavior Change During Pandemics: A Scoping Review of 149 Studies."

naturally create more fear in people as they worry about themselves or others suffering. All this means that a pandemic is a situation where alongside infection, misinformation finds fertile ground to breed and grow throughout the general populace.

An infodemic is an overabundance of information leading to confusion in the population as to what sources to trust.⁷⁸ As has just been covered, misinformation during a pandemic naturally leads to this state of infodemic. What further energizes an infodemic is its relationship to our now global information network which knows no borders, since an infodemic can find fuel in any region or language, as information is quickly shared and translated to be available to anyone anywhere with internet access.⁷⁹

An infodemic can then influence people's attitudes and actions as they become overwhelmed by the overwhelming amount of conflicting information they consume from their media sphere, leading them to embrace the most comforting, affirming, or even the most fear-inducing information, absent of any proper examination and judgment of its factuality.⁸⁰ The overload of information can overwhelm people and those without the knowledge base needed to properly assess all the information given to them are left with few paths forward as they end up trapped in their stress and anxiety, looking for any grace or outlet.⁸¹ In the end, even those who do not fall victim to the most malicious of disinformation may still be hindered by an infodemic

⁷⁸ Garneau, Karine and Clémence Zossou. "Misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic" Stats Canada, February 2, 2021. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00003-eng.htm>.

⁷⁹ Garneau, Karine and Clémence Zossou. "Misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic"

⁸⁰ Garneau, Karine and Clémence Zossou. "Misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic"

⁸¹ Majid, Umair, Aghna Wasim, Simran Bakshi, and Judy Truong. "Knowledge, (mis-)conceptions, Risk Perception, and Behavior Change During Pandemics: A Scoping Review of 149 Studies."

as it impedes their ability to find accurate information and thus prevents even the most rational from properly determining the correct course of action to protect themselves.⁸²

1.5: Covid Misinformation

Timeline of Canadian Covid Misinformation

What follows is a general timeline of misinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, with special attention paid to misinformation narratives found in Alberta. This list serves to help answer our question of misinformation's influence by aiding in the creation of our metric for analysis, as we need to identify what misinformation existed at a specific time in order to determine its influences and not mistake policies that we disagree with, which by chance are absorbed into a new misinformation narrative, as evidence of influence. This is not an exhaustive timeline of misinformation, as it would be impossible to document every narrative that every individual encountered since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our purposes are to both account for misinformation's influence on policy creation through its influence on those in power and to show how it affected the public, that is how they complied with health policy and how they in turn pressured the government into action. With that in mind, this is a general timeline of some of the most notable misinformation narratives and prominent groups or government individuals who claim or are accused of believing in misinformation narratives. With the help of this timeline, we seek to determine when different misinformation narratives existed and could have possibly had any effect on both the public and government actions.

⁸² Kim, Seoyong, and Sunhee Kim. "The Crisis of Public Health and Infodemic: Analyzing Belief Structure of Fake News About COVID-19 Pandemic."

Before the COVID conspiracy inroads

To begin, these are the first few misinformation narratives that were known to be in Canada before Covid-19 was known to the world. These narratives, while not related to Covid, would later be adapted and connected to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2017

- **Sprinkles of QAnon:** “The QAnon theory now connects **antivaccine, anti-5G conspiracies**, antisemitic and antimigrant tropes, and several bizarre theories that the world is in the thrall of a group of pedophile elites set on global domination in part aided by ritualistic child sacrifice.”⁸³
- **Pizza Gate and Bieber:** “The false theory targeting Democrats, now fueled by QAnon and teenagers on TikTok, is entangling new targets like Justin Bieber”⁸⁴
- **Out of the Shadows:** “Out of Shadows, a 77-minute “documentary” that appeared in April on YouTube, seemingly out of the blue, from a former stuntman named Mike Smith. The film alleges, among other things, that Hollywood is run by Satanic pedophilia rings that distribute propaganda through films like Zoolander, the music videos of Katy Perry and Lady Gaga, and a discreet set of symbols, including the words “television” (tell-a-vision), “channel” (psychic communication), and

⁸³ Gallagher Aoife, Jacob Davey, and Mackenzie Hart. "The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017", ISD Global, 2020. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Kang ,Cecilia and Sheera Frenkel. “‘PizzaGate’ Conspiracy Theory Thrives Anew in the TikTok Era” New York Times, June 27, 2020. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200627091004/https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/27/technology/pizzagate-justin-bieber-qanon-tiktok.html>.

“Hollywood” (named, they say, for the holly plant—which is poisonous and was once used in Druid rituals).”⁸⁵

The beginning of the pandemic and Covid misinformation

What follows are the known misinformation narratives that were born during the pandemic or were thrust into prominence in the Canadian and Albertan context after the spread of Covid-19 was confirmed.

2020

January

- **5G:** “. Some believe COVID-19 symptoms are a form of “mass injury” caused by 5G telecommunications technology, which has weakened the population’s immune system. Others insist the pandemic is a deliberate ploy to allow the authorities to install 5G infrastructure under cover of the social isolation lockdown.”⁸⁶
 - “Conspiracy theories linking 5G technology to COVID-19 have become so pervasive that Canada’s intelligence service is warning of possible extremist attacks on sites associated with the wireless network.”
December 3, 2020⁸⁷
- **Stolen from Canadian Lab:** “Social media posts falsely claim that a "Chinese spy team" working in a Canadian government lab sent "pathogens to the Wuhan

⁸⁵ Hitt, Tarpley. "Inside 'Out of Shadows': The Bonkers Hollywood-Pedophilia 'Documentary' QAnon Loves" The Daily Beast, Aug. 06, 2020. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/inside-out-of-shadows-the-bonkers-hollywood-pedophilia-documentary-qanon-loves>

⁸⁶ Dornan, Christopher. "SCIENCE DISINFORMATION IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC" June 2020. <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ScienceDisinformation-PPF-June2020-EN.pdf>. (page 17 pdf)

⁸⁷ Bell, Stewart. “CSIS warns about conspiracy theories linking COVID-19 to 5G technology” *Global News*, December 4, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7496689/csis-conspiracy-theories-coronavirus-covid-19-5g-technology/>.

facility" before the coronavirus outbreak in China. Two Canadian agencies have told us those claims are wrong.”⁸⁸

- “Baseless stories claiming that the two scientists are Chinese spies and that they smuggled the coronavirus to China's only Level 4 lab in Wuhan last year have been spreading on all major social media platforms and on conspiracy theorist blogs. One article from a conspiracy blog was shared more than 6,000 times on Facebook on Monday.”⁸⁹
- **The Lab Leak Theories:** an “alternative theory (of Covid’s origins) posits that the pandemic began after SARS-CoV-2 leaked from a laboratory in Wuhan, potentially the Wuhan Institute of Virology. A joint study by the World Health Organization and Chinese scientists in January and February 2021 considered this scenario "extremely unlikely." From the earliest days in the pandemic, it was represented as a conspiracy theory built on misinformation and fear.”⁹⁰
 - “To be clear, the so-called Wuhan lab-leak theory isn't back in the news because any major piece of evidence has been uncovered to give it credence. What has changed is calls from scientists in the field, the Biden administration, and others to investigate it properly — because even the head of the World Health Organization says that hasn't happened yet.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ [Spencer, Saranac Hale. “Coronavirus Wasn’t Sent by ‘Spy’ From Canada” Fact Check.org. January 28, 2020. https://www.factcheck.org/2020/01/coronavirus-wasnt-sent-by-spy-from-canada/.](https://www.factcheck.org/2020/01/coronavirus-wasnt-sent-by-spy-from-canada/)

⁸⁹ [Pauls, Karen, and Jeff Yates. "Online claims that Chinese scientists stole coronavirus from Winnipeg lab have 'no factual basis'" CBC, Jan 27, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/china-coronavirus-online-chatter-conspiracy-1.5442376.](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/china-coronavirus-online-chatter-conspiracy-1.5442376)

⁹⁰ [Ryan, Jackson. “How the coronavirus origin story is being rewritten by a guerrilla Twitter group” CNET. April 15, 2021. https://www.cnet.com/science/features/how-the-coronavirus-origin-story-is-being-rewritten-by-a-guerrilla-twitter-group/.](https://www.cnet.com/science/features/how-the-coronavirus-origin-story-is-being-rewritten-by-a-guerrilla-twitter-group/)

⁹¹ Gollom, Mark. “Why the Wuhan lab-leak origin theory of the COVID-19 virus is being taken more seriously” CBC. May 28, 2021. [https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-19-wuhan-lab-leak-theory-1.6042038.](https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-19-wuhan-lab-leak-theory-1.6042038)

- **False Health Advice:** “Social-media users have been sharing advice on ways to treat or prevent the disease. But at least some of the tips have proved to be misleading or false... One such claim - shared 16,000 times on Facebook - advises users in the Philippines to "keep your throat moist", avoid spicy food and "load up on vitamin C" in order to prevent the disease... Journalists and fact-checkers have found posts with identical or slightly altered wording - said to be from local health authorities - are also being circulated on Facebook and WhatsApp in Canada, Pakistan and India.”⁹²

March

- **Economic Shutdown “Ploy”:** Former Leader of Wexit Canada (The Maverick party) Peter Downing, used his personal Twitter account to suggest that the Covid lockdowns were meant to hurt the economy to replace the "climate change scare" which failed to do so.⁹³
- **Chinese Virus:** US President Donald Trump referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese Virus" and then defended his use of the term "It's not racist at all. No, not at all. It comes from China, that's why. It comes from China. I want to be accurate," Trump told reporters at a press conference." ⁹⁴

April

- **Ivermectin:** “Caly et al. at Monash University in Australia recently published a paper in *Antiviral Research*, reporting that ivermectin, a medication widely used

⁹² BBC Monitoring. “China coronavirus: Misinformation spreads online about origin and scale” January 30, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-51271037>.

⁹³ Phillips, Kurt. “FAR-RIGHT CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACIES” Canadian Anti-Hate Network, March 16, 2020. https://www.antihate.ca/far_right_coronavirus_conspiracies.

⁹⁴ Georgiou, Aristos. “WHO Expert Condemns Language Stigmatizing Coronavirus After Trump Repeatedly Calls It the 'Chinese Virus'” News Week, August 19th, 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/who-language-stigmatizing-coronavirus-trump-chinese-1493172>.

for the treatment of certain parasitic diseases in humans and livestock animals, inhibits the replication of SARS-CoV-2 in cell culture ([Caly et al., 2020](#))⁹⁵.

Despite the authors' cautious conclusion that ivermectin "warrants further investigation for possible benefits in humans," the paper has excited widespread interest on medical and veterinary websites, which often incorrectly describe the drug as a treatment or cure for COVID-19. These inappropriate statements led to a warning by the US FDA, that ivermectin in veterinary products should not be used for human therapy"⁹⁶

- **Bill Gates and Covid Micro Chips:** "A conspiracy theory falsely claims Bill Gates is plotting to use COVID-19 testing and a future vaccine to track people with microchips. The Gates Foundation has advocated for expanded testing and has funded vaccine research, but neither of those involves implanted microchips."⁹⁷

- "On April 6, Emerald Robinson, White House correspondent for the conservative website Newsmax, tweeted about Gates with a reference to another debunked conspiracy theory and concluded, "He controls global health policy. What's the plan? Using vaccines to track people" ... Two days later, Fox News host Laura Ingraham asked U.S. Attorney General William Barr about Gates favoring "what some would say, tracking mechanisms."

⁹⁵ Caly, Leon, Julian D. Druce, Mike G. Catton, David A. Jans, and Kylie M. Wagstaff. "The FDA-Approved Drug Ivermectin Inhibits the Replication of SARS-CoV-2 in Vitro." *Antiviral Research* 178 (2020): 104787–104787.

⁹⁶ Bray, Mike, Craig Rayner, François Noël, David Jans, and Kylie Wagstaff. "Ivermectin and COVID-19: A Report in *Antiviral Research*, Widespread Interest, an FDA Warning, Two Letters to the Editor and the Authors' Responses." *Antiviral Research* 178 (2020): 104805–104805.

⁹⁷ Spencer, Saranac Hale. "Conspiracy Theory Misinterprets Goals of Gates Foundation" *Fact Check.org*, April 14, 2020. <https://www.factcheck.org/2020/04/conspiracy-theory-misinterprets-goals-of-gates-foundation/>.

- **The Epoch Times’s Claim:** “The Epoch Times, a newspaper that has polarized people over its content, is coming under fire for advancing a conspiracy theory about the origin of the coronavirus — and having it delivered straight into people's mailboxes unsolicited...a special eight-page edition of the paper exploring the idea that the virus that causes COVID-19 was created as a biological weapon and arguing it should be called "the CCP virus," a reference to the Chinese Communist Party.”⁹⁸

May

- **Gates Becomes the Covid “Boogeyman”:** “In a 2015 speech, Bill Gates warned that the greatest risk to humanity was not nuclear war but an infectious virus that could threaten the lives of millions of people. That speech has resurfaced in recent weeks with 25 million new views on YouTube — but not in the way that Mr. Gates probably intended. Anti-vaccinators, members of the conspiracy group QAnon and right-wing pundits have instead seized on the video as evidence that one of the world’s richest men planned to use a pandemic to wrest control of the global health system.”⁹⁹
 - “In posts on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, he is being falsely portrayed as the creator of Covid-19, as a profiteer from a virus vaccine, and as part of a dastardly plot to use the illness to cull or surveil the global population.”

⁹⁸ Bellemare, Andrea and Jason Ho and Katie Nicholson. “Some Canadians who received unsolicited copy of Epoch Times upset by claim that China was behind virus” CBC News, Apr 29, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/epoch-times-coronavirus-bioweapon-1.5548217>.

⁹⁹ Wakabayashi, Daisuke, Davey Alba, and Marc Tracy. "Bill Gates, at Odds With Trump on Virus, Becomes a Right-Wing Target" The New York Times, April 17, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/technology/bill-gates-virus-conspiracy-theories.html>.

- “The wild claims have gained traction with conservative pundits like Laura Ingraham and anti-vaccinators such as Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Mr. Gates has emerged as a vocal counterweight to President Trump on the coronavirus.”
 - “Bill Gates is easily transformed into a health-related meme and figure because he’s so well known,” said Whitney Phillips, an assistant professor at Syracuse University who teaches digital ethics. “He’s able to function as kind of an abstract boogeyman.”¹⁰⁰
- **The Big Four:** A “study published in May at Carleton University indicated 46 per cent of Canadians believed at least one of four unfounded COVID-19 theories: the virus was engineered in a **Chinese lab**; the virus is being spread to cover up the effects of **5G** wireless technology; drugs such as **hydroxychloroquine** can cure COVID-19 patients; or rinsing your nose with a **saline solution** can protect you from infection.”¹⁰¹

June

- **First Dose Deaths:** “Several social media users are sharing a two-minute video featuring an interview with Judy Mikovits in which she alleges that “at least 50 million Americans would die, probably from the first dose” if a COVID-19 vaccine was mandated for the whole population. This claim is unfounded.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Wakabayashi, Daisuke, Davey Alba, and Marc Tracy. "Bill Gates, at Odds With Trump on Virus, Becomes a Right-Wing Target".

¹⁰¹ Kestler-D'Amours, Jillian. “COVID-19 conspiracy theories creating 'public health crisis' in Canada” The Canadian Press, August 3, 2020. <https://www.cp24.com/news/covid-19-conspiracy-theories-creating-public-health-crisis-in-canada-1.5049460?cache=%3FclipId%3D89680>.

¹⁰² Reuters Staff. “Fact check: Unfounded claim that 50 million Americans would die from COVID-19 vaccine” Reuters. June 23, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-mikovits-vaccine-50-idUSKBN23U2I2>.

July

- **Anti-Mask:** “MONTREAL -- A lively crowd gathered outside Francois Legault's office in downtown Montreal in mid-July to send a message to the Quebec premier: his government cannot force them to wear masks in indoor public spaces to fight the spread of COVID-19.”¹⁰³
 - “The anti-mask movement is not unique to Quebec, nor are masks the only source of conflict in the country when it comes to public health directives around the novel coronavirus. But the issue is one of several at the heart of a growing online movement of disinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada.”
 - “Researchers say conspiracy theories about COVID-19 are spreading at an alarming rate across the country - and they warn misinformation shared online may lead to devastating consequences and push Canadians to shun important safety measures.”

September

- **QAnon Comes to Canada:** “Conspiracy theories, including those propagated by the once-fringe QAnon movement, have gained traction as the COVID-19 pandemic fuels fear, social and economic insecurity, and mistrust in authorities, experts in Canada say.”¹⁰⁴
 - “It's hard to say where the discredited QAnon belief system begins and ends, he said, describing it as a multifaceted conspiracy theory that's

¹⁰³ Kestler-D'Amours, Jillian. “COVID-19 conspiracy theories creating 'public health crisis' in Canada”.

¹⁰⁴ Owen, Brenna. “Canada not immune to QAnon as pandemic fuels conspiracy theories, experts say” CTV News, December 11, 2020. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/canada-not-immune-to-qanon-as-pandemic-fuels-conspiracy-theories-experts-say-1.5226762>.

become increasingly overarching since the first so-called "Q drop," a post by an anonymous user called Q on the online forum 4chan in late 2017."

- "QAnon draws on and fuels an array of beliefs, he said, from anti-Semitism to white nationalism to the idea that U.S. President Donald Trump is secretly working to take down a cabal of corrupt, Satan-worshipping liberal elites who are abusing and trafficking children for sex."
- "Anti-mask and anti-vaccination movements are among those drawing from QAnon as a kind of "floating resource," Amarasingam said."
- "QAnon message boards were set alight after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a United Nations conference this fall that the pandemic is an opportunity to "reset" and reimagine economic systems to address challenges such as poverty and climate change, said Amarasingam... "They interpreted it as a kind of slip-up," he said. "Like it was showing evidence that there was this master plan at work, that COVID could have indeed been a hoax that was planned by powerful elites to then bring about all these new economic and social changes, or large-scale societal shifts."

November

- **Pierre Poilievre and the "Great Reset Theory":** "Pierre Poilievre has been posting messages to social media and on his constituency website about "global

elites preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab.”

105

- “In real life, the “Great Reset” is a rather modest vision put forward by the World Economic Forum, best known for organizing an annual talk-fest of business leaders and thinkers in the Swiss village of Davos...There’s nothing secret about it. You can find all the details on the forum’s website. In a nutshell, it argues that the pandemic has laid bare inequities in society and calls for post-COVID policies that would reduce that inequality.”¹⁰⁶
- “In the wilder corners of the Internet the “Great Reset” has become code for an alleged plot by a cabal of globalist elites to impose a new socialist order on the unwitting masses. In its most extreme form, the theory posits that the pandemic was deliberately let loose by those same elites looking for an excuse to carry out their nefarious plans... The conspiracy mongers had a field day last week when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke (virtually) to a United Nations meeting and said the pandemic provided an opportunity for a “reset” of economic and social policies. Aha! cried the conspiracists; Trudeau’s clearly part of the secret plot to destroy capitalism” ¹⁰⁷
- “Poilievre posted a petition on his website under the scary, all-caps headline “STOP THE GREAT RESET.” It says, “global financial elites”

¹⁰⁵ Boutillier, Alex. “A Conservative MP warns that Justin Trudeau wants a ‘Great Reset.’ Conspiracy theorists are worried, too” Toronto Star, Nov. 20, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/11/19/a-conservative-mp-warns-that-justin-trudeau-wants-a-great-reset-conspiracy-theorists-are-worried-too.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy” Toronto Star, Nov. 23, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2020/11/23/pierre-poilievre-is-flirting-with-the-far-right-by-pushing-great-reset-conspiracy.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy”

are pushing the agenda, and “Canadians must fight back against global elites preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab.” “Protect our freedom,” it concludes. Tens of thousands have signed.”¹⁰⁸

2021

February

- **Its Official, It’s an Infodemic:** the rate of dispersal of both real information and misinformation reached a level where WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, decided they needed to raise the alarm that “we’re not just fighting an epidemic, we’re fighting an infodemic.”¹⁰⁹ This resulted in muddied waters which made it difficult for the general public to find proper health information and advice for making good health choices.¹¹⁰
- **No Power to Mask:** Education Minister Adriana LaGrange “said "school boards will not be empowered" to require masking.”¹¹¹

March

- **Anti-Asian Hate and Violence:** Malformation throughout the pandemic caused a rise in violence and hate directed towards people of Asian descent and Asian communities, a report in March compiled by the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter,

¹⁰⁸ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy”

¹⁰⁹ World Health Organization. “WHO publishes public health research agenda for managing infodemics” World Health Organization. February 2, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-02-2021-who-public-health-research-agenda-for-managing-infodemics>.

¹¹⁰ World Health Organization. “WHO publishes public health research agenda for managing infodemics” World Health Organization Departmental news, 2 February 2021. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-02-2021-who-public-health-research-agenda-for-managing-infodemics>.

¹¹¹ Hardcastle, Lorian, and Ubaka Ogbogu. “Alberta’s new chief medical officer must be independent, not sidelined” Nov 15, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/opinion-alberta-chief-medical-officer-hinshaw-joffe-danielle-smith-1.6652235>.

Chinese Canadian National Council Social Justice, Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, and the Civic Engagement Network-Society of Canada, documented this increase in hate and violent acts.¹¹²

- **Ivermectin Steps in:** “The Canadian Covid Care Alliance, a group of mostly unidentified doctors and scientists, promotes ivermectin, a drug used to treat parasites, as a solution for COVID-19, even though overwhelming research shows it doesn’t work on the virus. The co-founder of the group, Ira Bernstein, is under investigation by the Ontario college.”¹¹³

April

- **GraceLife:** After following public health guidelines up until this point, the church became a flashpoint in the battle between religious liberty and COVID-19 restrictions in Canada. “The church continued to hold over-capacity indoor services throughout COVID’s second wave, despite surging infections and multiple public health orders mandating limits on in-person worship. Pastor James Coates spent 35 days in remand for repeatedly refusing to abide by the rules.”¹¹⁴
 - “The story took another dramatic turn April 7 when Alberta Health Services ordered GraceLife closed, preventing access to the building by erecting layers of fencing around the property.”

¹¹² Kong Justin and Jessica Ip and Celia Huang and Kennes Lin "A year of Racist attacks: Anti-Asian Racism across Canada one year into the Covid-19 Pandemic" Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto chapter. March 2022. https://mcusercontent.com/9fbfd2cf7b2a8256f770fc35c/files/35c9daca-3fd4-46f4-a883-c09b8c12bbca/covidr racism_final_report.pdf.

¹¹³ Weeks, Carly. “Physicians who spread misinformation may be eroding trust in health care system, experts say” The Globe and Mail, March 6, 2022. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-physicians-who-spread-misinformation-may-be-eroding-trust-in-health/>.

¹¹⁴ Wakefield, Jonny. “GraceLife: How an Edmonton-area church became the centre of Alberta's COVID-19 fight” Edmonton Journal, April 14, 2021. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/gracelife-tick-tock>.

- The church leader later made public statements showing regret for the church's initial compliance to health orders "In his affidavit, Coates said the church's initial move to online worship was a product of "ignorance concerning COVID-19 and its severity." He latched onto Premier Jason Kenney's references to COVID as an "influenza" that usually only kills the sick and elderly."

May

- **Suicide Rate Myth Debunked:** Early on there had been predictions that suicide rates would rise especially for youth during the pandemic and because of this assumption many went on to claim to be the case that restrictions were causing a rise in the suicide rate, however, it was found by a University of British Columbia report that this was not only false but that during the pandemic Suicide rates conversely declined. ¹¹⁵

August

- **Alberta Court Disproves Covid?** "a video posted to the right-wing video hosting platform Bitchute falsely claimed that a Canadian man, Patrick King, had successfully shown in court that COVID-19 is a "hoax," and as a result, government restrictions intended to slow the spread of the virus had been lifted."¹¹⁶
 - King didn't win but rather had to pay a fine. COVID-19 is not a hoax, and related restrictions meant to slow the spread in Alberta were lifted not because

¹¹⁵ Pierre, Joe. "Suicide in the Pandemic: A Prediction That Didn't Come True". Psychology Today, July 29, 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psych-unseen/202107/suicide-in-the-pandemic-prediction-didnt-come-true>.

¹¹⁶ Palma, Bethania. "No, a Canadian Court 'Victory' Didn't Prove COVID 'Is a Hoax'" Snopes. Aug 10, 2021. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/alberta-court-ruling/>.

of King's case, but because health experts there said high vaccination rates made severe outcomes from contracting the disease less likely.¹¹⁷¹¹⁸

October

- **Ivermectin Hits Home:** “Reports to poison centers concerning ivermectin as a prevention or treatment for COVID-19 have increased over the summer months. Health Canada is reminding Canadians not to use ivermectin to prevent or treat COVID-19. Canadian poison centers have seen an increase in reports concerning ivermectin over the summer. There is no evidence that ivermectin works to prevent or treat COVID-19, and it is not authorized for this use. To date, Health Canada has not received any drug submission or applications for clinical trials for ivermectin for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19.”¹¹⁹
- **4 Covid Denying Doctors:** “The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) says it has been forced to take four doctors to court in order to get them to cooperate with investigations over issuing medical exemptions for a COVID-19 vaccine or testing.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Palma, Bethania. “No, a Canadian Court 'Victory' Didn't Prove COVID 'Is a Hoax'”

¹¹⁸ Reuters Fact Check. “Fact Check-Alberta court case not linked to lifting of COVID-19 restrictions” Reuters, August 7, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-alberta-case-idUSL1N2PE0EX>.

¹¹⁹ Government of Canada. “Public advisory: Ivermectin not authorized to prevent or treat COVID-19; may cause serious health problems” Government of Canada, October 19th, 2021. <https://recalls-rappels.canada.ca/en/alert-recall/ivermectin-not-authorized-prevent-or-treat-covid-19-may-cause-serious-health-problems>.

¹²⁰ Rodrigues, Gabby. “Ontario physicians’ watchdog takes 4 doctors to court over COVID-19 vaccine, testing exemptions” Global News, November 3, 2021. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8345949/ontario-doctors-covid-vaccine-exemptions-cpso-court-action/>.

November

- **An Ontario MPP’s Message:** “A message regularly appears from Ontario MPP Randy Hillier, posted on Hillier’s Facebook page on Nov. 15, falsely claiming Public Health Ontario (PHO) is investigating 37 possible deaths due to vaccines.”¹²¹
- **Court Cases Weaponized:** “Over the past 19 months, Alberta has seen church leaders, business owners and others challenge public health restrictions in the court system... But health law experts and far-right researchers say they've seen a shift in the nature of the court challenges in the province... Alberta is seeing a growing number of court cases come forward challenging the science behind COVID-19, public health restrictions and vaccines.”¹²²

December

- **Lethbridge MP Spreads Misinformation:** “Lethbridge Conservative MP Rachael Thomas is facing questions after suggesting vaccinated people are more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 than the unvaccinated.”¹²³
- **Take Back Alberta:** Founded in December 2021¹²⁴ or sometime in 2022¹²⁵, “by right-wing activist David Parker, its leadership team also includes CFO Marco Van Huygens’s,

¹²¹ Stewart, Ashleigh. “The great COVID-19 infodemic: How disinformation networks are radicalizing Canadians” Global News, December 18, 2021. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8450263/infodemic-covid-19-disinformation-canada-pandemic/>.

¹²² Dubois, Stephanie. “Misinformation in the courtroom: How cases challenging COVID-19 restrictions in Alberta have shifted” CBC, Nov 22, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/misinformation-in-the-courtroom-how-cases-challenging-covid-19-restrictions-in-alberta-have-shifted-1.6254417>.

¹²³ Marczuk, Karsen. “Lethbridge MP wants unvaccinated to be 'respected, appreciated' in the community” CTV News, Dec. 21, 2021. <https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/lethbridge-mp-wants-unvaccinated-to-be-respected-appreciated-in-the-community-1.5716118>.

¹²⁴ Bratt Duane, Biggs Sarah, “Opinion: Take Back Alberta wields 'disproportionate' power in provincial politics” Calgary Herald, Mar 04, 2023. <https://calgaryherald.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-take-back-alberta-wields-disproportionate-power-in-provincial-politics>

¹²⁵ Take Back Alberta, “About us” Takingbackalberta.ca, <https://www.takingbackalberta.ca/about>.

a Fort Macleod town councilor who was one of the anti-government protesters charged last year with participating in the Coutts border crossing blockade”¹²⁶

- David Parker “worked for Kenney and helped him form the UCP in 2017. But when Kenney began imposing rules and jailing pastors during the pandemic, Parker organized against him.”¹²⁷

2022

January

- **The Canadian Covid Care Alliance (CCCA):** “A video produced by a group claiming to represent Canadian doctors and health care professionals alleges that the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine is dangerous. But the video repeats several previously debunked assertions about the safety of the shot, experts say the benefits outweigh the risks of rare side effects, and the Canadian government recommends it to prevent hospitalization and death.”¹²⁸
- **Even more, Covid Denying doctors:** “More than 40 physicians are currently being investigated by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) for promoting unproven treatments for COVID-19 or sharing unverified information about its vaccines, Global News can reveal... The revelation comes after Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott publicly urged the CPSO to crack down on a group of doctors accused of

¹²⁶ Fawcett Max, “How Take Back Alberta is taking over the United Conservative Party”, Canada’s National Observer

¹²⁷ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, May 14th, 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

¹²⁸ Goldhamer, Marisha. “Video repeats false claims about safety of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine” AFP Canada, 04 January 2022. <https://factcheck.afp.com/http%253A%252F%252Fdoc.afp.com%252F9VJ3DA-1>.

spreading unverified medical information about the vaccines after the situation was brought to light in a Global News investigation.”¹²⁹

- **The Freedom Convoy:** “Thousands of protesters began occupying the streets of Ottawa just less than three weeks ago... pledging to stay until all COVID-19 mandates and restrictions were removed,”¹³⁰
- **Coutts Border Protest:** “A truck convoy of anti-COVID-19 vaccine mandate demonstrators block a highway at the busy border crossing in Coutts.” ¹³¹

March

- **From Covid to Ukraine:** “As the tire tracks fade from the so-called “freedom convoy” that occupied downtown Ottawa streets, some of the Telegram forums devoted to the convoy have taken up the torch of a new cause: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine... Much like the misinformation that fueled some of the trucks headed for Ottawa, conspiracy theories are at the core of some of their conversations about Ukraine — leading them to decry Western intervention in the conflict, or in some cases, express outright support for Russia.”¹³²

July

- **Freedom Convoy Head, Bailed out:** July 26th, 2022, "Freedom Convoy organizer Tamara Lich has again been granted bail."

¹²⁹ Stewart, Ashleigh. “40 Ontario physicians currently being investigated for COVID-19 issues: College” Global News, January 19, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8524589/ontario-physicians-investigation-covid-19/>.

¹³⁰ CBC News. “The convoy crisis in Ottawa: A timeline of key events”, CBC, Feb 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/timeline-of-convoy-protest-in-ottawa-1.6351432>.

¹³¹ Dryden Joel, Grant Meghan, “Border protests in Coutts, Alta., a 'concrete manifestation' of risk to Canada: Rouleau” CBC News, February 17th, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/coutts-alberta-diagon-paul-rouleau-1.6751945#:~:text=CBC%20News%20Loaded-,Border%20protests%20in%20Coutts%2C%20Alta.%2C%20a%20concrete%20manifestation,to%20invoke%20the%20Emergencies%20Act>

¹³² Gilmore, Rachel. “‘Freedom convoy’ forums find new focus: disinformation about Russia-Ukraine war” Global News, March 8, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8659667/ukraine-russia-convoy-misinformation-conspiracy/>.

August

- **Warnings of Convoy Unearthed:** August 17th, 2022, “Newly disclosed documents show federal intelligence officials warned decision-makers that the police dispersal of Freedom Convoy protesters in Ottawa last winter could prompt an "opportunistic attack" against a politician or symbol of government." This was concerning a threat highlighted for February 24th, 2022.¹³³
 - “Ideologically motivated extremists would likely use police enforcement "to encourage violent revenge or as further evidence of government 'tyranny,'" the four-page assessment said.”
- **Mask Mandate Removal in Court:** August 18th, 2022, “A court hearing on the Alberta government's abrupt removal of a mandatory mask mandate for schoolchildren heard Thursday from a government lawyer who rejected a suggestion the decision was fueled by growing tensions at the Coutts border crossing in February.”¹³⁴
 - Lawyers representing immunocompromised children pushed back and “said the decision to remove mask mandates in Alberta schools was not consistent with public health advice and instead was made by government officials for political reasons, including "quelling protests" at the Coutts border crossing.”
- **The Queen of Canada:** August 18th, 2022, Ottawa “A few dozen people had gathered outside the city's police station after an appeal from a QAnon conspiracy theorist, who purports to be the "Queen of Canada," for citizens to arrest local officers.”¹³⁵

¹³³ Bronskill, Jim. “Intelligence report flagged possible 'violent revenge' after Ottawa protest shutdown” CBC News, Aug 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/intelligence-report-freedom-convoy-police-breakup-warning-1.6553466>.

¹³⁴ Labby, Bryan. “Alberta government lawyers reject claim school mask mandate lifted due to 'combustible' border protest” CBC News, Aug 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-cmoh-hinshaw-cabinet-mask-schools-1.6555650>.

¹³⁵ Fraser, David. “QAnon-inspired protest in Peterborough, Ont., prompts investigation” CBC News, Aug 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/protest-peterborough-arrest-special-investigation-1.6552575>.

- **Dutch Farmers Fertilizers Misinformation:** August 25th,2022, "supporters of the Freedom Convoy movement have continued to hold anti-mandate demonstrations across the country... they also featured a new — and perhaps surprising — symbol: The flag of the Netherlands was being waved alongside the more familiar Maple Leaf and F--k Trudeau banners... The red, white, and blue flag is meant to be a show of solidarity with Dutch farmers protesting their government's efforts to halve emissions linked to nitrogen-based fertilizers by the end of the decade" This was linked to "Far-right media and conservative politicians stoking misinformation about an early plan to cut emissions"¹³⁶
 - “In Canada, many within the convoy movement see the Dutch farmers as allies in a global fight against an array of policies they maintain are too progressive, such as public health mandates or emission targets... "The far right wants to think of it as a transnational movement," said Bàrbara Molas, a research fellow at the International Centre for Counterterrorism (ICCT) in The Hague.”
 - “As the convoy movement organized solidarity rallies for the Dutch farmers in July, its leaders warned that Canadian farmers would soon find themselves in a similar position.”

October (Start of the Smith Era)

- **Smith's win backed by Take Back Alberta:** Premier Smith was sworn in as premier on October 2022¹³⁷ replacing Premier Kenny. The group Take Back Alberta, born from the

¹³⁶ Montpetit, Jonathan. “Canada's convoy movement waved the Dutch flag. Then conspiracy theories swirled about fertilizer and bugs” CBC News, Aug 25, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/freedom-convoy-farmers-protest-netherlands-dutch-flag-1.6558902>.

¹³⁷ Alberta, “Premier Danielle Smith” Alberta.ca, <https://www.alberta.ca/premier.aspx>.

misinformation-fueled convoy movement, credibly claimed to have played a role in Smith's win.¹³⁸

- Now former premier Kenney would refer to his loss in connection with Take Back Alberta as “The lunatics,” he said, “are trying to take over the asylum.”¹³⁹
- **Chief Medical Officer Replaced:** October 11th -22nd 2022, Premier Smith said she would Replace Chief Medical Officer of Health Hinshaw with the plan to “recruit a new team of advisers in public health who consider COVID-19 an endemic disease.” As she did not believe that Covid should still be considered a pandemic, and that "A lot of the bad decisions were made by Alberta Health Services based on bad advice from the chief medical officer of health," Hinshaw was removed a week after the 11th.¹⁴⁰
- **Vaccinated Blood Refused:** October 13th, 2022, “Alberta physicians are raising the alarm about a dangerous trend — fueled by misinformation — that could cost lives... patient recently refused to consent to a blood transfusion if it came from a donor who had received the COVID-19 vaccine”¹⁴¹
 - “This is not an isolated incident in Alberta... "We're seeing it about once or twice a month, at this stage. And the worry is of course that these requests might

¹³⁸ Fawcett Max, “How Take Back Alberta is taking over the United Conservative Party”. Canada's National Observer, march 30th 2023, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2023/03/30/opinion/how-take-back-alberta-taking-over-united-conservative-party>.

¹³⁹ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, May 14, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

¹⁴⁰ CBC News. “Dr. Deena Hinshaw out as Alberta's chief medical officer of health” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/deena-hinshaw-alberta-chief-medical-officer-of-health-mark-joffe-covid-19-pandemic-1.6651416>.

¹⁴¹ Lee, Jennifer. “Doctors seeing resistance to blood transfusions over unfounded COVID vaccine concerns” CBC News, Oct 13, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-blood-transfusions-resistance-covid-1.6613841>.

increase," said Dr. Dave Sidhu, the southern Alberta medical lead for transfusion and transplant medicine."¹⁴²

- **The Tragedy of the Unvaccinated:** “One of Smith's key leadership campaign promises, which she's apparently determined to carry through, is to enshrine protections in the Alberta Human Rights Act for people based on vaccination status.”¹⁴³
 - “Premier Danielle Smith's remarks that the unvaccinated have been more discriminated against than any other group in the last half-century — a 50-year spell that's been marked by systemic racism against various groups, the rise of Islamophobia and transphobia, ongoing homophobia and anti-Semitism, continued mistreatment of Indigenous people, and on and on.”
- **Smith’s Desire to Pardon:** “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith confirmed... she may pardon people who were given tickets during the COVID-19 pandemic.”¹⁴⁴
- **Court finds Alberta Unreasonable:** “An Alberta judge has ruled the February order lifting the requirement for schoolchildren to mask was "unreasonable" because it was ultimately made by cabinet and not the chief medical officer of health (CMOH), which is a breach of the Public Health Act.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Lee, Jennifer. “Doctors seeing resistance to blood transfusions over unfounded COVID vaccine concerns” CBC News, Oct 13, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-blood-transfusions-resistance-covid-1.6613841>.

¹⁴³ Markusoff, Jason. “Danielle Smith wants vaccine status to be a human right. Expect a petri dish of problems”, CBC News, Oct 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/danielle-smith-vaccine-human-rights-analysis-1.6615900>.

¹⁴⁴ Green, Arthur C. “EXCLUSIVE: Smith considering pardoning lockdown, mandate charges during pandemic” Western Standard, Oct 21, 2022. https://www.westernstandard.news/news/exclusive-smith-considering-pardoning-lockdown-mandate-charges-during-pandemic/article_33395522-517c-11ed-b0b0-6f775a765211.html.

¹⁴⁵ Grant, Meghan. “'Unreasonable' order lifting Alberta school mask mandate made by politicians not Hinshaw: judge” CBC News, Oct 27, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/school-mask-mandate-alberta-unreasonable-judge-decision-lagrange-1.6631695>.

- **Take Back Alberta takes back the UCP:** “In October, Take Back Alberta mobilized en masse to vote in half the governing board of the UCP.”¹⁴⁶
 - “(The board) can remove the party membership of any member with a majority vote including a leader,” Parker tells the Grande Prairie crowd.”

November

- **Trump’s Advice:** “During a forum ahead of the Brooks-Medicine Hat byelection... Smith said a group of doctors who are advising her has reached out to Dr. Paul Alexander, a Canadian researcher and former adviser to a member of U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration. Alexander pushed for a herd immunity approach in 2020”¹⁴⁷
 - November 9th, 2022, “Alberta's Opposition leader said Premier Danielle Smith is not leading a government guided by science by consulting a former COVID-19 medical adviser of former U.S. president Donald Trump, who calls vaccines "bioweapons".”¹⁴⁸
 - “Paul Alexander has referred to COVID-19 vaccines as bioweapons.”
 - “[Dr. Paul Alexander] is a conspiracy theorist whose ideas have been discredited by all reasonable folks in the scientific and medical community," NDP Leader Rachel Notley said on Wednesday after

¹⁴⁶ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, May 14, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

¹⁴⁷ Short, Dylan. "Former Trump medical adviser has been invited to meet with Alberta officials: Premier Smith" Calgary Herald, November 7, 2022. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/former-trump-medical-advisor-has-been-invited-to-meet-with-alberta-officials-premier-smith>.

¹⁴⁸ Bennett, Dean. “Premier Danielle Smith consulting with former Trump adviser could affect health system, NDP says” CBC News, Nov 09, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-consulting-with-former-trump-adviser-could-affect-health-system-ndp-says-1.6646650>

delivering a speech addressed to the Rural Municipalities of Alberta convention.”

- “The very act of suggesting that she will be consulting with him is going to destabilize our healthcare system," Notley said.”
- **Removing the Mask:**” Thousands of Alberta children are home from school with respiratory illnesses, but Alberta Premier Danielle Smith says a school mask mandate is not on the table, and she plans to prevent school boards from invoking them.”¹⁴⁹
 - “Premier Smith has not embraced the decision's confirmation of the CMOH's legal authority, or the legitimacy of schools and other entities enacting their own public health policies. Instead, she stated she will not permit mask mandates in schools and will ensure her government alone makes public health decisions for schools.”¹⁵⁰
- **Smith’s Alleged Lies about Care Workers:** November 17th, 2022, “A now-fired AHS board member said Alberta's premier spread mistruths about Alberta Health Services' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and has a naive view of how difficult it is to recruit health-care workers.”¹⁵¹
 - “Former senior health administrator Tony Dagnone was reacting to Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's removal of 11 AHS board members on Thursday. She

¹⁴⁹ Bellefontaine, Michelle. “Premier Danielle Smith rules out mask mandates despite widespread school illness” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-rules-out-mask-mandates-despite-widespread-school-illness-1.6651417>.

¹⁵⁰ Bellefontaine, Michelle. “Premier Danielle Smith rules out mask mandates despite widespread school illness” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-rules-out-mask-mandates-despite-widespread-school-illness-1.6651417>.

¹⁵¹ French, Janet. “Premier Danielle Smith fires Alberta Health Services board appoints administrator” CBC News, Nov 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/danielle-smith-alberta-health-services-board-administrator-john-health-minister-jason-copping-1.6655400>.

has replaced them with an administrator, Dr. John Cowell, who will serve in the role for at least six months.”¹⁵²

- “She seems to like shooting from the hip,” Dagnone said on Thursday of Smith's decision. “She doesn't believe in being informed before making these huge, huge decisions that have an impact on the health of Albertans.”¹⁵³

December

- **The expectation of a New Convoy:** On December 1st, 2022, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's national security adviser told a parliamentary committee that the federal government is already preparing to deal with a new convoy protest planned for February 2023.

2023

January

- **Smith Challenging Prosecutor:** January 19th, 2023. CBC reported that “A staffer in Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's office sent a series of emails to the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service, challenging prosecutors' assessment and direction on cases stemming from the Coutts border blockades and protests”¹⁵⁴
 - January 21st, 2023, “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith said she has called for a review that she says will examine emails between her office and Crown prosecutors.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² French, Janet. “Premier Danielle Smith fires Alberta Health Services board appoints administrator” CBC News, Nov 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/danielle-smith-alberta-health-services-board-administrator-john-health-minister-jason-copping-1.6655400>.

¹⁵³ French, Janet. “Premier Danielle Smith fires Alberta Health Services board appoints administrator” CBC News, Nov 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/danielle-smith-alberta-health-services-board-administrator-john-health-minister-jason-copping-1.6655400>.

¹⁵⁴ Grant, Meghan. “Alberta premier's office contacted Crown prosecution about Coutts cases: sources” CBC News, Jan 19, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-premier-office-emails-prosecutors-coutts-1.6719743>.

¹⁵⁵ Markus, Jade. “Alberta premier orders review after CBC reports of emails over Coutts cases between her office, prosecution” CBC News, Jan 21, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-smith-premier-emails-review-1.6722080>.

- January 26th, 2023, “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith should call an independent investigation into contact between her office, the justice minister's office and Crown prosecutors to put questions to rest, one political scientist says.”¹⁵⁶
 - “University of Calgary political science professor Lisa Young says questions about the actions of Smith and her staff may follow them until an impartial third-party can look at the evidence.”¹⁵⁷
- January 28th, 2023, “The Justice Department said Monday it had done a four-month search of ingoing, outgoing and deleted emails” concerning “whether Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's office interfered with Crown prosecutors”¹⁵⁸

“The review was ordered by Smith a week ago to respond to allegations in a CBC story that reported a staffer in the premier's office emailed prosecutors last fall to question decisions and direction on cases stemming from a blockade at the Canada-U. S. border crossing at Coutts, Alta.”¹⁵⁹
- **Smith Intervened Inappropriately:** January 25th, 2023. CBC reported that “Premier Danielle Smith pressured the attorney general and his office to intervene in COVID-related court cases” an act deemed inappropriate according to a source close to the situation and that her goal was to make the charges go away.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ French, Janet. “Independent probe into contact between Alberta premier's office, prosecutors needed, says political scientist” CBC News, Jan 26, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/independent-probe-into-contact-between-alberta-premier-s-office-prosecutors-needed-says-political-scientist-1.6726473>.

¹⁵⁷ French, Janet. “Independent probe into contact between Alberta premier's office, prosecutors needed, says political scientist” CBC News, Jan 26, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/independent-probe-into-contact-between-alberta-premier-s-office-prosecutors-needed-says-political-scientist-1.6726473>.

¹⁵⁸ Bennett, Dean. “Alberta Justice spokespeople deliver duelling statements on prosecutor email review” CBC News, Jan 28, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-justice-dept-emails-1.6729648>.

¹⁵⁹ Bennett, Dean. “Alberta Justice spokespeople deliver duelling statements on prosecutor email review” CBC News, Jan 28, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-justice-dept-emails-1.6729648>.

¹⁶⁰ von Scheel, Elise. Grant, Meghan. French, Janet. “Premier pressured justice minister's office to get rid of COVID charges, sources say” CBC News, Jan 25, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-premiers-office-attorney-general-1.6724455>.

- “This specifically included the prosecution of Artur Pawlowski, a pastor charged with two counts of criminal mischief and a charge under Alberta's Critical Infrastructure Defense Act related to the Coutts border blockade.”¹⁶¹
- Smith would later call for CBC to retract this story as well as the connected report from the 19th, claiming they were defamatory.¹⁶²
- January 27th, 2023, “CBC News stands by Coutts story despite statement from Danielle Smith's office”¹⁶³

February

- **Take Back Alberta spreads into power:** “At the end of February, political organization Take Back Alberta managed to win 28 of the 30 positions up for re-election on the UCP’s Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre constituency association board.”¹⁶⁴
 - This would not be the only area that takes back Alberta would spread to, “Since rallying to knock out Kenney, it has continued organizing within the UCP, winning positions on constituency boards and supporting candidates, including Chelsae Petrovic in Livingstone-Macleod and Eric Bouchard in Kenney's old riding of Calgary-Lougheed.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ von Scheel, Elise. Grant, Meghan. French, Janet. “Premier pressured justice minister's office to get rid of COVID charges, sources say” CBC News, Jan 25, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-premiers-office-attorney-general-1.6724455>.

¹⁶² von Scheel, Elise. Grant, Meghan. French, Janet. “Premier pressured justice minister's office to get rid of COVID charges, sources say” CBC News, Jan 25, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-premiers-office-attorney-general-1.6724455>.

¹⁶³ Fenlon, Brodie. “CBC News stands by Coutts story despite statement from Danielle Smith's office” CBC News, Jan 27, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/editorsblog/cbc-stands-by-coutts-story-1.6728100>.

¹⁶⁴ Rodriguez Michael, “Candidate disqualified from UCP nomination set to take on Nixon as independent” Calgary Herald, Mar 15, 2023, <https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/candidate-disqualified-from-ucp-nomination-set-to-run-as-independent>.

¹⁶⁵ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, May 14th, 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

March

- **Covid Origin Misinformation Challenged:** March 17th, 2023, "Genetic material collected at a Chinese market near where the first human cases of COVID-19 were identified show raccoon dog DNA commingled with the virus, suggesting the pandemic may have originated from animals, not a lab, according to a group of international scientists... Other experts have not yet verified their analysis, which has yet to appear in a peer-reviewed journal."¹⁶⁶

April

- **Smith Threatens CBC over Coutts Reports:** April 4th, 2023, "Alberta Premier Danielle Smith is threatening legal action against the CBC if the corporation doesn't retract and apologize for recent reporting about the premier and COVID-19-related criminal cases related to last year's Coutts, Alta., blockade."¹⁶⁷
 - "In a letter addressed to CBC editor-in-chief Brodie Fenlon and verified by CBC News, lawyer Munaf Mohamed, writing on Smith's behalf, demands the corporation retract its reporting and publish an apology online and in news broadcasts "informing readers that it has no evidence of dishonesty or direct contact between the premier (or anyone in her office) and Alberta Crown prosecutors about any specific COVID-19-related prosecutions." ¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ The Associated Press. "Newly available COVID-19 origins data could point to raccoon dogs in Wuhan market, study says" CBC News, Mar 17, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-animal-origins-1.6782273>.

¹⁶⁷ Mazerolle, John. "Alberta Premier Danielle Smith threatens CBC with legal action over Coutts blockade stories" CBC News, Apr 04, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/danielle-smith-cbc-1.6799473>.

¹⁶⁸ Mazerolle, John. "Alberta Premier Danielle Smith threatens CBC with legal action over Coutts blockade stories" CBC News, Apr 04, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/danielle-smith-cbc-1.6799473>.

- “Asked for comment, CBC's head of public affairs Chuck Thompson said in an email, "As we've said all along, we stand by our journalism on this story and, if necessary, will defend it in court." ¹⁶⁹

May

- May 4, 2023, “the International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee of the WHO downgraded the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee determined that COVID-19 is now an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).”¹⁷⁰

1.5.1: Misinformation and a Pandemic

As we have covered, misinformation can alter people’s perceptions and beliefs about the world around them, which can influence a person's behavior leading to a disregard or excessive fear of the virus, the protection from which requires intentional and collective action such as social distancing and masking to properly combat the virus. ¹⁷¹ As it has been determined, this cannot be simply countered by corrective messaging from traditional media and political figures, as this counter information has not proven to be successful in preventing misinformation from taking root in an effective population of Canadians, ¹⁷² and may add to the risks of an infodemic.

¹⁶⁹ Mazerolle, John. “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith threatens CBC with legal action over Coutts blockade stories” CBC News, Apr 04, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/danielle-smith-cbc-1.6799473>.

¹⁷⁰ Infection Prevention and Control Canada, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) SARS-CoV-2” [ipac-canada.org, https://ipac-canada.org/coronavirus-resources#:~:text=On%20March%2011%2C%202020%20the,19%20viral%20disease%20a%20pandemic](https://ipac-canada.org/coronavirus-resources#:~:text=On%20March%2011%2C%202020%20the,19%20viral%20disease%20a%20pandemic).

¹⁷¹ Bridgman, Aengus, Eric Merkley, Oleg Zhilin, Peter John Loewen, Taylor Owen, and Derek Ruths. "Infodemic Pathways: Evaluating the Role That Traditional and Social Media Play in Cross-National Information Transfer." *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (2021).

¹⁷² Bridgman, Aengus, Eric Merkley, Oleg Zhilin, Peter John Loewen, Taylor Owen, and Derek Ruths. “Infodemic Pathways: Evaluating the Role That Traditional and Social Media Play in Cross-National Information Transfer.”

To be more specific, misinformation can have an indirect effect on public health policy by discouraging people from engaging in proactive protective behaviors such as social distancing, mask-wearing, getting vaccinated, and getting tested when they have symptoms.¹⁷³ Additionally, misinformation can influence people who in the past have been employing these behaviors, to begin to neglect the behaviors that take recurring effort such as mask-wearing, or leading them to no longer accept additional vaccinations or other new protective innovations as they become available.¹⁷⁴ An additional complication can come into play because of an infodemic, as the overwhelming tides of information may overwhelm or confuse a person and lead them to ineffective action or inaction due to being overwhelmed with conflicting information.

While different in the impact on a person's beliefs, an Infodemic can still have the same effect as a total indoctrination into a Covid denying mindset, in that the person can become unable or unwilling to continue the needed effort to protect themselves and others from the virus, which creates great challenges for policymakers in that their populace may either willfully choose to ignore the recommendations and mandates, or simply be unable to discern their validity from the noise of information.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, other health emergencies caused by misinformation such as people ingesting cleaning products or unnecessary medication, leading to

¹⁷³ OECD. “Combating COVID-19 disinformation on online platforms”, OECD, 3 July 2020. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=135_135214-mpe7q0bj4d&title=Combating-COVID-19-disinformation-on-online-platforms.

¹⁷⁴ OECD, “Combating COVID-19 disinformation on online platforms” OECD Library, 3 July 2020. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=135_135214-mpe7q0bj4d&title=Combating-COVID-19-disinformation-on-online-platforms.

¹⁷⁵ OECD. “Combating COVID-19 disinformation on online platforms”.

them being hospitalized, can add further strains on an already strained healthcare system, which can limit what types of public health policies can be put in place or that can be effective.¹⁷⁶

Misinformation during a pandemic can use the frayed emotions born by the stress and fear inherent to a public crisis to more easily cause people to target concepts and groups of people that had earned the ire of conspiracy groups before the pandemic. This can be seen in the attribution of Covid's existence to the signals broadcast by 5G technology, which led to many cell towers being set ablaze in areas such as the Netherlands, Australia, the EU, and the USA.¹⁷⁷ Or in the targeting of minority populations for hate crimes, in the case of Covid especially the targeting of Asian people under the false belief that race is somehow more likely to spread COVID due to the viruses origins and ongoing association of COVID-19 with the country of China, which can and has led to increasing racisms and violent racist action against people visually identifiable as of Asian descent.¹⁷⁸ All these effects of misinformation, while not unique to a pandemic, do increase the challenges in countering a pandemic as dealing with arson against communications infrastructure as well as violent and hateful acts targeting segments of the population can add additional confounding issues, which need to be attended to at the same time as the pandemic. This also adds an unnecessary additional drain on resources, personnel, and time that could be better served in combating the pandemic. This means that whether politicians are directly influenced by misinformation, succumb to pressure from an indoctrinated constituency, or are restricted in how they can deal with the public health emergency as resources and personnel are stretched thin dealing with the fallout of misinformed actions, the

¹⁷⁶ Konczi, Anita E. "COVID-19 Information for First Nations in Alberta" The First Nations Information Governance Center, May 10, 2020.

<https://www.afnigc.ca/main/includes/media/pdf/digital%20reports/AlbertaFNIGC%20COVID%20info-final.pdf>.

¹⁷⁷ OECD. "Combatting COVID-19 disinformation on online platforms".

¹⁷⁸ OECD. "Combatting COVID-19 disinformation on online platforms".

government and the population's ability to properly respond to the pandemic and create or follow health policies may be impeded, if not completely made irrelevant, due to any of the above dangers associated with misinformation.

As our society has become more interconnected through the internet and international news media, the question of what misinformation is relevant to this work is justifiable to ask. If a narrative born on the other side of the globe can be read in Alberta the moment it is published, do we then have to account for all misinformation seen everywhere? The answer to this question is, “No”, but we do need to pay attention. While we are more interconnected, there does tend to still be a creation of bubbles on the internet, such as subreddits or Facebook pages dedicated to Albertan issues and politics, and while technically any bit of misinformation may find its way into the Alberta internet bubble that does not mean that it will find any footing. For misinformation to manipulate people's emotions, it must be tailored to their culture and context to truly take hold of people, so a narrative that demonizes a specific group or suggests alternative remedies that ask people to use solutions unavailable in some contexts, such as needing to consume a spice not common in or not palatable to some parts of the world, can mean that while misinformation is potent in another context, it is not necessarily so in Alberta.

However, that is not to say narratives cannot be tailored to the Albertan context. So, while we do not analyze every bit of misinformation in the world, it can be helpful to be aware of them to insulate yourself and those you are responsible for, from a mutated version of the misinformation. For this thesis, we are only concerned if the misinformation already had adapted to or found hold in Alberta. The timeline of misinformation in this chapter was limited to narratives that were known to be in Alberta and Canada during the pandemic, as those two bubbles of the internet intersect so frequently.

The next chapter will deal with public health in Alberta, the who, what, and why of how the Alberta government is meant to approach public health crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, and how this public health crisis was approached. Understanding how Alberta's public health system is meant to work in a crisis and looking at the policies and communication of the government during the pandemic along with our knowledge of misinformation, its effects, and what was present in Alberta, will help us start to recognize when where, how and if misinformation had any effect on Alberta's response to Covid-19.

Chapter 2: Public Health and Pandemics

This chapter will discuss the basic players and procedures in typical public health actions within a pandemic. We do so to facilitate a proper understanding of the normal actions and procedures to implement public health orders and direction during a pandemic. This understanding will then help us be able to recognize if the Alberta government did or said anything that departed from the normal procedure. This on its own will not show if misinformation influenced the Alberta government's decision-making during the pandemic but may suggest events that might have been influenced. Conversely, departures from normal procedures may show the application of critical thinking and proper information gathering and not actions shaped by misinformation. Unique situations to the COVID-19 pandemic may have required special responses that depart from normal procedures so distinguishing between creative but informed problem-solving and action based on misinformation is imperative. This information about Alberta's public health policy and actions will be of further benefit to this discussion as understanding the channels by which public health orders and policies can be legally implemented, regardless of whether misinformation was a factor or not. This will help us recognize the scope of the influence any misinformation could have, as separation of power or other regulatory safeguards may have made it so that any influence misinformation had was not enough to have any real effect on any individual public health action or even public health.

2.1: Introduction to Public Health Response and Orders

To begin, it is necessary to define some of the basic terminology associated with a public health response. We do this despite the familiarity those who lived through the pandemic might have developed over the course of the outbreak, as the individual terms differ in their use depending on the region, even between Canadian provinces. As such, taking a moment to see how these terms are used in Alberta will be helpful as we approach the more detailed parts of how Alberta enacts public health policy.

2.1.1: Definitions and distinctions in the Alberta context

The term "Public Health" can refer to a wide variety of topics related to health care in a region as well as any topic related to the physical or mental wellness of a population. This vague definition of the term functions for our purposes, as we will be discussing public health during an outbreak of widespread disease infections, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic. While a pandemic does not require additional strain on some systems meant to maintain public health directly, we will still pay some attention to issues and tools not directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as a pandemic response does draw on the same resources as general healthcare and this added strain can degrade the overall quality of care.

The term "Public Health Measures" shares a definition with a term previously used in this work, that being "Public Health Order". The main distinction between the two is that "Public Health Measure" is the preferred wording for the Canadian federal government while Alberta and other provincial/regional governments tend to use the wording "Public Health Order." A connected term to these is that of "Public Health Action," which refers to any action taken by government representatives about the pandemic response, including publishing public health orders and addressing the public.

To expand further, the term "Public Health Measures" can also be used to refer to a health recommendation directed at the public, while a public health order carries with it enforcement measures. Additionally, the term "Public Health Mandate" is synonymous with "Public Health Orders" but found greater use during the Covid pandemic as the prevalence of mask 'mandates' encouraged the shift. All these terms are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to what the government has said or done concerning a pandemic. To the average person the distinctions between the terms can be less important than the idea that something is being said or done by the government. These terms are used to refer to a wide range of non-pharmaceutical interventions to an ongoing crisis, which can range from individual to community-level measures and apply to the non-medical community broadly.¹⁷⁹ To help clarify, this is not about triage protocols in the emergency room or directions on when to use a specific piece of medical equipment, such as a ventilator, but about requests and orders to the public, such as physical distancing, travel restrictions, or shelter-in-place orders for those with active infections.¹⁸⁰ On a community scale, this can refer to large-scale actions and plans such as education campaigns, mask mandates, or limits on group sizes and gathering places.¹⁸¹

Importantly it is the Canadian government's view that public health measures are effective in preventing the spread of a virus such as COVID-19, even in situations where there are many areas and contributing factors to create more concern of spread or strain on the

¹⁷⁹ Public Health Agency of Canada, "Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19" 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/federal-provincial-territorial-public-health-response-plan-ongoing-management-covid-19.html#a16>.

¹⁸⁰ Public Health Agency of Canada, "Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19" 2022.

¹⁸¹ Public Health Agency of Canada, "Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19" 2022.

system.¹⁸² This reflects the understanding that any government or group wishing to combat a pandemic and reduce the suffering inflicted on the public is best served by implementing public health measures. This is still true if it causes short-term pain, as in the long run public health mandates will still be the most effective approach assuming that they are implemented properly and kept consistent for the needed period.

Public health measures must be put in place while still considering and accounting for their potential consequences.¹⁸³ While public health measures are the most effective means of stemming the spread of infection, if by implementing them they cause more harm than they do good, then the approach must be re-considered. Because causing greater harm than is being prevented is counterproductive to the purpose of the measures. Some notable negative impacts public health measures can have on a population that need to be accounted for are: increasing rates of family and gender-based violence in the home, increasing social isolation and feelings of loneliness, reduced access to school food programs for low-income families, and a variety of potential negative effects childhood development.¹⁸⁴

Additionally while effective, it is important to note that public health measures are only effective if the public adheres to them.¹⁸⁵ Factors that can reduce public adherence to public health mandates are, for example, burnout after a long pandemic, economic factors such as lack of access to work leading to food or housing instability, as well as social pressures either created or accelerated by other struggles within the public health crisis, such as group pressure to ignore

¹⁸² Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19” 2022.

¹⁸³ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19” 2022.

¹⁸⁴ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19” 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19” 2022.

mandates for religious or philosophical reasons, or social pressure born out of misinformation, loneliness caused by social isolation and pressure from a local community which has been indoctrinated into a false narrative.¹⁸⁶

The goals of public health measures and orders during a pandemic revolve around the basic steps of identification, monitoring, breaking the chain, and communication.¹⁸⁷

Identification is the task of defining the specific pathogen and strain of the infectious agent, to best inform the subsequent steps.¹⁸⁸ Monitoring refers to the ability to track and trace the spread of infection between individuals and events so that people who were in close contact with or attended the same gathering as an infected person can isolate themselves or take any other precautions to prevent further spread and best protect their own and their loved ones' wellbeing going forward.¹⁸⁹ Monitoring also involves properly surveilling the ongoing situation, so that decision-makers can be supplied rapidly with up-to-date information to best inform their response.¹⁹⁰ Breaking the chain is the act of using the information gathered in previous steps to create a means by which spread can be curtailed, such as mask mandates for appropriate situations or by informing potential close contacts of the infected of their risk so that they can isolate before they are symptomatic and hopefully before they are infectious themselves.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶Public Health Agency of Canada, "Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19" 2022.

¹⁸⁷ Haldane, Victoria, Anne-Sophie Jung, Chuan De Foo, Mathias Bonk, Margaret Jamieson, Shishi Wu, Monica Verma, et al. "Strengthening the Basics: Public Health Responses to Prevent the Next Pandemic." *BMJ* (Online) 375 (2021): e067510–e067510. <https://www.bmj-com.uml.idm.oclc.org/content/bmj/375/bmj-2021-067510.full.pdf>

¹⁸⁸ Haldane, Victoria, Anne-Sophie Jung, Chuan De Foo, Mathias Bonk, Margaret Jamieson, Shishi Wu, Monica Verma, et al. "Strengthening the Basics: Public Health Responses to Prevent the Next Pandemic."

¹⁸⁹ Haldane, Victoria, Anne-Sophie Jung, Chuan De Foo, Mathias Bonk, Margaret Jamieson, Shishi Wu, Monica Verma, et al. "Strengthening the Basics: Public Health Responses to Prevent the Next Pandemic."

¹⁹⁰ Public Health Agency of Canada, "Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19" 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/federal-provincial-territorial-public-health-response-plan-ongoing-management-covid-19.html#a5>

¹⁹¹ Haldane, Victoria, Anne-Sophie Jung, Chuan De Foo, Mathias Bonk, Margaret Jamieson, Shishi Wu, Monica Verma, et al. "Strengthening the Basics: Public Health Responses to Prevent the Next Pandemic."

Finally, communication is a step that is part of all the previously listed steps as well as an ongoing effort after systems have already been put in place. Communication refers to the act of relaying information to the public about the state of the situation in affected settings, the existence of new public health orders such as mask mandates as well as communicating with people who have been in close contact with infected individuals. Additionally, communication refers to informing the public about support systems such as monetary grants or food assistance programs, as well as any other social support systems made available as needed for the current situation and time.¹⁹²

Public health mandates must be done while respecting the human rights of the public. While much control is needed to protect the public, governments need to avoid crossing the line into authoritarian actions even if they believe them to be for the good of their people, especially when less restrictive measures, before one needs to breach fundamental human rights, are available and effective.¹⁹³

To accomplish this balance between respect and protection and to make sure that the public is incentivized to adhere to the mandates, making sure that communication flows both ways with the public, both keeping them informed as well as seeking opinions and ideas from the public is important.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, communication must be done in plain language devoid of any technical or complex wording and available in multiple languages so that as many people as possible can be reached and fully informed with as little room for misunderstandings as possible.

¹⁹² Haldane, Victoria, Anne-Sophie Jung, Chuan De Foo, Mathias Bonk, Margaret Jamieson, Shishi Wu, Monica Verma, et al. “Strengthening the Basics: Public Health Responses to Prevent the Next Pandemic.”

¹⁹³ Haldane, Victoria, Anne-Sophie Jung, Chuan De Foo, Mathias Bonk, Margaret Jamieson, Shishi Wu, Monica Verma, et al. “Strengthening the Basics: Public Health Responses to Prevent the Next Pandemic.”

¹⁹⁴ Haldane, Victoria, Anne-Sophie Jung, Chuan De Foo, Mathias Bonk, Margaret Jamieson, Shishi Wu, Monica Verma, et al. “Strengthening the Basics: Public Health Responses to Prevent the Next Pandemic.”

¹⁹⁵ Communicating effectively not only helps save lives but also minimizes both social and economic impacts by ensuring that the pandemic lasts as little time as possible and carries with it little social stigma or emotional vitriol in the population, as well as making it so that the population can effectively work on an individual level to help prevent spread through proper sanitary and infection prevention strategies. In addition, it needs to be made as easy as possible for people to know when and where to get tested and how to help inform others that they have had close contact with someone infected so that tracing can be done effectively. ¹⁹⁶

Finally, the last point to cover in this section, which is especially important to understand the context of provincial health care and health crisis response, is the position of “Chief Medical Officer (CMO)”. This position is also known as “Chief Public Health Officer” in other parts of Canada and the world.¹⁹⁷ The commonly understood parameter for this role, before the pandemic, was that of a technical or background advisor on health-related issues for their government and, in some cases, a leader of the groups involved in healthcare in their region.¹⁹⁸ However, the COVID-19 pandemic, a state of emergency that lasted much longer and that was much wider spread than most framers of public health policy could have expected, resulted in the role taking on that of a forward-facing public and political figure as CMOs worldwide were repeatedly forced into the limelight to provide the public with updates concerning the ever-

¹⁹⁵ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19” 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/federal-provincial-territorial-public-health-response-plan-ongoing-management-covid-19.html#a5>

¹⁹⁶ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19”

¹⁹⁷ MacAulay M, Macintyre AK, Yashadhana A, et al. “Under the spotlight: understanding the role of the Chief Medical Officer in a pandemicJ” *Epidemiol Community Health* 2022;76:100-104. <https://jech.bmj.com/content/76/1/100.abstract>

¹⁹⁸ MacAulay M, Macintyre AK, Yashadhana A, et al. “Under the spotlight: understanding the role of the Chief Medical Officer in a pandemicJ”

changing circumstances and understanding of the Covid-19 virus and pandemic as new information was obtained.¹⁹⁹

The origin of the role comes from 19th century England, where a physician was given the powers of a high-ranking civil servant to allow them to flow between the realms of politics, the medical community, and public health.²⁰⁰ Their status and expertise in the field provided them with the unique ability to comprehend contemporary medical literature and science, along with the power and responsibility to directly advise policymakers and influence public health responses.²⁰¹ These basic factors that make up the role have been carried over to the Canadian system and, while the role has adjusted to some degree, these basic elements are the same. An additional strength the role has gained because of the passage of time and the advancement of technological progress is in garnering the trust of the population through public exposure made possible by modern forms of communication, such as daily newspapers and social media news feeds. While this trust has been reduced after the long strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role has served as a trustworthy voice to the public, due to the expertise of the one holding the role and the powers held by them intended to help protect the public, as well as their independence from the government in power.²⁰² Even as the role has expanded to have a greater public-facing element as technology has allowed for it, the role has always been that of communicating to the public as well as policymakers. Even before the existence of daily press briefings in front of live streaming cameras, CMOs have sometimes had the authority to issue reports on public health

¹⁹⁹ MacAulay M, Macintyre AK, Yashadhana A, et al. “Under the spotlight: understanding the role of the Chief Medical Officer in a pandemicJ”.

²⁰⁰ MacAulay M, Macintyre AK, Yashadhana A, et al. “Under the spotlight: understanding the role of the Chief Medical Officer in a pandemicJ”.

²⁰¹ MacAulay M, Macintyre AK, Yashadhana A, et al. “Under the spotlight: understanding the role of the Chief Medical Officer in a pandemicJ”.

²⁰² MacAulay M, Macintyre AK, Yashadhana A, et al. “Under the spotlight: understanding the role of the Chief Medical Officer in a pandemicJ”.

topics in their name without approval from their government, thus further increasing independence.²⁰³

According to the Alberta Public Health Act, in its most recent version published on April 1st, 2023, on Alberta, the role of CMO affords the responsibility and powers needed to, "monitor the health of Albertans and make recommendations to the Minister and regional health authorities on measures to protect and promote the health of the public and to prevent disease and injury,"²⁰⁴ Additionally they "act as a liaison between the Government and regional health authorities, medical officers of health and executive officers in the administration of this Act"²⁰⁵ and "shall monitor activities of regional health authorities, medical officers of health and executive officers in the administration of this Act, and may give directions to regional health authorities, medical officers of health and executive officers in the exercise of their powers and the carrying out of their responsibilities under this Act."²⁰⁶

Lastly "Where the Chief Medical Officer is of the opinion that a medical officer of health or executive officer is not properly exercising powers or carrying out duties under this Act in respect of a matter, the Chief Medical Officer may assume the powers and duties of the medical officer of health or executive officer in respect of the matter and act in that person's place."²⁰⁷ When the CMO decides to act to replace a medical, health, or executive officer, they must provide written notice to relevant parties such as the officer being replaced, government officials in the area where the replacement will occur, and the minister.²⁰⁸ These are the powers and

²⁰³ MacAulay M, Macintyre AK, Yashadhana A, et al. "Under the spotlight: understanding the role of the Chief Medical Officer in a pandemic".

²⁰⁴ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37" April 1, 2023. https://kings-printer.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=P37.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779837946

²⁰⁵ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37".

²⁰⁶ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37".

²⁰⁷ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37".

²⁰⁸ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37".

responsibilities of the CMO during non-emergency or pandemic times, as was the case during the COVID-19. The way that these powers change, during a crisis such as a pandemic, has caused some confusion, as the role changes from being purely advisory to having a mix of advisory and direct-action powers and responsibilities.

2.1.2: Public Health during a Pandemic

While some powers and approaches can shift from the above, the previous section provides a baseline as to the terminology, powers, and basic approaches related to public health. What this section will cover is how a pandemic situation or other extreme public health event can expand, alter, or add to the above. This will hopefully show how public health should be approached during an emergency so that Alberta's response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be analyzed for both reasonability and variation from normal expectations. If variation can be determined, its responsibility and the reasoning behind the variation can then be examined, so that we can see what influence misinformation had on this public health response without the possibility that the normally prescribed response was created using misinformation when Alberta's Public Health Act was drafted originally. While that would still show the influence of misinformation, it would be a different outcome than the public health response being influenced by modern and active misinformation.

One of the first changes to public health regarding a pandemic can occur before a pandemic is declared. When the CMO or a medical officer of health in Alberta under the Alberta Public Health Act knows of or suspects the presence of a public health emergency of some kind, they “may initiate an investigation to determine whether any action is necessary to protect the

public health,”²⁰⁹ and if that investigation confirms that there is a communicable disease present the CMO is granted additional powers to take what steps they believe to be necessary to suppress the disease, protect the uninfected, prevent further transmission of the disease, and remove the source of infection.²¹⁰ These additional powers do not remove the CMO's ability to make advisory statements to the government but rather add to their ability to act and create public health orders in order to protect the public. This is where there was some confusion during the COVID-19 pandemic, as both the CMO Dr. Hinshaw and the ministers seemed to be unsure of the powers of the CMO and tended to assign the power and responsibility of public health orders to either the CMO or the government depending on the particular public health order after the order had already been enacted and signed by the CMO, even though by law this is a power solely held by the CMO during the spread of a pandemic.²¹¹ During the pandemic, the government tended to describe the CMO as a solely advisory role despite her needing to sign all public health orders. Officials did listen to her advice on the public health situation but weighed her recommendations against the need to protect "lives and livelihoods"²¹². When a public health order did not end up having the desired effect, such as when restrictions were lifted in the summer of 2021 resulting in a large number of new Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations leading to the hospitals being overwhelmed, the then Premier and Minister of Health stated they followed a course of action based on the exact recommendations of the CMO.²¹³ This statement

²⁰⁹ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37" April 1, 2023.

²¹⁰ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37" April 1, 2023.

²¹¹ Hardcastle Lorian, Fluker Shaun, "Confirmed in Law: The Decision-Maker for COVID-19 Public Health Orders in Alberta is the Chief Medical Officer of Health" University of Calgary Faculty of Law AB Lawg, October 28, 2022. <https://ablawg.ca/2022/10/28/confirmed-in-law-the-decision-maker-for-covid-19-public-health-orders-in-alberta-is-the-chief-medical-officer-of-health/>.

²¹² Hardcastle Lorian, Fluker Shaun, "Confirmed in Law: The Decision-Maker for COVID-19 Public Health Orders in Alberta is the Chief Medical Officer of Health".

²¹³ Hardcastle Lorian, Fluker Shaun, "Confirmed in Law: The Decision-Maker for COVID-19 Public Health Orders in Alberta is the Chief Medical Officer of Health".

was quickly at odds with the CMO's comment that her role is not purely advisory and that she had "the authority to take whatever steps are, in my opinion, necessary to lessen the impact of the public health emergency."²¹⁴ However, later on, she also stated her role was purely advisory, in regards to the Cabinet's decision to lift mask mandates in schools, an action which was later the topic of a lawsuit and litigation in court.²¹⁵ At first, even the courts gave the public mixed signals on the topic of the powers of the CMO adding to the confusion. However, the court eventually concluded that the CMO was the only person with the authority to issue public health orders.²¹⁶

Most of the changes to public health during the pandemic are connected to the Chief Medical Officer and the way that the role, that is at the center of government communications, shifts. While other government officials can and do make public statements and provide information to the public, the CMO also takes the lead in the government's communication with the public. The changes to how communication should and can change during a pandemic of this scale differ from what has been experienced before as modern communication technologies have not overlapped with such a long period of pandemic before. Now there were new learnings on what was important for pandemic communication.

Some factors that altered communication to the public during COVID-19 were known topics such as people's risk perception being based on individual experience and thus requiring government communications tailored to match the broad experience bases of its population so as

²¹⁴ Hardcastle Lorian, Fluker Shaun, "Confirmed in Law: The Decision-Maker for COVID-19 Public Health Orders in Alberta is the Chief Medical Officer of Health".

²¹⁵ Hardcastle Lorian, Fluker Shaun, "Confirmed in Law: The Decision-Maker for COVID-19 Public Health Orders in Alberta is the Chief Medical Officer of Health".

²¹⁶ Hardcastle Lorian, Fluker Shaun, "Confirmed in Law: The Decision-Maker for COVID-19 Public Health Orders in Alberta is the Chief Medical Officer of Health" University of Calgary Faculty of Law AB Lawg, October 28, 2022. <https://ablawg.ca/2022/10/28/confirmed-in-law-the-decision-maker-for-covid-19-public-health-orders-in-alberta-is-the-chief-medical-officer-of-health/>.

many as possible would relate and listen to the information.²¹⁷ A factor that was discovered during this was the erosion of public trust in authorities, health, social and economic inequalities being revealed to be greater than estimated prior as well as amplified by the pandemic, and the infodemic overload of information (real or fake information) paired with a massive amount of misinformation contending for the public’s attention.²¹⁸ All of these confounding factors meant that communication needed to contend with more influences than expected while also needing to be clear and succinct whenever possible.²¹⁹ The changes were not all negative however, as the length of the pandemic resulted in the public gaining a better understanding of public health orders and how to best protect themselves from diseases like COVID-19, meaning that as the pandemic went on communication could be made clearer thanks to the ability to assume a general basis of knowledge in the public and the public having a better understanding of the basic terminology related to public health.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19” 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/federal-provincial-territorial-public-health-response-plan-ongoing-management-covid-19.html#a21>

²¹⁸ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19”.

²¹⁹ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19”.

²²⁰ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Federal, Provincial, Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Ongoing Management of COVID-19”.

2.1.3: Policy and Misinformation

While the previous chapter addressed the relationship between misinformation and pandemics, it will be worthwhile to discuss how misinformation can affect policy creation, especially public health policy.

To start, for a democratic system to function a knowledgeable citizenry is essential.²²¹ This is because democracy which relies on public input through voting and the public's compliance with public policy is hampered when its population acts in disregard for objective truth or their own best interests, based on misinformation. In addition to the need for the citizens to vote and act from a base of knowledge, a democracy needs an informed population so that people can access services and operations provided to them, such as free and easy access to vaccines or testing, and so that those in the population, who are aggrieved by issues the government can address, can direct their passion and energy into communicating the correct problem instead of directing the same fervor at a fictional reason for their situation to which the government can undertake no real action to solve a situation without identifying the real underlining problem.²²² Furthermore, when disinformation plays a role in confusing people, the region's democracy and any policies the government tries to enact can be undermined causing direct harm to the system and the people.

²²¹ HOCHSCHILD, JENNIFER L., and KATHERINE LEVINE EINSTEIN. "Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics." *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 4 (2015): 585–624. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43828727>.

²²² HOCHSCHILD, JENNIFER L., and KATHERINE LEVINE EINSTEIN. "Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics."

As stated in the previous chapter, misinformation that evokes strong emotions such as fear or anger (also known as fear arousing misinformation or FAM)²²³ can be extremely impactful, and that trust is essential in preventing misinformation from taking hold in a population. An example of the impact on health policy creation that FAM and distrust in authorities can have is the backlash to vaccination against Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) through the misinformation that the MMR vaccine was linked to cases of autism.²²⁴ The main factors at play are the ableist and negative view of people with autism, the fear for their children that parents experience, and the distrust in experts and government actors/institutions. The ableist view that autism renders life worthless or makes a person inferior triggers fear in parents when it is suggested their children might be at risk of becoming autistic. When these fearful parents then assess the claims made by experts and the government that there is no link between MMR vaccines and autism, and the claims that it does cause autism made by random people online, friends sharing links, or online personalities promoting the misinformation, they will tend to favor the claim made by what they consider the more trustworthy source.

So, in cases such as the parts of the United States where there are low levels of trust in the government or experts, the comparison is between a group the parents distrust and a person or group whom they either hold neutral or positive opinions of, leading them to side with the misinformation.²²⁵ This meant that public health mandates requiring/suggesting the MMR vaccine were hampered in their implementation both from non-adherence and by increased

²²³ Lee, Jiyoun. “When Web Add-on Correction Comes with Fear-Arousing Misinformation in Public Health Crisis: Focusing on the Role of Risk Perception in Belief in Misinformation.” *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 50, no. 1 (2022): 70–90.

²²⁴ HOCHSCHILD, JENNIFER L., and KATHERINE LEVINE EINSTEIN. “Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics.”

²²⁵ HOCHSCHILD, JENNIFER L., and KATHERINE LEVINE EINSTEIN. “Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics.”

pressure on political actors to rescind requirements or ban the vaccine altogether based on no real danger to the public, which led to a greater risk to public health.

Another factor at play in both the MMR vaccine example and the COVID-19 pandemic is the impact of a population's long-standing biases against clearly defined groups of people.²²⁶ The way bias interacts with a public health situation can take a few forms. In cases such as the MMR vaccine, the bias against people with autism created fear. In cases such as the AIDS crisis, homophobia and the perceived link between gay men in particular and AIDS drove inaction as people saw it as only effecting a group they disliked.²²⁷ In the case of COVID-19, the impact of bias is more complicated, but the link between COVID-19 and China invoked racism in many, and the way this was targeted changed over the course of the pandemic. Anti-Asian racism during the pandemic was used both to downplay the situation by Covid either being seen as a "race-specific bioweapon"²²⁸ that would not affect non-Asian people or that Asian people were the most likely to spread the virus which led to people telling Asian people to "go back to China" so as to not spread the illness.²²⁹ Or that China was at fault for either COVID-19, the vaccine or both, and that to protect oneself from this Chinese attack people should not follow health orders as they restrict the freedom China wants to steal. This type of bias plays a significant role in public perception and compliance with policy and can override information that a person

²²⁶ PRICE VINCENT, MEI-LING HSU, "PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT AIDS POLICIES THE ROLE OF MISINFORMATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALS" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 56, Issue 1, SPRING 1992, Pages 29–52, <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1086/269294>.

²²⁷ PRICE VINCENT, MEI-LING HSU, "PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT AIDS POLICIES THE ROLE OF MISINFORMATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALS".

²²⁸ Knight Dacre, "COVID-19 Pandemic Origins: Bioweapons and the History of Laboratory Leaks" *South Med J*. 2021 Aug;114(8):465-467. doi: 10.14423/SMJ.0000000000001283. PMID: 34345925; PMCID: PMC8300139. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8300139/>.

²²⁹ Balintec Vanessa, "2 years into the pandemic, anti-Asian hate is still on the rise in Canada, report shows" *CBC News*, Apr 03, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/2-years-into-the-pandemic-anti-asian-hate-is-still-on-the-rise-in-canada-report-shows-1.6404034>.

previously relied on. This means that in cases of political debate, bigotry, and bias can play an even greater role than even FAM.²³⁰

As such, misinformation can utilize bias or just induce fear in order to undermine policy implementation or creation. As there is ample opportunity for FAM during a pandemic and bigotry is present systematically, we are faced with a difficult problem for anyone seeking to benefit public health. That is not to say that a government can have no influence on the impact misinformation has on policy. When trusted by its population a government can push back to a degree, but trust is never universal in a large populace and the act of debunking misinformation may only serve to promote it. By naming that there is a debate on a topic, people are more open to alternative theories and ideas. So, when a government says that there is another claim than theirs even when named clearly as a false claim, some will only hear that there is another option than the government's, and thus the government's action to stop the spread will promote the misinformation to a small part of their population, who are both distrustful and unaware of the misinformation.²³¹ Even worse is when a political figure flirts with the possibility of misinformation being true or even endorses the misinformation. Then, the effect is reversed and those who trust them are more likely to be misinformed and the small group who distrusts them and were misinformed will become more open to the truth.²³² However, in the first option, a small number are freshly exposed to the misinformation, and some who already believed it are reinforced in their belief. The second option only benefits a small group making it much more

²³⁰ PRICE VINCENT, MEI-LING HSU, "PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT AIDS POLICIES THE ROLE OF MISINFORMATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALS".

²³¹ HOCHSCHILD, JENNIFER L., and KATHERINE LEVINE EINSTEIN. "Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics."

²³² HOCHSCHILD, JENNIFER L., and KATHERINE LEVINE EINSTEIN. "Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics."

damaging and can even allow the chance for misinformation narratives to become disinformation to serve a political actor's needs.²³³

2.2: What was Alberta's public health response?

What follows is a comprehensive timeline of the public health actions taken by the Alberta government during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes orders, suggestions, and communications from the Alberta government. This timeline, in partnership with the misinformation timeline from chapter 1, will be used to examine the connection between Alberta's pandemic response and misinformation and will be helpful in understanding what the Albertan public health response to the pandemic was.

2.2.1: Timeline of Alberta's public health response

2020

January

- January 20th: First Covid-19 test performed in Alberta ²³⁴

February

- February 24th: Retroactive tests would later determine the first Covid-19 case in Alberta was on this date; this was not realized until months later.²³⁵

March

- March 5: Alberta identifies what is believed its first COVID-19 case. This is the first case known to the public.²³⁶

²³³ HOCHSCHILD, JENNIFER L., and KATHERINE LEVINE EINSTEIN. "Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics."

²³⁴ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta". Global News, December 28, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7538547/covid-19-alberta-health-timeline/>.

²³⁵ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

²³⁶ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta" Calgary Herald, Mar 15, 2022. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/two-years-of-covid-19-a-timeline-of-the-pandemic-in-alberta>.

- March 9: Chief Medical Officer of Health Doctor Deena Hinshaw stated, "At this point, it is likely we will be dealing with this virus worldwide for many months to come."²³⁷
- March 12th: Alberta's first restrictions were put in place, and gatherings with more than 250 people were canceled. ²³⁸
- March 15: Alberta cities declare a state of local emergency. closing most non-essential businesses and services.
 - o "Alberta cancels all school classes and declares a provincial public health state of emergency the following day."²³⁹
- March 17th: Alberta declares a state of public health emergency²⁴⁰
 - o A ban on gatherings of 50 or more put in place²⁴¹
- March 18: When asked about the impact restrictions were having on the economy, Dr. Hinshaw stated, "In order to save lives, I have had to make recommendations that will take away livelihoods for many Albertans over the next several weeks to months"²⁴²
- March 19: "Alberta recorded the first COVID-19 death in the province"²⁴³
- March 27th: "The province announced many non-essential businesses would temporarily close and that gatherings would be limited to 15 people."²⁴⁴

²³⁷ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

²³⁸ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

²³⁹ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta".

²⁴⁰ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

²⁴¹ Assaly Richie, "How we got here: A timeline of Alberta's response to the COVID-19 pandemic" Toronto Star, Sept. 16, 2021. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/09/16/how-we-got-here-a-timeline-of-albertas-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.html>.

²⁴² Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

²⁴³ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

²⁴⁴ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

- March 28: “The UCP government announced that they would redirect \$128 million from the K–12 education budget to their COVID response.”²⁴⁵

April

- April 6th: “Alberta chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw recommends the use of non-medical face masks when physical distancing is difficult.”²⁴⁶
- April 7th: “Premier Jason Kenney addressed the province in a televised speech warning Albertans about the dangers of the virus.”²⁴⁷
- April 13th: “Alberta Health expanded testing to include all Albertans with symptoms.”²⁴⁸
- April 23: Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Deena "Hinshaw restricts gatherings of more than 15 people.”²⁴⁹
- April 30th: “Details of the provincial relaunch were released.”²⁵⁰

May

- May 3: “The end of the province’s first wave of the virus.”²⁵¹
- May 13: “Alberta enters Stage 1 of its COVID-19 relaunch, letting businesses like restaurants and retailers reopen, but Calgary and Brooks are singled out of the relaunch due to ongoing meat-plant outbreaks. Both municipalities are allowed to join in the relaunch on May 25.”²⁵²

²⁴⁵ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. “Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools” *Journal of Teaching and Learning* Vol. 15, No. 2 (2021), pp. 117–132 <https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v15i2.6725>. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1313646.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁴⁷ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁴⁸ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁴⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁵⁰ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁵¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁵² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- May 29th: “Alberta Health expanded testing to include all Albertans with or without symptoms who wanted to receive a test.”²⁵³

June

- June 12: “Stage 2 of Alberta’s relaunch begins a week ahead of schedule, with businesses like massage clinics, theatres and libraries allowed to reopen.”²⁵⁴
 - o “Calgary’s local state of emergency expires after three months, with Alberta following on June 16.”²⁵⁵

July

- July 21:” Alberta announces schools will reopen in September with added safety measures.”
 - o “Calgary makes mask use mandatory in indoor public spaces effective Aug. 1.”
 - o “COVID-19 case counts begin to surge, with nearly 10,000 confirmed cases and 202 deaths.”
- July 27: “The curve is no longer flat,” Dr. Hinshaw announced as caseloads skyrocketed, prompting questions about whether Alberta reopened too quickly.”²⁵⁶
- July 30: “Serology testing suggests nearly 36,000 Albertans had COVID-19 by mid-May, far higher than official counts.”²⁵⁷
 - o Alberta chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena “Hinshaw urges mask use, but Alberta does not introduce a mandate.”²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁵⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁵⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁵⁶ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁵⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁵⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

August

- Aug. 4: “Alberta mandates mask use for its back-to-school plan for students in grades 4 to 12.”²⁵⁹
- Aug. 20: COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Alberta. Alberta's chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw suggests young people and indoor gatherings are driving the spread.²⁶⁰
- August 21st: “Teachers, parents and students across the province hold rallies to protest the UCP’s school re-entry plan, which does not include funding to reduce class sizes. Concerns also grow around topics such as ventilation, sanitation, and staffing.”²⁶¹

September

- Sept. 1: Students head back to school, while Alberta public health services release data suggesting Alberta has entered its second Covid wave.²⁶²
 - o “Kenney says his government has accepted that COVID-19 infections in schools are inevitable and don’t warrant closing down all classrooms: "It's time to go back to some kind of normal.”²⁶³
- Sept. 21: “Alberta Health Services staff work to contain multiple COVID-19 outbreaks at Foothills Medical Centre.”²⁶⁴

October

- Oct. 8: “Voluntary” COVID-19 restrictions come to the AHS Edmonton zone amid a surge in infections.” Other areas of Alberta such as Calgary see no new measures.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁶⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁶¹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

²⁶² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁶³ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

²⁶⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁶⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Oct. 12: Spread caused by Thanksgiving gatherings cements the reality that Alberta is experiencing a second wave.²⁶⁶
- October 13: “The province shifted to appointment-only COVID-19 tests as drop-in testing proved to only account for a small amount of confirmed cases.”²⁶⁷
- Oct. 26: “Alberta imposes a mandatory 15-person limit on social gatherings for Calgary.”²⁶⁸
- October 27: “Alberta Health rushed to hire contact tracers after Dr. Hinshaw admitted the existing staff could not keep up with new cases.”²⁶⁹

November

- Nov. 5: “Alberta’s contact tracing system is overwhelmed by surging case counts. The system doesn’t recover until February.”²⁷⁰
- Nov. 12: “Hundreds of Alberta doctors sign a letter urging the province to enter a circuit-breaker lockdown to curb the second wave.”²⁷¹
 - o “Restaurants and bars face tighter restrictions, including an earlier last call for alcohol, but the province stops short of more strict restrictions.”
- November 20: “Our current situation is grim,” Dr. Hinshaw said as Alberta broke record after record with climbing case counts.”²⁷²
- November 21: “Alberta Health Services said intensive care units across the province were approaching capacity limits as hospitalizations increased.”²⁷³

²⁶⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁶⁷ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁶⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁶⁹ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁷⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁷¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁷² Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁷³ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

- Nov. 24: Following weeks of rising COVID-19 case numbers, “Alberta announces new restrictions, banning social gatherings, closing high schools and limited attendance at places of worship.”²⁷⁴
- November 26: “Recordings of health meetings were leaked to the CBC and appeared to show the tension between Dr. Hinshaw and the Alberta government pandemic response team. Dr. Hinshaw called the leak "a personal betrayal.”²⁷⁵

December

- Dec. 8: Lockdown-style restrictions come to Alberta. Non-essential businesses closed, and all social gatherings were banned.²⁷⁶
- Dec. 15: “Long-term care residents receive the first doses of COVID-19 vaccine in Alberta”²⁷⁷

2021

January

- Jan. 8: “Increasing numbers of medical workers are made eligible to receive the Covid vaccine.”²⁷⁸
- Jan. 14: “Alberta eases restrictions for outdoor gatherings and allows personal services businesses to reopen as case counts slowly decline.”²⁷⁹
- Jan. 18: “Premier Jason Kenney says Alberta will run out of vaccine as Pfizer shipments to Canada halt.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁷⁵ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

²⁷⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁷⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁷⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁷⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁸⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Jan. 29: “Alberta announces it will ease some restrictions on restaurants, indoor fitness and kids’ sport on Feb. 8.”²⁸¹

February

- Feb. 3: Alberta's chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw bragged that Alberta had “bent the curve” citing falling case counts.²⁸²
 - o Fifty COVID-19 variant cases were identified.
- Feb. 24: Vaccine appointments for those born in 1946 or earlier became available. However, “technical problems cause headaches, but more than 50,000 seniors book slots, with some getting immunized the same day.”²⁸³
- Feb. 26: “Health Canada regulators approve the AstraZeneca vaccine”²⁸⁴

March

- March 1: “Gyms and libraries are allowed to reopen in Alberta.” All other businesses are still closed.²⁸⁵
- March 8: “After a week delay due to rising case numbers, former Health Minister Tyler Shandro announced Alberta will enter the second step of its economic relaunch plan”²⁸⁶
- March 10: Alberta starts booking appointments online for the AstraZeneca vaccine.

April

- April 6: “Premier Jason Kenney announced the province will reintroduce restrictions on restaurants, fitness centers, and retail due to spiking variant cases and hospitalizations.”²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁸² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁸³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁸⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁸⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁸⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁸⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- “Citing widespread rule-breaking and new COVID-19 variants, Kenney announces that Alberta is in a third wave of the pandemic, as the province averages 1,000 new cases each day.”²⁸⁸
- April 7: “While Alberta doctors say the latest restrictions imposed were not enough, 16 UPC MLAs released a public letter saying the restrictions moved the province “backward.”²⁸⁹
 - “Fifteen UCP MLAs release a public letter criticizing new measures, despite the fact Alberta has the highest case counts and some of the loosest public health restrictions in the country.”²⁹⁰
- April 29: “Alberta sets daily active COVID case records as the government tightens restrictions; Kenney also threatened possibly implementing curfews if cases continued to rise.”²⁹¹

May

- May 4: “With more than 23,000 active cases in Alberta and the highest case rate per population in Canada, Kenney announced a new set of restrictions which included K-12 students moving online, restaurants moving to takeout service only, closure of personal care businesses, and capacity restrictions on outdoor social gatherings, places of worship, and funerals.”
 - List of restrictions announced.²⁹²
 - Effective May 5th
 - Post-secondary learning shifts online.

²⁸⁸ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

²⁸⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁹⁰ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

²⁹¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁹² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Faith services are limited to 15 people in person.
- Indoor fitness centers closed for one-on-one training.
- Retail capacity is limited to 10 percent of the fire code, bottoming out at 5 customers.
- Outside social gatherings are limited to 5 people and indoor gatherings are still prohibited.
- Funerals and weddings are limited to 10 people.
- Effective May 7th
 - Kindergarten through grade 12 schooling shifts to home learning until May 25.
- Effective May 9th
 - Outdoor recreation with those outside of your household or outside of the two-person bubble of someone living alone is prohibited.
 - All indoor recreation in public is prohibited.
 - In-person dining on patios for service venues is prohibited, only takeout/delivery is allowed.
 - Hair and nail salons and all other aesthetic wellness businesses such as tattoo parlors must close.
- May 18: Premier Jason “Kenney announces more than 50 per cent of Albertans aged 12 and over have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.”²⁹³

²⁹³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- May 26: Premier Jason “Kenney announces the controversial three-stage Open for Summer plan, and says all restrictions could be lifted in Alberta by July.”²⁹⁴
 - o Open for summer replaced “the “Path Forward” framework ... Tied to both vaccination rates and hospitalizations, the plan aims to drop all restrictions by July.”²⁹⁵

June

- June 18: “With over 70 per cent of eligible Albertans receiving at least one dose of vaccine, Kenney announced all restrictions would be lifted on July 1.”²⁹⁶

July

- July 1: “Rules around indoor and outdoor social gatherings, capacity limits in businesses and other venues, recreation, large events like concerts or sports and other settings were lifted.”²⁹⁷
 - o "Alberta becomes the first Canadian jurisdiction to drop all restrictions after hitting the government's goal of getting a first dose into 70 percent of the eligible population. "Don't live in fear," Kenney told Albertans, before promising the "best summer ever." ²⁹⁸
- July 5: “A Calgary city council vote went 10-4 in favor of rescinding its mandatory masking rules.”²⁹⁹
- July 12: Despite Manitoba and Quebec having announced vaccine passport programs, “Kenney says Alberta will not move in that direction.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁹⁵ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

²⁹⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁹⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

²⁹⁸ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

²⁹⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³⁰⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- July 28: Cases continued to rise in Alberta. “Dr. Hinshaw announced starting Aug. 16, provincial masking would no longer be required for transit, taxis and rideshares. It continued to be recommended in schools.”³⁰¹
 - o “And that there will no longer be a legally required isolation period should someone test positive for COVID-19.”³⁰²

August

- Aug. 9: “With concerns mounting regarding the Delta variant, the Alberta Medical Association Section of Pediatrics penned a letter to Kenney, pleading with the province to keep public health measures in place.”³⁰³
 - o “Expressing grave concern over Alberta’s decision to eliminate COVID-19 testing and tracing, and its plan to end mandated isolation for positive cases.”³⁰⁴
- Aug. 13: “Due to public pressure and rising case counts, the provincial government announced it would be taking a step back from lifting public health measures, and instead be keeping them in place for an additional six weeks.”
 - o “Following weeks of pressure, the Alberta government reverses course, extending remaining public health restrictions for six more weeks. “We are not going backward. We are pausing to monitor and assess before taking a step forward,” Hinshaw said.”³⁰⁵

September

- Sept. 1: “During a Q&A marking his first appearance since Aug. 9, Kenney says the coming fourth wave will be a “wave of the unvaccinated.” He said if the province, which

³⁰¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³⁰² Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³⁰³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³⁰⁴ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³⁰⁵ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

lagged most in Canada in terms of vaccination, had 90 per cent vaccine coverage there would not be meaningful pressure on the health-care system.”³⁰⁶

- “Kenney addresses Albertans for the first time since Aug. 9, after modelling from a team of independent pandemic researchers suggests a health crisis is unavoidable unless there is strong action. It is later confirmed that Kenney took a two-week vacation in Europe in late August.”³⁰⁷
- Sept. 3: A survey suggests “Over 75% of Albertans would support a vaccine passport”.³⁰⁸
- Sept. 3: Kenney offers \$100 gift cards to Albertans who currently weren’t vaccinated if they got vaccinated. ³⁰⁹
 - “Calgary restores its mask bylaw and declares a state of local emergency as case counts ramp up.”
 - “For the love of God, please get vaccinated now,” “If you are unvaccinated, it is urgent that you protect yourself.” Kenney told the media.³¹⁰
- Sept. 7th: “Twelve Alberta mayors call for Kenney to bring in provincewide COVID-19 vaccine passport rules.”³¹¹
- Sept 13th: “Hinshaw admits lifting all public health restrictions in July was the wrong move. “The expectations did not match the reality,” Hinshaw said.”³¹²
 - "Hinshaw says she looked at the evidence, consulted with colleagues, and watched modeling in early summer — all of which led her to recommend that

³⁰⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³⁰⁷ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³⁰⁸ Kost Hannah, “Over 75% of Albertans would support vaccine passport, survey suggests” CBC News, September 3, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-vaccine-passport-kenney-leger-poll-covid-1.6164353>.

³⁰⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³¹⁰ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³¹¹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³¹² Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

Alberta move toward "endemic" at the outset of summer. "The move to endemics was too early," she said."³¹³

- Sept. 15: Premier Jason Kenney “declares a state of public health emergency in Alberta and introduces a number of new restrictions.”³¹⁴
 - o “Despite having promised for weeks that the province would not do so”³¹⁵
Premier Kenney “also announced the implementation of a vaccine passport program – also known as the Restriction Exemption Program.”
 - o “Kenney defends his decision to lift restrictions during the summer, but says he is sorry for being “too enthusiastic” that the province would be open for good and for underestimating the virus.”³¹⁶
- Sept 28: “Cases in children reach a record high not seen since during the pandemic.”³¹⁷

October

- Oct. 5: “Alberta rolls out its first COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for the general public”³¹⁸
- Oct. 28: The Alberta government “announces that support workers from the Canadian Red Cross, Canadian Armed Forces and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador are no longer needed, about one month after it was announced they would assist in the province’s strained hospitals.”³¹⁹

³¹³ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³¹⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³¹⁵ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³¹⁶ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

³¹⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³¹⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³¹⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

November

- Nov. 4: “The province’s health minister reveals Alberta cancelled an estimated 15,000 surgeries as it scrambled to preserve health-care capacity during the fourth wave of COVID-19.”³²⁰
- Nov. 24: “Vaccine bookings for Alberta children aged 5-11 opens.”
- Nov. 25: “Scientists announce they’ve detected a new variant of COVID-19 in South Africa with unusual mutations. The variant is named Omicron.”³²¹
- Nov. 30: “The Omicron COVID-19 variant is confirmed in Alberta”³²²

December

- Dec. 15: “Premier Jason Kenney announces rapid COVID-19 antigen tests will be made available to Albertans as the province also lifts some restrictions around indoor gatherings.”³²³
- Dec. 21: “Alberta opens up its booster shots to anyone aged 18 or older and announces capacity limits on certain indoor venues, as well as restricted liquor serving hours in an attempt to bring down rapidly rising COVID-19 cases brought on by the Omicron variant.”³²⁴

2022

January

- Jan. 17: “Health Minister Jason Copping tests positive for COVID-19 as the number of hospitalizations for the virus top 1,000.”³²⁵

³²⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³²¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³²² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³²³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³²⁴ CTV News Edmonton “Alberta opens COVID-19 vaccine boosters to all adults, reduces attendance at large venues”, CTV News, December 21, 2021. <https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/alberta-opens-covid-19-vaccine-boosters-to-all-adults-reduces-attendance-at-large-venues-1.5715178>

³²⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Jan. 25: “Health Minister Jason Copping announces an initial shipment of Pfizer’s COVID-19 anti-viral drug Paxlovid has arrived in the province, with 3,200 courses of treatment available to eligible Albertans beginning Jan. 31.”³²⁶
- Jan. 28: “A convoy of truckers rolls into Ottawa and sets up a protest against vaccine mandates and other health measures in that city’s downtown.”³²⁷
- Jan. 29: “Truck drivers and other protesters set up a blockade at Alberta’s Coutts border crossing with the U.S.”³²⁸

February

- Feb. 9: “Premier Jason Kenney announces the vaccine passport program, known officially as the Restrictions Exemption Program, will end at midnight. He also announces plans to end other health restrictions such as capacity limits in smaller venues in the following days.”³²⁹
- Feb. 14: “Students in Alberta are no longer required to wear masks.”³³⁰
 - o “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invokes the Emergencies Act over an ongoing protest in the nation’s capital by truckers and others opposed to health restrictions.”
- Feb. 15: “Protesters at the Coutts border blockade pack up and head for home, one day after RCMP seized illegal weapons and arrested 13 people.”³³¹

³²⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³²⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³²⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³²⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³³⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³³¹ CBC News, “Mounties seize guns and arrest 13 protesters at border blockade in Alberta” CBC News, Feb 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/coutts-protest-blockade-arrests-rcmp-monday-1.6351112>.

- Feb. 18: Canada’s “top doctor Theresa Tam says Canada is past the peak of the COVID-19 wave caused by the Omicron variant and is ready to move out of a crisis response.”³³²

March

- March 1: “Most health restrictions are lifted in Alberta, with the exception of certain health care settings.”³³³
 - o “Premier Jason Kenney says any attempt by municipalities to bring in their own health restrictions will be blocked by the province.”
- March 8th: It was announced that "Effective March 10 at 4 p.m., Alberta Health Services (AHS) will no longer require proof of COVID-19 vaccination or regular rapid testing of its current workers.”³³⁴

April

- April 6th: The Alberta government announced that it “is expanding eligibility for fourth doses of COVID-19 vaccine and Paxlovid treatment to protect those most at risk from severe outcomes.”³³⁵

June

- June 13th: “Alberta will take the final step in its plan to ease public health measures as the province moves past the Omicron BA.2 wave and COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to decline.”³³⁶

³³² The Canadian Press, “Top doctor says Canada is past peak of Omicron-fuelled wave of COVID-19”. CBC News, Feb 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/top-doctor-says-canada-is-past-peak-of-omicron-fuelled-wave-of-covid-19-1.6357173#:~:text=The%20country's%20top%20doctor%20says,sense%20of%20normalcy%2C%22%20Dr.>

³³³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³³⁴ Alberta Government. “AHS mandatory vaccination policy lifted” Alberta.ca, Mar 08, 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=8206835279AEF-F976-3D2F-EAA53CFCDD239C52>.

³³⁵ Alberta government, “Alberta expands access to fourth vaccine doses” Alberta.ca, April 6th, 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=822960A564540-9E17-A696-8D1B30A93143EF97>

³³⁶ Alberta Government “Alberta to lift remaining health restrictions” Alberta.ca, June 12th, 2023. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=83071B896298F-E65E-B3B8-D14840FE40EFD1F>.

- Public health measures would end effect on June 15. After which point isolation and masking would be recommended but not mandatory.
- June 29th: Minister of Health Jason Copping published a statement about the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic in Alberta.
 - “Today’s COVID-19 update is more good news for Albertans and for our health-care system. The Omicron wave continues to recede. Levels of the virus in wastewater are trending down across the province, including in Edmonton and Calgary, and are at or near the levels before Omicron in many centers.”
 - “The number of COVID-19 patients in hospital continues to drop.”
 - “Our hospitals and other services remain under strain, especially in Edmonton and Calgary, for the same reasons as in other provinces: a wave of patients in recent months, plus the impact of the past two years on the health workforce.”
 - “These pressures will ease as the Omicron BA.2 wave recedes and we get through the current wave of other respiratory viruses. And we’re continuing to add capacity. Alberta Health Services has now opened 26 of the 50 new ICU beds funded in Budget 2022 and nine new ambulances will be on the streets in Edmonton and Calgary by the end of this month.”
 - “It’s been a tough spring for our health system in Alberta and across Canada. We know the pandemic is not over. We have to expect cases to increase again, most likely in the fall, and we’re preparing for that. We’ll continue to closely monitor the emergence of new variants and keep Albertans informed of the risks from the pandemic and how we’re responding to them.”

July

- July 19th: Alberta expanded COVID-19 boosters to those over the age of 18 to "provide Albertans with more choices about increasing their protection against COVID-19 based on their personal risk factors."³³⁷
- July 29th: "COVID-19 vaccine appointments are available for children between six months and five years of age starting Aug. 2."³³⁸

August

- August 28th: eligibility for the booster was expanded to kids aged 5-11³³⁹

October

- October 14: "Danielle Smith reiterated in her first press conference as Alberta premier that she intends to amend the Alberta Human Rights Act to protect people from losing their jobs because of vaccine status."³⁴⁰
 - o She previously talked about this during her campaign.

2023

January

- January 19th: "Premier Danielle Smith is establishing an expert panel to review the legislation and governance practices used by the Government of Alberta during the management of the COVID-19 public health emergency and to recommend changes necessary to improve government response to future health emergencies."³⁴¹

³³⁷ Alberta Government, "Expanding COVID-19 booster choices for those 18+" Alberta.ca, July 19th 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=84282EA99A2B3-CAB4-5B7F-725C6A3812CCBE2D>.

³³⁸ Alberta Government "Rollout of COVID-19 vaccine for children under" July 29th, 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=84349F2BF1BC8-B69E-ED80-0B6C1B4CC1D1CDA0>.

³³⁹ Alberta Government, "Boosters expand to kids aged 5-11" August 26th, 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=844648BFECF81-03B4-4A75-B3377ED1E6AD24D7>.

³⁴⁰ Markusoff Jason. "Danielle Smith wants vaccine status to be a human right. Expect a petri dish of problems" CBC News, Oct 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/danielle-smith-vaccine-human-rights-analysis-1.6615900>.

³⁴¹ Alberta Government, "Improving Alberta's response to public health emergencies" Alberta.ca, Jan 19, 2023. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86404F47300F9-D122-5701-9E14BBC5D4AAFF3E>.

February

- February 9th: During a live press conference Premier Smith referred to working to grant amnesty for those charged with non-violent COVID-related charges, such as street preacher and political activist Artur Pawlowski whom Smith had met with in 2022.³⁴²³⁴³
- February 23rd: The COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities report was published but the Auditor General of Alberta³⁴⁴. This report reviewed “the public health response by the Department of Health (Alberta Health) and Alberta Health Services (AHS) to COVID-19 in Alberta’s 355 publicly funded continuing care facilities. We audited what Alberta Health and AHS did to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in these facilities during waves one and two of the COVID-19 pandemic.”³⁴⁵
 - o The report found that “we concluded that Alberta Health and AHS had processes to respond to COVID-19 in continuing care facilities, but that improvements can be made.”³⁴⁶

March

- March 29th: Premier Danielle Smith published a statement about the CBC article referencing her statements about granting amnesty for “those charged with non-violent, non-firearms COVID-related charges.”³⁴⁷

³⁴² Black Matthew. “Smith sticks to her story on prosecutors, denies seeking amnesty for controversial pastor” Edmonton Journal, Feb 09, 2023. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/smith-sticks-to-her-story-on-prosecutors-denies-seeking-amnesty-for-controversial-pastor>.

³⁴³ Alberta Government, “CORRECTION*: Statement: Premier Danielle Smith” March 29th, 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86837CCB50BB8-CB1F-4883-C625969B6B8D9586>.

³⁴⁴ Alberta Auditor General, “COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities” Alberta Health Services, February 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230303073925/https://www.oag.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/oag-covid19-cont-care-facilities-feb2023.pdf>.

³⁴⁵ Alberta Auditor General, “COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities”

³⁴⁶ Alberta Auditor General, “COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities”

³⁴⁷ Alberta Government, “CORRECTION*: Statement: Premier Danielle Smith” March 29th, 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86837CCB50BB8-CB1F-4883-C625969B6B8D9586>.

- “Later today, in an effort to continue their campaign of defamatory attacks against me and my office staff, the CBC intends to release an article about a conversation I had with an individual named Artur Pawlowski.”
- “During a live press conference on Feb. 9, 2023*, I referenced this very conversation where Mr. Pawlowski expressed his frustration to me with pandemic-related public health orders. This should come as no shock since I spent a lot of time before and during my leadership campaign talking to hundreds of Albertans about COVID-related public health orders and violations.”
- “As I have previously stated, I had my staff work with the Ministry of Justice to determine if anything could be done to grant amnesty for those charged with non-violent, non-firearms COVID-related charges.”
- “As also indicated previously in multiple interviews, I received a legal brief from the Ministry of Justice recommending against pursuing amnesty further, as several matters involving this issue were and still are before the courts. I have followed that advice.”
- “At no time have I spoken with anyone from the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service, nor to my knowledge have any of my office’s staff. Allegations to the contrary are defamatory and will be dealt with accordingly.”

April

- April 20th: Responses to the Preston Manning-led COVID-19 review panel were obtained by Post media through a freedom of information request.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ Black Matthew, “Reliance on expertise, stronger CMOH the most common early replies to Manning-led COVID-19 review panel” Edmonton Journal, Apr 20, 2023. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/reliance-on-expertise-stronger-cmoh-the-most-common-early-replies-to-manning-led-covid-19-review-panel#:~:text=Politics-,Reliance%20on%20expertise%2C%20stronger%20CMOH%20the%20most%20common%20early%20replies,politicians%2C%E2%80%9D%20reads%20one%20reply>.

- The panel started in January and asked Albertans one question via an online survey which asked, "What changes should be made, if any, to the laws of Alberta to better equip the province to cope with future public health emergencies?"
- "The 2,225 responses from the survey's first week — received by the government between Jan. 19 and Jan. 26."
- "The government is scheduled to release an interim report and recommendations by June 30 with the final report to come by Nov. 15."
- "The NDP has pledged to end the panel should it be elected as government in May."
- "Calls for greater reliance on medical expertise and a strengthened, more independent role for the chief medical officer of health were the two most frequent subjects of early responses."
 - "The most common replies stressed the need for increased reliance on medical and scientific expertise, a decreased emphasis on the opinion of politicians, and greater use of peer-reviewed data to form evidence-based solutions."
 - "Responses in this category amounted to just over 17 per cent of all replies, or 350 in total."
 - "The next most common category of response echoed a similar message in calling for greater powers and autonomy for the province's chief medical officer of health (CMOH)."
 - "Answers specifically calling for a strengthened CMOH made up 16.6 per cent of all replies, or 339 in all."

- “The third and fifth most common types of replies took more skeptical views of government’s role and public health measures.”
 - “Just over 15 per cent of replies, or 310 in total, called for weakened or eliminated public health measures, specifically, mandates for masking and physical distancing.”
- “About eight per cent of replies indicated some of form of dissent, most often challenging the validity of the survey, the panel or Manning’s leadership of it.”
- “Slightly more than three per cent of all replies denied the ongoing pandemic was a health threat at all, or echoed conspiracy theories involving the World Health Organization, World Economic Forum, and computer chips implanted in vaccines, often followed by a call for criminal charges to be laid against government and health-care leaders.”

May

- May 4, 2023, “the International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee of the WHO downgraded the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee determined that COVID-19 is now an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ Infection Prevention and Control Canada, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) SARS-CoV-2” Ipac-canada.org, <https://ipac-canada.org/coronavirus-resources#:~:text=On%20March%2011%2C%202020%20the,19%20viral%20disease%20a%20pandemic>.

2.3: How effective was Alberta's public health strategy?

The effect that Alberta's Public health actions during the pandemic had, when compared to similarly located and situated provinces, will help determine the overall quality of the response. Once we know both the quality of the public health strategy and can examine the evidence of misinformation having an impact, we can determine if the public health actions made during the pandemic, which were potentially influenced by misinformation, had a deleterious effect on Alberta's overall response to the pandemic.

To examine this, we will compare several metrics of the effects of Covid-19 in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. These four provinces alongside Alberta make up western Canada. The rest of western Canada was chosen as a comparison to the subject province of Alberta because the five are similarly located, are all connected, share a border with the United States, and experience similar climates. These similarities should help reduce the influences of outside factors, as much as possible, to allow for clear comparison. The categories that we will compare for the western Canadian provinces are cases and deaths by population, case mortality rate, the number of cases of infection in healthcare workers as part of the percent of the total cases, and the number of healthcare workers who died. While these statistics do not encompass every type of impact, they are less subjective and easier to measure than more nebulous values by which individuals may rate their personal experience of the pandemic. The following data represents the most current information available for each province as of the writing of this thesis.

- Alberta
 - (Unless otherwise stated numbers are current as of May 15th, 2023)

- Total cases: 632,775³⁵⁰
- Deaths: 5,733³⁵¹
- Vaccine rate one dose: 79.7% as of April 23rd, 2023.³⁵²
- Health care worker cases: 26,011 as of January 14th, 2022³⁵³
- Population: 4,647,178³⁵⁴
 - Cases by population: 13.61%
 - Deaths by population: 0.12%
 - Case mortality rate: 0.91%
 - Healthcare worker percentage of cases: 4.11%
 - Healthcare worker deaths: 10
- British Columbia
 - (Unless otherwise stated numbers are current as of May 13th, 2023)
 - Total cases: 400,661³⁵⁵
 - Deaths: 5,520³⁵⁶

³⁵⁰ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Total death count by province/territory” Health Infobase, Jun 6th, 2023. https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/current-situation.html?stat=num&measure=deaths_total&map=pt#a2

³⁵¹ Government of Canada, COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Figure 1. Types of statistics Count of total deaths of COVID-19, province/territory as of May 27, 2023" Health Infobase June 6, 2023. https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/current-situation.html?stat=num&measure=deaths_total&map=pt#a2

³⁵² Government of Canada, "COVID-19 vaccination: Vaccination coverage" health Infobase May 5, 2023, <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccination-coverage/>.

³⁵³ Canadian Institute for Health Information. "COVID-19 cases and deaths in health care workers in Canada — infographic" January 14th, 2022. <https://www.cihi.ca/en/covid-19-cases-and-deaths-in-health-care-workers-in-canada-infographic>.

³⁵⁴ Alberta Government, “Population statistics” Alberta.ca, March 22, 2023. <https://www.alberta.ca/population-statistics.aspx>.

³⁵⁵ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Total death count by province/territory” Health Infobase, Jun 6th, 2023. https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/current-situation.html?stat=num&measure=deaths_total&map=pt#a2

³⁵⁶ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Total death count by province/territory” Health Infobase, Jun 6th, 2023. https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/current-situation.html?stat=num&measure=deaths_total&map=pt#a2

- Vaccine rate one dose: 86.7% as of April 23rd, 2023.³⁵⁷
- Health care worker Cases:10,960 as of January 14th, 2022³⁵⁸
- Population: 5,399,118³⁵⁹
 - Cases by population: 7.42%
 - Deaths by population:0.10%
 - Case mortality rate: 1.37%
 - Healthcare worker percentage of cases: 2.74%
 - Healthcare worker deaths: 0
- Saskatchewan
 - (Unless otherwise stated numbers are current as of May 13th, 2023)
 - Total cases: 155,381³⁶⁰
 - Deaths: 1,960³⁶¹
 - Vaccine rate one dose: 81.1% as of April 23rd, 2023.³⁶²
 - Health care worker Cases: 3,929 as of January 14th, 2022³⁶³
 - Population: 1,214,618³⁶⁴
 - Cases by population: 12.79%
 - Deaths by population: 0.16%

³⁵⁷ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 vaccination: Vaccination coverage”

³⁵⁸ Canadian Institute for Health Information. “COVID-19 cases and deaths in health care workers in Canada — infographic”

³⁵⁹ Alberta Government, “Population statistics”

³⁶⁰ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Total death count by province/territory”.

³⁶¹ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Total death count by province/territory”.

³⁶² Government of Canada, “COVID-19 vaccination: Vaccination coverage”

³⁶³ Canadian Institute for Health Information. “COVID-19 cases and deaths in health care workers in Canada — infographic”

³⁶⁴ Alberta Government, “Population statistics”

- Case mortality rate: 1.26%
- Healthcare worker percentage of cases: 2.52%
- Healthcare worker deaths: 1
- Manitoba
 - (Unless otherwise stated numbers are current as of May 13th, 2023)
 - Total cases: 156,138³⁶⁵
 - Deaths: 2,501³⁶⁶
 - Vaccine rate one dose: 82.2% as of April 23rd, 2023.³⁶⁷
 - Health care worker Cases: 5,413 as of January 14th, 2022³⁶⁸
 - Population: 1,431,792
 - Cases by population: 10.9%
 - Deaths by population: 0.17%
 - Case mortality rate: 1.60%
 - Healthcare worker percentage of cases: 3.5%
 - Healthcare worker deaths: 5

What we see in this data is as follows. In terms of the number of cases for their population, Alberta had the most at 13.61% with Saskatchewan following at 12.79%. Alberta had the second lowest deaths by population rate at 0.12%, with BC doing slightly better at 0.10%. Saskatchewan had more at 0.16% and Manitoba had the most with

³⁶⁵ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Total death count by province/territory”.

³⁶⁶ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update: Current situation: Total death count by province/territory”.

³⁶⁷ Government of Canada, “COVID-19 vaccination: Vaccination coverage”

³⁶⁸ Canadian Institute for Health Information. “COVID-19 cases and deaths in health care workers in Canada — infographic”

0.17%. When comparing the mortality rate for those infected, Alberta had the lowest rate at 0.91%, while BC had the highest mortality rate at 1.37%.

Turning to healthcare workers, we see that Alberta's healthcare workers made up the most cases of the total being 4.11% of total cases, the next closest being Manitoba's healthcare workers making up 3.5% of total cases, BC at 2.74% and Saskatchewan was the lowest at 2.52%. Additionally, Alberta had the most healthcare workers die with 10 deaths, Manitoba had the second most with 5 deaths, Saskatchewan followed with 1 death, and BC reported no deaths of healthcare workers.

While the average Albertan had a low chance comparatively of dying due to Covid-19, their chances of being infected were the highest. Additionally, Alberta healthcare workers were at a high risk of infection and death when compared to healthcare workers in other provinces. So, while Albertan medical care provided the best outcomes for the infected, it failed to protect the workers who cared for the infected. Conversely, British Columbia had the highest mortality rate for those infected but was close to the lowest in all other categories, so while the infected had the worst outcomes, the chances of infection and death for the general population was the lowest in western Canada. Furthermore, BC's healthcare workers were the least likely to be infected or die in this comparison.

The contrast between BC and Alberta, and the difference in approach between the two is worth noting. In BC, the largely successful pandemic response has been praised for working to gain public trust and using a straightforward communication style,³⁶⁹ while

³⁶⁹ Cameron-Blake Emily, Breton Charles, Sim Paisley, Tatlow Helen, Hale Thomas, Wood Andrew, Smith Jonathan, Sawatsky Julia, Parsons Zachary, Tyson Katherine. "Variation in the Canadian provincial and territorial responses to COVID-19" University of Oxford, BSG-WP-2021/039, March 2021. <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/BSG-WP-2021-039.pdf>.

Alberta's pandemic response has been criticized as being confusing in its messaging.³⁷⁰ As has been previously covered, trust in the government can be a deterrent against the effects of misinformation, and uncertainty can allow for misinformation to have a greater effect. This means that the confusion caused by public health messaging would have made Alberta more susceptible to misinformation than BC.

As a basic inference from the data, it can be said that Alberta's pandemic response was weak on preventive measures protecting both the public and healthcare workers but benefited from a strong and well-funded healthcare system. This is in line with criticism that Alberta's public health response was hesitant to impose restrictions relying on personal responsibility to keep businesses open to protect the economy.³⁷¹ Furthermore, when experts and public health officials made recommendations to combat COVID-19, the Alberta government was slow to adopt them and quick to lift them, even when the situation requiring the public health mandate had not been resolved.³⁷²

When we compare this criticism to our public health response timeline, we see that in the beginning, the focus was not on protecting the economy but on preventing infection. A week after the first detected case in Alberta on March 5th, 2020, restrictions were put in place which would expand further three days later. When asked about the economic effects of the restrictions the CMO said, “To save lives, I have had to make recommendations that will take away livelihoods for many Albertans over the next

³⁷⁰ Cameron-Blake Emily, Breton Charles, Sim Paisley, Tatlow Helen, Hale Thomas, Wood Andrew, Smith Jonathan, Sawatsky Julia, Parsons Zachary, Tyson Katherine. “Variation in the Canadian provincial and territorial responses to COVID-19”

³⁷¹ Cameron-Blake Emily, Breton Charles, Sim Paisley, Tatlow Helen, Hale Thomas, Wood Andrew, Smith Jonathan, Sawatsky Julia, Parsons Zachary, Tyson Katherine. “Variation in the Canadian provincial and territorial responses to COVID-19”

³⁷² Cameron-Blake Emily, Breton Charles, Sim Paisley, Tatlow Helen, Hale Thomas, Wood Andrew, Smith Jonathan, Sawatsky Julia, Parsons Zachary, Tyson Katherine. “Variation in the Canadian provincial and territorial responses to COVID-19”

several weeks to months”.³⁷³ But as of May of 2020 with the first attempts to reopen, we see a shift to the economically focused, restriction-hesitant, and recommendation-focused response. This shift held even as cases skyrocketed, with restrictions only being put in place at the height of a crisis and being removed at the first sign of recovery, such as in the timeframe around Thanksgiving of 2020 where, despite rising case numbers before the holiday, no new restrictions were put in place, only recommendations in some areas. The spike in cases from Thanksgiving gatherings then overwhelmed the Alberta health care system leading to some limits on social gatherings that were only put in place in Calgary on October 26th, 2020. The Thanksgiving surge would cause hundreds of doctors on November 12th, 2020, to sign a letter begging the province to implement lockdowns. On November 21st, 2020, the CMO described Alberta’s situation as “grim” as Alberta’s case numbers broke record highs.³⁷⁴ Finally, at the end of November and the beginning of December, restrictions were put in place. However, by the beginning of January as cases finally started to lessen somewhat, the restrictions would be eased to allow businesses to re-open. Sadly, the end of these restrictions signaled a return in cases as the easing of restrictions coincided with the first 50 detected cases of COVID-19's first effective variant.³⁷⁵

Alongside this hesitant application of restrictions was a hesitancy to implement the degree of restrictions recommended by health care officials. On April 7th, 2021, Alberta, despite having the highest case counts in the country, had the loosest restrictions in place.³⁷⁶ This matches our data and the criticism we noted before, confirming that

³⁷³ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

³⁷⁴ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

³⁷⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

³⁷⁶ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

Alberta's healthcare response was weak on preventive measures and focused on economic outcomes above the protection of public health. This focus on protecting the economy was not without any benefit, using BC as a comparison once again. While BC's economy did better than Alberta's economy at the beginning of the pandemic from 2020-2021,³⁷⁷ Alberta was able to recover more quickly than BC economically in the frame of 2021-2022³⁷⁸ and is predicted to outperform BC once again in 2023.³⁷⁹ Meaning that at the height of the pandemic in Canada, around January 2022,³⁸⁰ Alberta's health response was more successful at protecting economic interests than BC's, while BC was more successful at protecting human life and public health.

Lastly, there are reviews of the Albertan pandemic response we can examine to help understand how effective the pandemic response was. The first is the KPMG review of 2020, which was done for the Albertan government as part of an engagement agreement.³⁸¹ Then we will look at the "Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel" which in 2023 asked Albertans the question, "What changes should be made, if any, to the laws of Alberta to better equip the province to cope with future public health

³⁷⁷ Statistics Canada. "Gross domestic product (GDP) at basic prices, by industry, provinces and territories, growth rates" 150 Statscan, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3610040202&pickMembers%5B0%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.3&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2021&referencePeriods=20210101%2C20210101>.

³⁷⁸ Statistics Canada. "Gross domestic product (GDP) at basic prices, by industry, provinces and territories, growth rates" 150 Statscan, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3610040202&pickMembers%5B0%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.3&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2021&referencePeriods=20210101%2C20210101>.

³⁷⁹ Caranci Beata, Burleton Derek, Sondh Rishi, Ercolao Marc. "Provincial Economic Forecast: Regional Growth Resiliency On a Time Limit As Rate Hikes Bear Down" TD Economics, March 16, 2023. https://economics.td.com/domains/economics.td.com/documents/reports/pef/ProvincialEconomicForecast_Mar2023.pdf.

³⁸⁰ Mathieu Edouard, Ritchie Hannah, Rodés-Guirao Lucas, Appel Cameron, Giattino Charlie, Hasell Joe, Macdonald Bobbie, Dattani Saloni, Beltekian Diana, Ortiz-Ospina Esteban and Roser Max. "Canada: Coronavirus Pandemic Country Profile". OurWorldInData.org, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus>.

³⁸¹ KPMG, "Review of Alberta's COVID-19 Pandemic Response: March 1 to October 12, 2020: Final Report to the Government of Alberta" Alberta.ca, January 2021. <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/health-alberta-covid-19-pandemic-response-review-final-report.pdf>.

emergencies?"³⁸² These will give us both the average Albertan's view of the pandemic as well as what a formal audit of the response suggests could have been improved upon.

The KPMG report did not find many areas where they suggested needed improvement. The two recommendations they made were that Alberta “should continue to conduct analysis and stakeholder engagement to strengthen its ongoing pandemic response.”³⁸³ Secondly, once the pandemic was under control, the province should “conduct a comprehensive review of its pandemic response to strengthen its future efforts.”³⁸⁴ Neither of these two recommendations is particularly radical, and it is fair to say they would apply to any government that dealt with Covid-19. In that basic list of recommendations, we do see that the KPMG report done early in the pandemic found little to no areas of Alberta's pandemic response they could criticize. This supports the inference that the early pandemic response in Alberta was overall effective and positive.

While the KPMG report was devoid of substantial criticism, the same cannot be said for the responses to the “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel”. As outlined earlier, there were several responses to the question, “What changes should be made, if any, to the laws of Alberta to better equip the province to cope with future public health emergencies?”³⁸⁵ which the panel had posed. “The most common replies stressed the need for increased reliance on medical and scientific expertise, a decreased emphasis on the opinion of politicians, and greater use of peer-reviewed data to form evidence-

³⁸² Alberta Government. “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel” Alberta.ca, 2023. <https://www.alberta.ca/public-health-emergencies-governance-review-panel.aspx>.

³⁸³ KPMG, “Review of Alberta's COVID-19 Pandemic Response: March 1 to October 12, 2020: Final Report to the Government of Alberta”

³⁸⁴ KPMG, “Review of Alberta's COVID-19 Pandemic Response: March 1 to October 12, 2020: Final Report to the Government of Alberta”

³⁸⁵ Alberta Government. “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel”

based solutions.”³⁸⁶ The second most common replies called for greater power and autonomy for the CMO.³⁸⁷

However, the third most common replies were skeptical that the government should have any role in a public health response, calling for an elimination of public health measures.³⁸⁸ And lastly, a small minority denied that the pandemic ever was a threat while parroting conspiracy theories and asking for criminal charges against the federal and provincial government and healthcare "leaders".³⁸⁹

So, most respondents felt that the Alberta pandemic response needed to rely more on experts and put the CMO at the center of decision-making and communication. This shows a general appetite to avoid misinformation, by looking to experts and having an official government voice that is uniform and independent.

The next two categories of replies mentioned were skeptical of the need for public health orders, whom we will refer to as “skeptics”. While most skeptics did not cite any misinformation specifically like the minority of skeptics did, it can be inferred that the debate about the government's intent and role as well as the effectiveness of public health orders such as masking, was facilitated by misinformation opening the door to the skeptical view. While there is no evidence that public health measures, such as mask mandates, cause more harm than they prevent, some still are skeptical of this. While the influence of misinformation is not obvious in all the skeptical respondents, it can be inferred that misinformation was impactful in creating this group of respondents to varying degrees.

³⁸⁶ Alberta Government. “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel”

³⁸⁷ Alberta Government. “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel”

³⁸⁸ Alberta Government. “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel”

³⁸⁹ Alberta Government. “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel”

Next, we can look at criticism of the pandemic response from Alberta Premier Danielle Smith. She describes how shocked she was that the healthcare system, which the Albertan government has poured so much funding into, buckled under the weight of the pandemic, stating that the healthcare system was seemingly not up to the job of handling this crisis.³⁹⁰ Her stated solution is to open up the Albertan healthcare system to allow for private healthcare options to enter the market alongside existing public healthcare to lessen the burden on the public healthcare system.³⁹¹ She diagnosed the problem in Alberta's pandemic response as a culture of compliance and an inability to think outside of the box on how to provide healthcare.³⁹²

This argument seems to go against the data we have established. When we looked at the numbers, we saw that while under greater strain than the rest of western Canada, the Alberta healthcare system did one of the best jobs in the region in protecting the lives of the infected and that the main weak point was in prevention, not the care for the infected. As such this solution, even if able to lessen the strain on healthcare in future pandemics, would neglect the preventive side and only address recovery.

Considering that long before the pandemic, Premier Smith wanted to privatize Albertan healthcare³⁹³ and has discussed pardoning those who violated public health orders to reduce infection,³⁹⁴ it is fair to say that her view is not based on data or the recommendations of experts but on her personal beliefs which in the past have been

³⁹⁰ Smith Danielle, "ALBERTA'S KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES" University of Calgary, SPP Pre Publication Series, June 2021. <https://albertapolitics.ca/wp-content/uploads/Danielle-Smith-Challenges-Paper.pdf>.

³⁹¹ Smith Danielle, "ALBERTA'S KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES"

³⁹² Smith Danielle, "ALBERTA'S KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES"

³⁹³ Thompson Mitchell, "Danielle Smith Has Spent Decades Pushing To Privatize Alberta's Health System" PressProgress, May 25, 2023. <https://pressprogress.ca/danielle-smith-has-spent-decades-pushing-to-privatize-albertas-health-system/>.

³⁹⁴ Bennett Dean. "Smith says no COVID-19 pardons because Canadian system doesn't work like the U.S." Global news, January 16, 2023.

suggested to have been influenced by misinformation.³⁹⁵ ³⁹⁶ ³⁹⁷ This also means that she has chosen to not rely on expert views as was wanted by the respondents to the “Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel” query, and is likely to open the province up to greater influences of misinformation while not addressing the problems exposed by the pandemic.

Public school systems faced unique challenges during the pandemic worldwide but as a study out of York University found, Alberta’s approach to public education during the pandemic may have caused additional stress, worsening the overall pandemic response. At the beginning of the pandemic on March 28th, 2020, the Albertan government redirected \$128 million from the K–12 education budget to support their pandemic response.³⁹⁸ This caused 1900 workers to be temporarily laid off in addition to many permanent firings in some local school systems, such as in Edmonton.³⁹⁹ This action was widely seen as heartless and cruel by the educational staff, as the diminished staff had to quickly learn and adapt their teaching to online learning without additional funding or support their now former colleagues could have provided them.⁴⁰⁰

One complaint that was unanimous among teachers surveyed in the study was that the Ministry of Education and other parts of the Albertan government continued to

³⁹⁵ CBC News, “Before becoming premier, Danielle Smith ran a subscribers-only social media feed full of disinformation and conspiracies” CBC, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2088015939578>.

³⁹⁶ Rieger Sarah, “Alberta talk radio host deletes tweet with false claim that there's a 100% cure for coronavirus” CBC, Mar 22, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/coronavirus-cure-claim-1.5506187>

³⁹⁷ Boyd Alex, “Danielle Smith is ‘concerned’ about arsonists causing wildfires. Experts are more worried about misinformation” Toronto Star, June 8, 2023. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2023/06/08/danielle-smith-is-concerned-about-arsonists-causing-wildfires-experts-are-more-worried-about-misinformation.html>.

³⁹⁸ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. “Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools”

³⁹⁹ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. “Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools”

⁴⁰⁰ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. “Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools”

provide conflicting messaging on how the education system would adapt to the pandemic as new challenges and information were discovered.⁴⁰¹ Additionally, what each school board, district, and individual school was told to do tended to be different from one another and sometimes conflicted with public messaging leading to confusion among students' parents and educational staff alike.⁴⁰² The view of the educators surveyed was that, based on the decisions made by the Albertan government early on as part of their pandemic response, the government's priorities for the education system did not focus on supporting the education, well-being, and mental health of the students.⁴⁰³ With that said, the reasoning given for some public health policies related to schools, such as the lifting of mask mandates, was that the government's priority was to ensure the wellbeing and mental health of students to which they claimed masks caused harm.⁴⁰⁴ This claim that the government sought the wellbeing of students was in opposition with some complaints teachers had about the post-vaccine period of Alberta's pandemic response, in that the response ignored the reality of the situation and worked to return to business as normal at all costs.⁴⁰⁵ Overall the clear throughline of the teacher's view of Alberta's public health response was that it was poorly communicated and did not give teachers or students time to adapt or prepare for how the government wanted them to continue education, leaving

⁴⁰¹ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. "Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools"

⁴⁰² Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. "Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools"

⁴⁰³ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. "Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools"

⁴⁰⁴ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, "Amended Certified Record of Proceedings" Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg. 68.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/0hnig08elapj3im/Amended%20Amended%20Certified%20Record%20of%20Proceedings%20filed%20July%2012%202022.pdf?dl=0>.

⁴⁰⁵ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. "Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools"

the limited educational staff scrambling days before they were meant to switch to online, to in person or to accommodate a mixed learning environment with minimal support.⁴⁰⁶

This leads to teachers and students being overworked, burnout, and confused.⁴⁰⁷

Most of the world suffered during the pandemic, so the way that we examined Alberta's public health strategy took this into account. By comparing the outcomes of people in the rest of western Canada along with the complaints raised by groups and individuals affected by and involved in the pandemic response, we see the story of Alberta's pandemic response in the context of a country dealing with Covid.

We see that, after an initial push to prevent transmission, there was a refocusing on bringing Alberta back to normal, despite the dire nature of the situation. The priority was economic concerns while neglecting proper communication or protections for people. The negative impacts of these decisions were then put upon the health care and education systems, who were left to react to confused and changing messaging and decisions without the support they needed. These two systems were the target of political debate, starting well before the pandemic, by the United Conservative Party of Canada,⁴⁰⁸ which raises questions about whether this effort was implicitly designed to strain and break the public health care and education systems in order to move towards privatization of these systems. If intentional or not, this and other abrogation of the facts shown in Alberta's pandemic response suggest the potential influence of misinformation, or the use of disinformation to reach politically motivated ends.

⁴⁰⁶ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. "Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools"

⁴⁰⁷ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. "Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools"

⁴⁰⁸ Oates Cheryl, "The UCP's attack on Alberta's public education has hurt us all" Canadian Union of Public Employees, July 14th, 2022. <https://cupe.ca/ucps-attack-albertas-public-education-has-hurt-us-all>.

The next chapter will examine these and other moments where the pandemic response seemed to ignore the reality of the situation and act against what the expert consensus suggested at the moment, to look for misinformation's influences and hypothesis about how, where and if misinformation played some part in Alberta's public health response, in order to attempt to create a likely hypothesis answering the question posed by this thesis and to suggest an answer as to if misinformation undermined the Government of Alberta's public health response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter 3: Misinformation's Effect on Alberta

This chapter will begin with a look into some of the trends and potential effects of misinformation that were revealed through an examination of the misinformation and public health timelines. Next, using the information gathered in these 'snapshots' of the timelines, we will examine a case where we have an increased ability to examine the potential impact of misinformation. We will do so to be able to lay out a detailed hypothesis which will conclude this work in the final chapter.

3.1: Merged timeline breakdown

The following section of this chapter contains the analysis of parts of a merged version of the misinformation and public health timeline (see Appendix A) in the form of 'Timeline snapshots'. These snapshots are small parts of the merged timeline that are important to the area of misinformation that is being discussed in each sub-section while excluding other timeline bullet points surrounding them in the merged timeline which, though important in their context, are not relevant to every sub-section's focus and would only serve to muddle the analysis.

Each sub-section will begin with a quick analysis of that topic referred to as a "summary". Topics will be areas where misinformation may have had a direct impact, such as vaccination or generally the implementation of public health mandates. Topics can also include factors that only served to contribute to the spread of misinformation, such as a lack of guidance from the government. The analysis will also examine how public health actions shifted in time after misinformation influences were introduced.

After the summary analysis will be the 'snapshot' of relevant timeline bullets related to the topic. The snapshots are added to give context to timing and a more detailed explanation of

events or misinformation that would interfere with the explanation in the summary analysis section.

#1 Lack of Guidance

Summary:

- While this topic is not an effect of misinformation, it is a potential contributing factor as an unnecessary three-month gap, a gap where we know that Covid treatment misinformation was present. We also know that misinformation is enhanced by taking advantage of confusion and a narrative gap which, in this case, was caused by the discovery of Covid-19 while the information space was devoid of any comment from the Alberta Government.
- This would have preemptively prepped the population to see non-governmental online spaces, such as social media, as a primary source of information to quell their fear and confusion and would have built up trust in some of these online sources while the government's silence would have only exacerbated fears of the unknown.
- This may have changed the balance of trust in information sources in some people, as the misinformation was left unchallenged and was able to be seen as a salve to fears otherwise left untreated. To overcome this, we would have needed to see a clear, constant, calming, and honest voice from the government throughout the pandemic. But with all the contradictions and confusion of the government's policy and communications as pointed out in the previous chapter, it is fair to say we did not see this calm voice of clarity.
- This means that Alberta would have been primed and open to misinformation from the very beginning of the pandemic, and the number of people who ignored or refused

to comply with the Public Health Orders was unnecessarily inflated. However, whether that increase made a meaningful difference is another question.

Timeline snapshot

- January 2020 Covid misinformation detected. Including the 5G conspiracy⁴⁰⁹, the Canadian⁴¹⁰ and Chinese lab⁴¹¹ theories as well as False Health Advice.⁴¹²
 - Alberta gave no public guidance at this time.
- On March 5-12, 2020, Alberta's first case identified⁴¹³ and first health orders.

414

#2 Masks

Summary:

- To begin, on July 27, 2020, we see Dr. Hinshaw acting within the limits of her normal role by recommending the use of masks. This recommendation came about amid anti-mask protests in Montreal. The recommendation would not result in a mandate until the following week and, even then, the mask mandate which was sometimes optional, were to be limited to schools. On its own, this is nothing more than a correlation and not proof of an influence, that said it does suggest that we should continue to pull on this thread.

⁴⁰⁹ Dornan, Christopher. "SCIENCE DISINFORMATION IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC" June 2020.

<https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ScienceDisinformation-PPF-June2020-EN.pdf>. (page 17 pdf)

⁴¹⁰ [Spencer, Saranac Hale. "Coronavirus Wasn't Sent by 'Spy' From Canada" Fact Check.org. January 28, 2020. https://www.factcheck.org/2020/01/coronavirus-wasnt-sent-by-spy-from-canada/.](https://www.factcheck.org/2020/01/coronavirus-wasnt-sent-by-spy-from-canada/)

⁴¹¹ [Ryan, Jackson. "How the coronavirus origin story is being rewritten by a guerrilla Twitter group" CNET. April 15, 2021. https://www.cnet.com/science/features/how-the-coronavirus-origin-story-is-being-rewritten-by-a-guerrilla-twitter-group/.](https://www.cnet.com/science/features/how-the-coronavirus-origin-story-is-being-rewritten-by-a-guerrilla-twitter-group/)

⁴¹² BBC Monitoring. "China coronavirus: Misinformation spreads online about origin and scale" January 30, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-51271037>.

⁴¹³ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta" Calgary Herald, Mar 15, 2022. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/two-years-of-covid-19-a-timeline-of-the-pandemic-in-alberta>.

⁴¹⁴ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

- However, these were not normal times, as the pandemic would have enhanced the CMO's powers and let her "initiate an investigation to determine whether any action is necessary to protect the public health."⁴¹⁵
- This is a moment where we see the confusion about what powers and responsibilities the CMO has during a pandemic or whether they even differ at all from the position's normal state.
- This confusion could be said to be a form of disinformation, using the lack of clarity and the trust placed in government officials to pull power away from the CMO and place it in the hands of other government officials including the Premier. However, as the role rarely takes on these powers, there is room for the possibility that this was honest confusion. The additional support and resources the government has do lessen the possibility of internal confusion and push us toward a disinformation-fueled power grab, but it is hard to say for certain.
- The fact that the only area where masks were mandated was schools is interesting given that the economic shutdown theory pushed by the Wexit party had already long been in place. Meaning that this targeting of the mask mandate which avoids business may be an influence of that misinformation narrative.
- Beyond this first case, in the early days of COVID-19, masks were not used to prevent spread. Except for local mandates, we would not see the use of masks mandated from the provincial government outside of school.

⁴¹⁵ Alberta King's Printer, "PUBLIC HEALTH ACT: Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 Chapter P-37" April 1, 2023.

- After the Convoy and the Coutts border blockade schools would cease to be the exception to these rules as mask mandates were not only removed on July 28th, 2021 but on Feb. 26th, 2022, Education Minister Adriana LaGrange said that "Schools will not be given the power to have mask mandates" meaning schools would be uniquely situated in not being able to put masking rules in place, while business and local governments were left with the power to still do so.
- On August 18, 2022, the removal of masks from schools was ruled to have been unreasonable by a court of law. However, Premier Smith at the time of writing still rejects this decision and will not permit anyone but their government alone to put in place public health mandates.
- Following this trail of events a few potential effects of misinformation are revealed. Starting with the hesitancy and limited scope of mask mandates and after the Quebec protest and the confirmation that COVID-19 misinformation is spreading rapidly in Canada, we see this hesitancy continuing with masks being avoided as an option for public spaces most of the time, being limited to forms of transit and schools, which brings in the possibility of the economic shutdown theory being a potential influence. Lastly, we see a shift away from masking after the trucker convoy-related protest spoke out against mandates, including masking mandates. The shift not only removed the mandates but also came with a change in rhetoric as the Alberta government became emphatic that mask mandates would not be put back in place. This removal was also deemed to be unreasonable by the court because of how the decision was made. This also puts immunocompromised students at risk. So, with our evidence to suggest that there would be substantial benefits to retaining the mandates, this final

radical change in approach, so close to the trucker protests, is the most substantial connection in this section. The radical change matched the timing of the protest so closely that, while the connection is not definitive, it is highly suggestive of an effect. That is not to say the other connections are without their reasonability such as the hesitancy and limited scope of mask mandates after the Quebec protests and economic shutdown narrative, but they are dulled by the fact that, while limited in scope, there were mandates in place in schools.

- So, if misinformation influenced Alberta's masking policy, I would hypothesize that this snapshot suggests that there is a high likelihood of influence. First, the timing and existence of misinformation supported a hesitancy to use masks while little to no other reasoning was presented by the government or experts to suggest that hesitancy was warranted. That misinformation resulted in the Alberta government being hesitant in the use of mask mandates.
- Secondly, after establishing the likelihood of the above, the strength of the connection to the trucker convoy and removal of masks becomes even stronger. That the government was already showing a likely willingness to listen to misinformation over the protection of public health paired with the massive change right after the convoy protests paves a clear road for us to follow.
- As such this thesis hypothesizes that there was very likely an effect of misinformation on Alberta's masking policy, an effect which only grew as the pandemic progressed.

Timeline snapshot

- April 6, 2020: “Alberta chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw recommends the use of non-medical face masks when physical distancing is difficult.”⁴¹⁶
- July 21, 2020:” Alberta announces schools will reopen in September with added safety measures.”
 - “Calgary makes mask use mandatory in indoor public spaces effective Aug. 1.”
 - “COVID-19 case counts begin to surge, with nearly 10,000 confirmed cases and 202 deaths.”
 - “Students and staff may choose to wear masks to school if they want, but it will not be mandatory.”⁴¹⁷
 - “We recognize how difficult masking would be for many students, especially elementary, which is why we aren’t relying on any single public health measure in the school setting,” Alberta’s chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw said.
- On July 30, 2020, the CMO urged mask use, but no mandate was put in place.

418

⁴¹⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴¹⁷ Gibson, Caley. “Alberta K-12 students to head back to classroom this fall”. *Global News*, July 21, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7200717/alberta-covid-19-schools-september-2020-plan/>.

⁴¹⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Anti-mask protests started in Montreal. ⁴¹⁹
- Covid-19 misinformation was found to spread faster than expected across Canada. ⁴²⁰
- On August 4, 2020, Alberta put a school mask mandate in place. ⁴²¹
- July 28, 2021: Cases continued to rise in Alberta. “Dr. Hinshaw announced starting Aug. 16, provincial masking would no longer be required for transit, taxis and rideshares. It continued to be recommended in schools.”⁴²²
 - “And that there will no longer be a legally required isolation period should someone test positive for COVID-19.”⁴²³
- January 28, 2022: “A convoy of truckers rolls into Ottawa and sets up a protest against vaccine mandates and other health measures in that city’s downtown.”⁴²⁴
- January 29, 2022: “Truck drivers and other protesters set up a blockade at Alberta’s Coutts border crossing with the U.S.”⁴²⁵
- February. 14, 2022: “Students in Alberta are no longer required to wear masks.”⁴²⁶

⁴¹⁹ Kestler-D'Amours, Jillian. “COVID-19 conspiracy theories creating 'public health crisis' in Canada”.

⁴²⁰ Kestler-D'Amours, Jillian. “COVID-19 conspiracy theories creating 'public health crisis' in Canada”.

⁴²¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴²² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴²³ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴²⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴²⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴²⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- February 26, 2022: “Education Minister Adriana LaGrange says schools will not be given the power to have mask mandates. Because of this, without a provincial order, schools lack the power to impose mask mandates.”⁴²⁷
- April 6, 2022: The Alberta government announced that it “is expanding eligibility for fourth doses of COVID-19 vaccine and Paxlovid treatment to protect those most at risk from severe outcomes.”⁴²⁸
- June 13, 2022: “Alberta will take the final step in its plan to ease public health measures as the province moves past the Omicron BA.2 wave and COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to decline.”⁴²⁹
 - Public health measures would end effect on June 15. After which point isolation and making would be recommended but not mandatory.
- **Mask Mandate Removal in Court:** August 18, 2022, “A court hearing on the Alberta government's abrupt removal of a mandatory mask mandate for schoolchildren heard Thursday from a government lawyer who rejected a suggestion the decision was fueled by growing tensions at the Coutts border crossing in February.”⁴³⁰
 - **2022 Court finds Alberta Unreasonable:** “An Alberta judge has ruled the February order lifting the requirement for schoolchildren to mask was

⁴²⁷ Hardcastle, Lorian, and Ubaka Ogbogu. “Alberta's new chief medical officer must be independent, not sidelined” Nov 15, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/opinion-alberta-chief-medical-officer-hinshaw-joffe-danielle-smith-1.6652235>.

⁴²⁸ Alberta government, “Alberta expands access to fourth vaccine doses” Alberta.ca, April 6th, 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=822960A564540-9E17-A696-8D1B30A93143EF97>

⁴²⁹ Alberta Government “Alberta to lift remaining health restrictions” Alberta.ca, June 12th, 2023. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=83071B896298F-E65E-B3B8-D14840FE40EFDC1F>.

⁴³⁰ Labby, Bryan. “Alberta government lawyers reject claim school mask mandate lifted due to 'combustible' border protest” CBC News, Aug 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-cmoh-hinshaw-cabinet-mask-schools-1.6555650>.

"unreasonable" because it was ultimately made by cabinet and not the chief medical officer of health (CMOH), which is a breach of the Public Health Act.”⁴³¹

- **Removing the Mask:**2022 “Thousands of Alberta children are home from school with respiratory illnesses, but Alberta Premier Danielle Smith says a school mask mandate is not on the table, and she plans to prevent school boards from invoking them.”⁴³²
 - “Premier Smith has not embraced the decision's confirmation of the CMOH's legal authority, or the legitimacy of schools and other entities enacting their own public health policies. Instead, she stated she will not permit mask mandates in schools and will ensure her government alone makes public health decisions for schools.”

#3 Youth/Schools

Summary

- Bellow in the first two bullets of this snapshot, we see first a reduction in school resources at the start of the pandemic, followed by restrictions unique to the setting, and finally blame being put upon youth for the continued spread of COVID-19.
- To examine this, we need to deal with the question of how Dr. Hinshaw defined "Youth," as active case information from this time shows that 20–29-year-olds were

⁴³¹ Grant, Meghan. “‘Unreasonable’ order lifting Alberta school mask mandate made by politicians not Hinshaw: judge” CBC News, Oct 27, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/school-mask-mandate-alberta-unreasonable-judge-decision-lagrange-1.6631695>.

⁴³² Bellefontaine, Michelle. “Premier Danielle Smith rules out mask mandates despite widespread school illness” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-rules-out-mask-mandates-despite-widespread-school-illness-1.6651417>.

the group with the highest active case count in Alberta⁴³³. If “youth” refers to K-12- aged students, then the active removal of funds to support students and then placing blame on them suggests the creation of disinformation to move blame away from the government and onto youth.

- "Statistics Canada defines youth as between 15-29 years of age" meaning that her use of the term was accurate, if not overbroad, as it included 15–19-year-olds who were not part of the group with high case numbers.⁴³⁴
 - This ambiguity of the term in this context and the statistics showing a group that it would be reasonable to refer to as "youth" was the one with the highest case numbers makes this connection less powerful. However, the ambiguity might allow for it to be used as disinformation to target the school-aged people who were lumped into this group, as such it should be observed.
- As Premier Kenny stated, "his government has accepted that COVID-19 infections in schools are inevitable and don't warrant closing down all classrooms: "It's time to go back to some kind of normal."⁴³⁵ Along with the early budget cuts which would have allowed teachers better resources to minimize harms from COVID-19, we see a clear minimization of the importance of protecting the health of those in schools in favor of getting back to normal, despite entering a second wave. This could have been caused by political ideology alone. As previously stated, the UCP has long been targeting schools. The reasoning for this political belief may have connections to

⁴³³ CTV News Edmonton Staff, “Alberta children have the highest rate of active COVID-19 cases of any age group: Active Cases of COVID-19 in Alberta Shown by Age Range 1st wave” CTV News, September 28th, 2021. <https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/alberta-children-have-the-highest-rate-of-active-covid-19-cases-of-any-age-group-1.5603974>

⁴³⁴ Government of Canada, “Canada’s first State of youth report: for youth, with youth, by youth” Canada.ca, 2021 <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth/report.html>.

⁴³⁵ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

misinformation but that is beyond the scope of this research. That aside, the fact that this de-prioritization of schools does mesh with anti-mandate misinformation and the effects of the economic shutdown theory suggests an influence, but the scope of influence is hard to separate from the political stance.

- The next part of this section of concern relates to the post-trucker convoy which was also covered in the mask sub-section. To add to that discussion, we also see that after the removal of masks, the rates of respiratory illness in school-aged children skyrocketed. Despite this, Dr. Hinshaw stuck to the line that masks would not return to schools.
 - The long-term targeting of schools as a political hot button by the UCP, the reduction of funding of schools and the greater proportion of mandates, and the vague wording of "youth" when referring to those causing the problem, suggests that there is the possible use of disinformation to move the blame for rising cases off the government and onto schools and students.
 - Secondly just as stated in the "Masks" section, there is a highly likely influence of misinformation from the trucker convoy on public health orders in Alberta's schools.

Timeline snapshot

- March 28, 2020, "the UCP government announced that they would redirect \$128 million from the K–12 education budget to their COVID response"⁴³⁶
- August 4, 2020, School mask mandates were put in place.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁶ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. "Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools" *Journal of Teaching and Learning* Vol. 15, No. 2 (2021), pp. 117–132 <https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v15i2.6725>. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1313646.pdf>.

⁴³⁷ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta".

- August 20, 2020, Dr. Deena Hinshaw suggests young people and indoor gatherings are driving the spread.⁴³⁸
 - Teachers, parents, and students across the province hold rallies to protest the UCP’s school re-entry plan, which does not include funding to reduce class sizes. Concerns also grow around topics such as ventilation, sanitation, and staffing.
- September 1, 2020: Students head back to school, while Alberta public health services release data suggesting Alberta has entered its second Covid wave.⁴³⁹
 - “Kenney says his government has accepted that COVID-19 infections in schools are inevitable and don’t warrant closing down all classrooms: "It's time to go back to some kind of normal.”⁴⁴⁰
 - Education Minister Adriana LaGrange says schools will not be given the power to have mask mandates.
- **May 2021 Suicide Rate Myth Debunked:** Early on there had been predictions that suicide rates would rise, especially for youth, during the pandemic. It was found in a University of British Columbia report that this was not only false but that during the pandemic suicide rates conversely declined.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴³⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁴⁰ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴⁴¹ Pierre, Joe. "Suicide in the Pandemic: A Prediction That Didn't Come True". Psychology Today, July 29, 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psych-unseen/202107/suicide-in-the-pandemic-prediction-didnt-come-true>.

- July 28, 2021: Cases continued to rise in Alberta. “Dr. Hinshaw announced starting Aug. 16, provincial masking would no longer be required for transit, taxis and rideshares. It continued to be recommended in schools.”⁴⁴²
 - “And that there will no longer be a legally required isolation period should someone test positive for COVID-19.”⁴⁴³
- August 9, 2021: “With concerns mounting regarding the Delta variant, the Alberta Medical Association Section of Pediatrics penned a letter to Kenney, pleading with the province to keep public health measures in place.”⁴⁴⁴
- September 28, 2021: “Cases in children reach a record high not seen since during the pandemic.”⁴⁴⁵
- February 14, 2021: “Students in Alberta are no longer required to wear masks.”⁴⁴⁶
- February 26, 2022: “Education Minister Adriana LaGrange says Schools will not be given the power to have mask mandates. Because of this, without a provincial order, schools lack the power to impose mask mandates.
- **Mask Mandate Removal in Court:** August 18, 2022, “A court hearing on the Alberta government's abrupt removal of a mandatory mask mandate for schoolchildren heard Thursday from a government lawyer who rejected a suggestion the decision was fueled by growing tensions at the Coutts border crossing in February.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁴³ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴⁴⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁴⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁴⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁴⁷ Labby, Bryan. “Alberta government lawyers reject claim school mask mandate lifted due to 'combustible' border protest” CBC News, Aug 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-cmoh-hinshaw-cabinet-mask-schools-1.6555650>.

- **2022 Court finds Alberta Unreasonable:** “An Alberta judge has ruled the February order lifting the requirement for schoolchildren to mask was “unreasonable” because it was ultimately made by cabinet and not the chief medical officer of health (CMOH), which is a breach of the Public Health Act.”⁴⁴⁸
- **Removing the Mask:** 2022 “Thousands of Alberta children are home from school with respiratory illnesses, but Alberta Premier Danielle Smith says a school mask mandate is not on the table, and she plans to prevent school boards from invoking them.”⁴⁴⁹
 - “Premier Smith has not embraced the decision's confirmation of the CMOH's legal authority, or the legitimacy of schools and other entities enacting their own public health policies. Instead, she stated she will not permit mask mandates in schools and will ensure her government alone makes public health decisions for schools.”

#4 QAnon

Summary

- Anti-federal pushback is common in Alberta, and QAnon had managed to find space in Albertan minds before COVID-19, so during the pandemic, the supporters of this misinformation narrative made use of this resistance to the federal government by

⁴⁴⁸ Grant, Meghan. “‘Unreasonable’ order lifting Alberta school mask mandate made by politicians not Hinshaw: judge” CBC News, Oct 27, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/school-mask-mandate-alberta-unreasonable-judge-decision-lagrange-1.6631695>.

⁴⁴⁹ Bellefontaine, Michelle. “Premier Danielle Smith rules out mask mandates despite widespread school illness” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-rules-out-mask-mandates-despite-widespread-school-illness-1.6651417>.

painting Trudeau as one of their villains to make QAnon even misinformation more palatable to Albertans.

- While the existence of QAnon as an intellectual resource for misinformation and as additional noise in an infodemic does increase the likelihood of effect, this on its own does not suggest a notable influence. So, while it is important to note its existence in the province, it is likely to have only had effects through the use of it in other narratives, such as we see it do in pushing anti-mask and anti-vaccination misinformation notably connected to Bill Gates.

Timeline snapshot

- 2017, **Sprinkles of QAnon**: “The QAnon theory now connects **antivaccine, anti-5G conspiracies**, antisemitic and antimigrant tropes, and several bizarre theories that the world is in the thrall of a group of pedophile elites set on global domination in part aided by ritualistic child sacrifice.”⁴⁵⁰
- 2017, **Pizza Gate and Bieber**: “The false theory targeting Democrats, now fueled by QAnon and teenagers on TikTok, is entangling new targets like Justin Bieber”⁴⁵¹
- In 2020, QAnon groups in Canada push anti-mask anti-vaccine misinformation, while targeting Trudeau as a villain.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Gallagher Aoife, Jacob Davey, and Mackenzie Hart. "The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017", ISD Global, 2020. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf>.

⁴⁵¹ Kang ,Cecilia and Sheera Frenkel. “‘PizzaGate’ Conspiracy Theory Thrives Anew in the TikTok Era” New York Times, June 27, 2020. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200627091004/https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/27/technology/pizzagate-justin-bieber-qanon-tiktok.html>.

⁴⁵² Owen, Brenna. “Canada not immune to QAnon as pandemic fuels conspiracy theories, experts say” CTV News, December 11, 2020. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/canada-not-immune-to-qanon-as-pandemic-fuels-conspiracy-theories-experts-say-1.5226762>.

- **2020 Gates Becomes the Covid “Boogeyman”:** “In a 2015 speech, [Bill Gates](#) warned that the greatest risk to humanity was not nuclear war but an infectious virus that could threaten the lives of millions of people. [That speech](#) has resurfaced in recent weeks with 25 million new views on YouTube — but not in the way that Mr. Gates probably intended. Anti-vaccinators, members of the conspiracy group QAnon and right-wing pundits have instead seized on the video as evidence that one of the world’s richest men planned to use a pandemic to wrest control of the global health system.”⁴⁵³
- **September 2020, QAnon Comes to Canada:** “Conspiracy theories, including those propagated by the once-fringe QAnon movement, have gained traction as the COVID-19 pandemic fuels fear, social and economic insecurity, and mistrust in authorities, experts in Canada say.”⁴⁵⁴
 - “QAnon draws on and fuels an array of beliefs, he said, from anti-Semitism to white nationalism to the idea that U.S. President Donald Trump is secretly working to take down a cabal of corrupt, Satan-worshipping liberal elites who are abusing and trafficking children for sex.”
 - “Anti-mask and anti-vaccination movements are among those drawing from QAnon as a kind of “floating resource,” Amarasingam said.”

⁴⁵³ Wakabayashi, Daisuke, Davey Alba, and Marc Tracy. "Bill Gates, at Odds With Trump on Virus, Becomes a Right-Wing Target" The New York Times, April 17, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/technology/bill-gates-virus-conspiracy-theories.html>.

⁴⁵⁴ Owen, Brenna. “Canada not immune to QAnon as pandemic fuels conspiracy theories, experts say” CTV News, December 11, 2020. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/canada-not-immune-to-qanon-as-pandemic-fuels-conspiracy-theories-experts-say-1.5226762>.

- “QAnon message boards were set alight after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a United Nations conference this fall that the pandemic is an opportunity to "reset" and reimagine economic systems to address challenges such as poverty and climate change, said Amarasingam..."They interpreted it as a kind of slip-up," he said. "Like it was showing evidence that there was this master plan at work, that COVID could have indeed been a hoax that was planned by powerful elites to then bring about all these new economic and social changes, or large-scale societal shifts."

#5 Mandates

Summary

- The first restrictions came a week after Alberta's first confirmed case, and along with them came a misinformation narrative that COVID restrictions were being put in place to hurt the economy. The month following the birth of this narrative, Alberta announced its plan to reopen despite the situation still being serious. This list of events on its own does not directly show an effect of misinformation, as it could just be an overzealous approach to reopening. However, we see that cases continue to rise as Alberta keeps opening through early 2021 while doctors urged that restrictions be put in place. Voluntary restrictions on a local level were the only response. This additional context comes with the quick first shutdown bordered by the introduction of the economic shutdown misinformation, making this chain of events suspect.
- During this time, we see a loss in the government's fervor for stopping Covid-19. We also see that Pierre Poilievre introduced, on a mass scale, the misinformation

- narrative of the “great reset theory”, which in this context suggests that “elites” are using Covid as an excuse to change the world to their liking. This pairs nicely with the economic shutdown theory to create many avenues for people to become distrustful of the burdensome restrictions. This confluence of public discomfort from mandates, the fear of COVID which started at an early point in the pandemic where there was less certainty about treatment, and misinformation narratives targeting mandates created a perfect storm for the misinformation to have had an effect.
- So, when we see that the conditions were primed for misinformation and the Alberta government switched their approach to dealing with COVID-19 from the quick implementation of mandates to easing of restrictions despite increased case numbers, it suggests that there is a high likelihood that misinformation at the time had the effect of making the Alberta government more hesitant to implement restrictions.
 - When we look at the public health actions taken throughout 2021 and 2022, we see this hesitancy continue. The Alberta government was slow to implement restrictions, waiting until the situation was on the verge of collapsing the healthcare system, and then was quite limited in what was put in place. When they do act, they wait until those minimal restrictions have failed to resolve the crisis before turning to more aggressive options.
 - Another trend we see is that, even though vaccine misinformation has been around in Alberta since 2020, Alberta's government shows no hesitation and pushes for public vaccination. This trend only started to disappear after the Trucker convoy, before meeting its harsh end with Premier Smith taking office.

Timeline snapshot

- March 12, 2020: Alberta's first restrictions were put in place, and gatherings with more than 250 people were canceled.⁴⁵⁵
 - Restrictions included.
 - Large gatherings were canceled,
 - In late March, non-essential businesses closed.
 - **March 2020, Economic Shutdown “Ploy”:** Former Leader of Wexit Canada (The Maverick party) Peter Downing, used his personal Twitter account to suggest that the Covid lockdowns were meant to hurt the economy to replace the "climate change scare" which failed to do so.⁴⁵⁶
 - March 28, 2020 “the UCP government announced that they would redirect \$128 million from the K–12 education budget to their COVID response”⁴⁵⁷
 - April 6, 2020: “Alberta chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw recommends the use of non-medical face masks when physical distancing is difficult.”⁴⁵⁸
 - The first warning about the dangers of the virus from Kenny
 - Gatherings are further restricted.

⁴⁵⁵ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁴⁵⁶ Phillips, Kurt. “FAR-RIGHT CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACIES” Canadian Anti-Hate Network, March 16, 2020. https://www.antihate.ca/far_right_coronavirus_conspiracies.

⁴⁵⁷ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. “Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools” *Journal of Teaching and Learning* Vol. 15, No. 2 (2021), pp. 117–132 <https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v15i2.6725>. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1313646.pdf>.

⁴⁵⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- A reopening plan has been put in place.
- May 13, 2020: “Alberta enters Stage 1 of its COVID-19 relaunch, letting businesses like restaurants and retailers reopen, but Calgary and Brooks are singled out of the relaunch due to ongoing meat-plant outbreaks. Both municipalities are allowed to join in the relaunch on May 25.”⁴⁵⁹
- June 2020 **First Dose Deaths**: “Several social media users are sharing a two-minute video featuring an interview with Judy Mikovits in which she alleges that “at least 50 million Americans would die, probably from the first dose” if a COVID-19 vaccine was mandated for the whole population. This claim is unfounded.”⁴⁶⁰
- June 12, 2020: “Stage 2 of Alberta’s relaunch begins a week ahead of schedule, with businesses like massage clinics, theatres and libraries allowed to reopen.”⁴⁶¹
- July 21, 2020:” Alberta announces schools will reopen in September with added safety measures.”
 - “Calgary makes mask use mandatory in indoor public spaces effective Aug. 1.”
 - “COVID-19 case counts begin to surge, with nearly 10,000 confirmed cases and 202 deaths.”

⁴⁵⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁶⁰ Reuters Staff. “Fact check: Unfounded claim that 50 million Americans would die from COVID-19 vaccine” Reuters. June 23, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-mikovits-vaccine-50-idUSKBN23U2I2>.

⁴⁶¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- July 27, 2020: “The curve is no longer flat,” Dr. Hinshaw announced as caseloads skyrocketed, prompting questions about whether Alberta reopened too quickly.”⁴⁶²
- October 8, 2020: “Voluntary” COVID-19 restrictions come to the AHS Edmonton zone amid a surge in infections.” Other areas of Alberta such as Calgary see no new measures.⁴⁶³
- November 12, 2020: “Hundreds of Alberta doctors sign a letter urging the province to enter a circuit-breaker lockdown to curb the second wave.”⁴⁶⁴
 - “Restaurants and bars face tighter restrictions, including an earlier last call for alcohol, but the province stops short of more strict restrictions.”
- November 20, 2020: “Our current situation is grim,” Dr. Hinshaw said as Alberta broke record after record with climbing case counts.”⁴⁶⁵
- November 21, 2020: “Alberta Health Services said intensive care units across the province were approaching capacity limits as hospitalizations increased.”⁴⁶⁶
- November 24, 2020: following weeks of rising COVID-19 case numbers, “Alberta announces new restrictions, banning social gatherings, closing high schools and limited attendance at places of worship.”⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶² Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁴⁶³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁶⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁶⁵ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁴⁶⁶ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁴⁶⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- November 2020 Poilievre **Pierre Poilievre and the “Great Reset Theory”**:
 “Pierre Poilievre has been posting messages to social media and on his constituency website about "global elites preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab.”⁴⁶⁸
 - “In real life, the “Great Reset” is a rather modest vision put forward by the World Economic Forum, best known for organizing an annual talk-fest of business leaders and thinkers in the Swiss village of Davos... There’s nothing secret about it. You can find all the details on the forum’s website. In a nutshell, it argues that the pandemic has laid bare inequities in society and calls for post-COVID policies that would reduce that inequality.”⁴⁶⁹
 - “In the wilder corners of the Internet the “Great Reset” has become code for an alleged plot by a cabal of globalist elites to impose a new socialist order on the unwitting masses. In its most extreme form, the theory posits that the pandemic was deliberately let loose by those same elites looking for an excuse to carry out their nefarious plans... The conspiracy mongers had a field day last week when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke (virtually) to a United Nations meeting and said the pandemic provided an opportunity for a “reset” of

⁴⁶⁸ Boutilier, Alex. “A Conservative MP warns that Justin Trudeau wants a ‘Great Reset.’ Conspiracy theorists are worried, too” Toronto Star, Nov. 20, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/11/19/a-conservative-mp-warns-that-justin-trudeau-wants-a-great-reset-conspiracy-theorists-are-worried-too.html>.

⁴⁶⁹ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy” Toronto Star, Nov. 23, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2020/11/23/pierre-poilievre-is-flirting-with-the-far-right-by-pushing-great-reset-conspiracy.html>.

economic and social policies. Aha! cried the conspiracists; Trudeau’s clearly part of the secret plot to destroy capitalism”⁴⁷⁰

- “Poilievre posted a petition on his website under the scary, all-caps headline “STOP THE GREAT RESET.” It says, “global financial elites” are pushing the agenda, and “Canadians must fight back against global elites preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab.” “Protect our freedom,” it concludes. Tens of thousands have signed.”⁴⁷¹
- January 29, 2021: “Alberta announces it will ease some restrictions on restaurants, indoor fitness and kids’ sport on Feb. 8.”⁴⁷²
- March 1, 2021: “Gyms and libraries are allowed to reopen in Alberta.” All other businesses are still closed.⁴⁷³
- March 8, 2021: “After a week delay due to rising case numbers, former Health Minister Tyler Shandro announced Alberta will enter the second step of its economic relaunch plan”⁴⁷⁴
- April 6, 2021: “Premier Jason Kenney announced the province will reintroduce restrictions on restaurants, fitness centers, and retail due to spiking variant cases and hospitalizations.”⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁰ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy”

⁴⁷¹ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy”

⁴⁷² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁷³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁷⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁷⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- “Citing widespread rule-breaking and new COVID-19 variants, Kenney announces that Alberta is in a third wave of the pandemic, as the province averages 1,000 new cases each day.”⁴⁷⁶
- April 29, 2021: “Alberta sets daily active COVID case records as the government tightens restrictions; Kenney also threatened possibly implementing curfews if cases continued to rise.”⁴⁷⁷
- May 4, 2021: “With more than 23,000 active cases in Alberta and the highest case rate per population in Canada, Kenney announced a new set of restrictions which included K-12 students moving online, restaurants moving to takeout service only, closure of personal care businesses, and capacity restrictions on outdoor social gatherings, places of worship, and funerals.”⁴⁷⁸
 - The list of restrictions rolled out in the coming days is attached to the timeline (See Appendix A).
- August 13, 2021: “Due to public pressure and rising case counts, the provincial government announced it would be taking a step back from lifting public health measures, and instead keeping them in place for an additional six weeks.”⁴⁷⁹
- September 13, 2021: “Hinshaw admits lifting all public health restrictions in July was the wrong move. “The expectations did not match the reality,” Hinshaw said.”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁶ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴⁷⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁷⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁷⁹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴⁸⁰ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

- September 15, 2021: Premier Jason Kenney “declares a state of public health emergency in Alberta and introduces a number of new restrictions.”⁴⁸¹
- December 15, 2021: “Premier Jason Kenney announces rapid COVID-19 antigen tests will be made available to Albertans as the province also lifts some restrictions around indoor gatherings.”⁴⁸²
- December 21, 2021: “Alberta opens up its booster shots to anyone aged 18 or older and announces capacity limits on certain indoor venues, as well as restricted liquor serving hours in an attempt to bring down rapidly rising COVID-19 cases brought on by the Omicron variant.”
- March 1, 2022: “Most health restrictions are lifted in Alberta, with the exception of certain health care settings.”⁴⁸³
 - “Premier Jason Kenney says any attempt by municipalities to bring in their own health restrictions will be blocked by the province.”
- April 6, 2022: The Alberta government announced that it “is expanding eligibility for fourth doses of COVID-19 vaccine and Paxlovid treatment to protect those most at risk from severe outcomes.”⁴⁸⁴
- June 13, 2022: “Alberta will take the final step in its plan to ease public health measures as the province moves past the Omicron BA.2 wave and COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to decline.”⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁸² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁸³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁸⁴ Alberta government, “Alberta expands access to fourth vaccine doses” Alberta.ca, April 6th, 2022.

<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=822960A564540-9E17-A696-8D1B30A93143EF97>

⁴⁸⁵ Alberta Government “Alberta to lift remaining health restrictions” Alberta.ca, June 12th, 2023.

<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=83071B896298F-E65E-B3B8-D14840FE40EFD1F>.

- Public health measures would end effect on June 15. After which point isolation and masking would be recommended but not mandatory.

#6 Shifting the Blame

Summary

- With how few restrictions Alberta put or kept in place, it seems odd that at the start of this snapshot, Premier Kenney blamed rule breakers for spiking case numbers.
- Additionally, one would expect that, even if a lockdown had complete compliance, case numbers would still rise just after they were enacted as those who had yet to show symptoms before the lockdown would spread the virus to their household and confirm their infectious status to the trackers. But placing the blame on rule breakers may serve a purpose in that, instead of people blaming the government for its slow or minimal implementation of mandates, these rule breakers would take on that burden.
- In similar cases, we see that "youth" and the unvaccinated are blamed for continued outbreaks. This calls back to the confusion over the term "youth" in the previous subsection, "Youth/Schools". No matter how legitimate these claims are, it is still the government's responsibility to tailor their restrictions to try and stop the spread among these groups. As the government cannot force compliance entirely and some will always try and break the mandates it becomes imperative that they limit the spread by putting in place mandates which will minimize the impact of non-compliant populations.
- This could be said to be a use of disinformation, just as we suggested in the section entitled "Youth/Schools." This disinformation would have been meant to target the blame for the government's failures onto others to both damage groups the

government has previously targeted, like schools, and remove critical eyes from the government's actions. This is not a certainty but a likely use of disinformation.

Timeline snapshot

- April 6, 2021, Kenny announced the province will reintroduce restrictions on restaurants, fitness centers, and retail due to spiking variant cases and hospitalizations.⁴⁸⁶
 - Citing widespread rule-breaking and new COVID-19 variants, Kenney announces that Alberta is in the third wave of the pandemic.
- September 1, 2021: “During a Q&A marking his first appearance since Aug. 9, Kenney says the coming fourth wave will be a “wave of the unvaccinated.” He said if the province, which lagged most in Canada in terms of vaccination, had 90 per cent vaccine coverage there would not be meaningful pressure on the health-care system.”⁴⁸⁷
 - “Kenney addresses Albertans for the first time since Aug. 9, after modelling from a team of independent pandemic researchers suggests a health crisis is unavoidable unless there is strong action. It is later confirmed that Kenney took a two-week vacation in Europe in late August.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴⁸⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁸⁸ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

#7 Experts and the Government disagree

Summary

- Multiple times we see experts in the medical field publicly pleading for the government to implement restrictions. The mere fact that these groups got to the point of publicly demanding the implementation of a public health order suggests that the Alberta government was acting, not from a place informed by experts and the facts, but from something else. This may be tied to many narratives especially the economic shutdown and COVID-19 great reset narratives as they relate to mandate hesitancy.
- This once again suggests that misinformation was one of the main influences behind Alberta's public health policy, as it was seemingly not based on expert advice.

Timeline snapshot

- April 7, 2021: “While Alberta doctors say the latest restrictions imposed were not enough, 16 UPC MLAs released a public letter saying the restrictions moved the province "backward.”⁴⁸⁹
- August 9, 2021: “With concerns mounting regarding the Delta variant, the Alberta Medical Association Section of Pediatrics penned a letter to Kenney, pleading with the province to keep public health measures in place.”⁴⁹⁰

#8 Vaccines

Summary

- While we do see a positive view of vaccines from the Alberta government, we also see that helpful enthusiasm pushing vaccination turns toxic as the government starts

⁴⁸⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁹⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

to over-rely on the vaccine, acting like it will solve the situation on its own. Some of the largest re-opening attempts such as Premier Kenny's "Best Summer Ever" plan relied on the percentage of the Alberta population with their first doses of the vaccine, treating the vaccine as a miracle drug, a standard no drug can live up to. This may have been related to the common hopes people put into the vaccine not based on realistic understandings of the medicine but in hopes that the situation would be over. So, while starting as random unintentional misinformation, it may have been taken up by the Alberta government to allow them to reopen in a manner seemingly based on medical knowledge. This is not a certainty as they may have simply shared the general enthusiasm the public had for the vaccine to be released but, as a governing body, the Alberta government had access to much greater up-to-date and accurate information than the public. So, this suggests that they were either ignoring expert information in favor of misinformation or using misinformation as disinformation to push for their goal of reopening.

Timeline snapshot

- April 2020 Covid Vaccine misinformation starts.⁴⁹¹
- February 24, 2021: Vaccine appointments for those born in 1946 or earlier became available. However, “technical problems cause headaches, but more than 50,000 seniors book slots, with some getting immunized the same day.”⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ Spencer, Saranac Hale. “Conspiracy Theory Misinterprets Goals of Gates Foundation” Fact Check.org, April 14, 2020. <https://www.factcheck.org/2020/04/conspiracy-theory-misinterprets-goals-of-gates-foundation/>.

⁴⁹² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- February 26, 2021: “Health Canada regulators approve the AstraZeneca vaccine.”⁴⁹³
- May 4, 2021: “With more than 23,000 active cases in Alberta and the highest case rate per population in Canada, Kenney announced a new set of restrictions which included K-12 students moving online, restaurants moving to takeout service only, closure of personal care businesses, and capacity restrictions on outdoor social gatherings, places of worship, and funerals.”⁴⁹⁴
 - The list of restrictions rolled out in the following days is attached to the timeline.
- June 18, 2021: “With over 70 per cent of eligible Albertans receiving at least one dose of vaccine, Kenney announced all restrictions would be lifted on July 1.”⁴⁹⁵
- July 2021 "Alberta becomes the first Canadian jurisdiction to drop all restrictions after hitting the government's goal of getting a first dose into 70 percent of the eligible population. "Don't live in fear," Kenney told Albertans, before promising the "best summer ever."⁴⁹⁶
- September 3, 2021: Kenney offers \$100 gift cards to Albertans who currently weren't vaccinated if they got vaccinated.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁹⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁹⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁴⁹⁶ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴⁹⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- “For the love of God, please get vaccinated now,” “If you are unvaccinated, it is urgent that you protect yourself.” Kenney told the media.⁴⁹⁸
- October 5, 2021: “Alberta rolls out its first COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for the general public”⁴⁹⁹
- December 21, 2021: “Alberta opens up its booster shots to anyone aged 18 or older and announces capacity limits on certain indoor venues, as well as restricted liquor serving hours in an attempt to bring down rapidly rising COVID-19 cases brought on by the Omicron variant.”⁵⁰⁰
- March 8, 2022: it was announced that "Effective March 10 at 4 p.m., Alberta Health Services (AHS) will no longer require proof of COVID-19 vaccination or regular rapid testing of its current workers.”⁵⁰¹
- April 6, 2022: The Alberta government announced that it “is expanding eligibility for fourth doses of COVID-19 vaccine and Paxlovid treatment to protect those most at risk from severe outcomes.”⁵⁰²
- July 19, 2022: Alberta expanded COVID-19 boosters to those over the age of 18 to "provide Albertans with more choices about increasing their protection against COVID-19 based on their personal risk factors.”⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁸ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁴⁹⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁵⁰⁰ CTV News Edmonton “Alberta opens COVID-19 vaccine boosters to all adults, reduces attendance at large venues”, CTV News, December 21, 2021. <https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/alberta-opens-covid-19-vaccine-boosters-to-all-adults-reduces-attendance-at-large-venues-1.5715178>

⁵⁰¹ Alberta Government. “AHS mandatory vaccination policy lifted” Alberta.ca, Mar 08, 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=8206835279AEF-F976-3D2F-EAA53CFCDD239C52>.

⁵⁰² Alberta government, “Alberta expands access to fourth vaccine doses” Alberta.ca, April 6th 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=822960A564540-9E17-A696-8D1B30A93143EF97>

⁵⁰³ Alberta Government, “Expanding COVID-19 booster choices for those 18+” Alberta.ca, July 19th, 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=84282EA99A2B3-CAB4-5B7F-725C6A3812CCBE2D>.

- August 28, 2022: eligibility for the booster was expanded to kids aged 5-11⁵⁰⁴
- **Vaccinated Blood Refused:** October 13, 2022, “Alberta physicians are raising the alarm about a dangerous trend — fueled by misinformation — that could cost lives... patient recently refused to consent to a blood transfusion if it came from a donor who had received the COVID-19 vaccine”⁵⁰⁵
- **2022 The Tragedy of the Unvaccinated:** “One of Smith's key leadership campaign promises, which she's apparently determined to carry through, is to enshrine protections in the Alberta Human Rights Act for people based on vaccination status.”⁵⁰⁶
- **2022 Smith’s Desire to Pardon:** “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith confirmed... she may pardon people who were given tickets during the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁵⁰⁷

#9 Vaccine Passport

Summary

- Vaccine passports unlike vaccines themselves ended up being a large hot-button topic in Alberta, as they were vilified early after other areas implemented them. This hate of vaccine passports would only increase after the trucker convoy expressed their opposition to them. All the reasons for not implementing vaccine passports connected

⁵⁰⁴ Alberta Government, “Boosters expand to kids aged 5-11” August 26th, 2023,

<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=844648BFECF81-03B4-4A75-B3377ED1E6AD24D7>.

⁵⁰⁵ Lee, Jennifer. “Doctors seeing resistance to blood transfusions over unfounded COVID vaccine concerns” CBC News, Oct 13, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-blood-transfusions-resistance-covid-1.6613841>.

⁵⁰⁶ Markusoff, Jason. “Danielle Smith wants vaccine status to be a human right. Expect a petri dish of problems”, CBC News, Oct 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/danielle-smith-vaccine-human-rights-analysis-1.6615900>.

⁵⁰⁷ Green, Arthur C. “EXCLUSIVE: Smith considering pardoning lockdown, mandate charges during pandemic” Western Standard, Oct 21, 2022. https://www.westernstandard.news/news/exclusive-smith-considering-pardoning-lockdown-mandate-charges-during-pandemic/article_33395522-517c-11ed-b0b0-6f775a765211.html.

to the Covid great reset type conspiracy of government control as the information stored on the vaccine passports served only as a tool to allow targeted restrictions for non-essential businesses to operate, something which aligns with the UCP's apparent focus for the Covid-19 pandemic response. This means that since the Alberta government was supportive of vaccines and since vaccine passports would have benefited their goal of economic protection as well as reducing case numbers, it seems likely that there was an influence of misinformation in the delayed implementation.

- This influence became even clearer when the Alberta government, after promising not to use vaccine passports, implemented the "Restrictions Exemption Program" which was a vaccine passport in all but name, but which also made a special point to say that was not a vaccine passport on government sites⁵⁰⁸.

Timeline snapshot

- September 3, 2021, A survey suggests “Over 75% of Albertans would support a vaccine passport”.⁵⁰⁹
- September 7, 2021: “Twelve Alberta mayors call for Kenney to bring in provincewide COVID-19 vaccine passport rules.”⁵¹⁰
- July 12, 2021: Despite Manitoba and Quebec having announced vaccine passport programs, “Kenney says Alberta will not move in that direction.”⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁸ Kost Hannah, “What we know about Alberta's new vaccine passport (that's not being called a passport) so far” CBC News, Sep 16, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-vaccine-passport-restriction-exemption-program-covid-1.6178020>.

⁵⁰⁹ Kost Hannah, “Over 75% of Albertans would support vaccine passport, survey suggests” CBC News, September 3, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-vaccine-passport-kenney-leger-poll-covid-1.6164353>.

⁵¹⁰ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁵¹¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- September 15, 2021: Premier Jason Kenney “declares a state of public health emergency in Alberta and introduces a number of new restrictions.”⁵¹²
 - “Despite having promised for weeks that the province would not do so” Premier Kenney “also announced the implementation of a vaccine passport program – also known as the Restriction Exemption Program.”⁵¹³
- February 9, 2022: “Premier Jason Kenney announces the vaccine passport program, known officially as the Restrictions Exemption Program, will end at midnight. He also announces plans to end other health restrictions such as capacity limits in smaller venues in the following days.”⁵¹⁴

#10 TBA and Trucks

Summary

- The timeframe from December 2021 to late January 2022 when we saw the founding of Take Back Alberta and the series of trucker convoy protests is a turning point in Alberta’s relationship with misinformation.
- Take Back Alberta was founded by David Parker an activist who formerly helped Premier Kenney form the United Conservatives party. He created Take Back Alberta (TBA) in reaction to Kenney imposing the minimal restrictions that he did on churches and pastors. This same anger at Kenney for imposing any restrictions would be carried over into Parker’s involvement with the Coutts border protest, a border

⁵¹² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁵¹³ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁵¹⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

blockade born out of the trucker convoy protest. Both protests fought against the use of COVID-19 public health orders such as vaccinations, masks, and lockdowns. The protests were also enflamed by misinformation related to the QAnon, the new world order, and economic shutdown narratives.

- After the border blockade ended, we began to see a shift in Alberta's pandemic public health approach concerning common health options, such as masks and vaccination as was outlined in their sections of this breakdown.
- We also see an interesting effect revealed in this section, as the TBA worked to oust Kenny from his leadership position. How much of an influence they may have had is somewhat up for debate, but the basic fact is that, after their efforts, they did see their beliefs related to Covid mandates reflected in Kenney's replacement Premier Danielle Smith.
- When the era of Smith's leadership began, we saw a rapid change in the language and approach to the pandemic. This was especially seen in the fervor against the implementation of public health orders as lived out in the removal and subsequent banning of masking rules in schools and looking to pardon those who broke COVID mandate regulations.
- Smith would then go on to take advice from former members of the Trump-era White House who were known for referring to the vaccine as "Bioweapons," and using the misinformation narrative that vaccines were developed by some elite group, most often China or left-leaning billionaires such as Bill Gates, to kill, serialize or control the population in some manner.

- Smith's era is riddled with constant new events of misinformation influence. Instead of spending time outlining the rest of these many moments which are found in the timeline snapshot below, what we will discuss instead is what this constant parade of misinformation tells us about the question posed by this thesis.
- The question we seek to answer is that of misinformation's effect on Alberta's public health policy. While there will be a final extended analysis in the next chapter, Smith's era presents us with one massive indicator of the effect of misinformation. On its own, the convoy and border protests as well as the TBA affected Alberta's public health response by first pressuring some change under Kenney's leadership before helping replace him with Premier Smith. This change in leadership alone could be said to be a large "effect" on public health policy as any change in leadership would yield a significant possibility of change. But Smith's unique approach to pandemic response, seemingly fueled by misinformation alone, is a self-reinforcing cycle of 'misinformation's effects'. So along with the other effects outlined in this section, our question then must move on from determining 'if' to 'how much' of an effect misinformation had on Alberta's public health approach to the pandemic which will be the goal of the next chapter.

Timeline snapshot

- **Take Back Alberta:** Founded in December 2021⁵¹⁵ or sometime in 2022⁵¹⁶, “by right-wing activist David Parker, its leadership team also includes CFO Marco Van Huygens’s, a Fort Macleod town councilor who was one of the

⁵¹⁵ Bratt Duane, Biggs Sarah, “Opinion: Take Back Alberta wields 'disproportionate' power in provincial politics” Calgary Herald, Mar 04, 2023. <https://calgaryherald.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-take-back-alberta-wields-disproportionate-power-in-provincial-politics>.

⁵¹⁶ Take Back Alberta, “About us” Takingbackalberta.ca, <https://www.takingbackalberta.ca/about>.

anti-government protesters charged last year with participating in the Coutts border crossing blockade”⁵¹⁷

- David Parker “worked for Kenney and helped him form the UCP in 2017. But when Kenney began imposing rules and jailing pastors during the pandemic, Parker organized against him.”⁵¹⁸
- January 28, 2022: “A convoy of truckers rolls into Ottawa and sets up a protest against vaccine mandates and other health measures in that city’s downtown.”⁵¹⁹
- January 29, 2022: “Truck drivers and other protesters set up a blockade at Alberta’s Coutts border crossing with the U.S.”⁵²⁰
 - **The Freedom Convoy:** “Thousands of protesters began occupying the streets of Ottawa just less than three weeks ago... pledging to stay until all COVID-19 mandates and restrictions were removed,”⁵²¹
- **Mask Mandate Removal in Court:** August 18, 2022, “A court hearing on the Alberta government's abrupt removal of a mandatory mask mandate for schoolchildren heard Thursday from a government lawyer who rejected a suggestion the decision was fueled by growing tensions at the Coutts border crossing in February.”⁵²²

⁵¹⁷ Fawcett Max, “How Take Back Alberta is taking over the United Conservative Party”, Canada’s National Observer.

⁵¹⁸ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, May 14th, 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

⁵¹⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁵²⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁵²¹ CBC News. “The convoy crisis in Ottawa: A timeline of key events”, CBC, Feb 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/timeline-of-convoy-protest-in-ottawa-1.6351432>.

⁵²² Labby, Bryan. “Alberta government lawyers reject claim school mask mandate lifted due to 'combustible' border protest” CBC News, Aug 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-cmoh-hinshaw-cabinet-mask-schools-1.6555650>.

- **Chief Medical Officer Replaced:** October 11 -22, 2022, Premier Smith said she would replace Chief Medical Officer of Health Hinshaw with the plan to “recruit a new team of advisers in public health who consider COVID-19 an endemic disease.” As she did not believe that Covid should still be considered a pandemic, and that "A lot of the bad decisions were made by Alberta Health Services based on bad advice from the chief medical officer of health," Hinshaw was removed a week after the 11th.⁵²⁹
- **Vaccinated Blood Refused:** October 13, 2022, “Alberta physicians are raising the alarm about a dangerous trend — fueled by misinformation — that could cost lives... patient recently refused to consent to a blood transfusion if it came from a donor who had received the COVID-19 vaccine”⁵³⁰
- **2022 Take Back Alberta takes back the UCP:** “In October, Take Back Alberta mobilized en masse to vote in half the governing board of the UCP.”⁵³¹
 - “(The board) can remove the party membership of any member with a majority vote including a leader,” Parker tells the Grande Prairie crowd.”
 - **Trump’s Advice:** “During a forum ahead of the Brooks-Medicine Hat byelection... Smith said a group of doctors who are advising her has reached out to Dr. Paul Alexander, a Canadian researcher and former adviser to a

⁵²⁹ CBC News. “Dr. Deena Hinshaw out as Alberta's chief medical officer of health” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/deena-hinshaw-alberta-chief-medical-officer-of-health-mark-joffe-covid-19-pandemic-1.6651416>.

⁵³⁰ Lee, Jennifer. “Doctors seeing resistance to blood transfusions over unfounded COVID vaccine concerns” CBC News, Oct 13, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-blood-transfusions-resistance-covid-1.6613841>.

⁵³¹ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, May 14, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

member of U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration. Alexander pushed for a herd immunity approach in 2020”⁵³²

- November 9, 2022, “Alberta's Opposition leader said Premier Danielle Smith is not leading a government guided by science by consulting a former COVID-19 medical adviser of former U.S. president Donald Trump, who calls vaccines "bioweapons".”⁵³³

- “Paul Alexander has referred to COVID-19 vaccines as bioweapons.”
- “[Dr. Paul Alexander] is a conspiracy theorist whose ideas have been discredited by all reasonable folks in the scientific and medical community," NDP Leader Rachel Notley said on Wednesday after delivering a speech addressed to the Rural Municipalities of Alberta convention.”
- “The very act of suggesting that she will be consulting with him is going to destabilize our healthcare system," Notley said.”

- **Smith’s Alleged Lies about Care Workers:** November 17, 2022, “A now-fired AHS board member said Alberta's premier spread mistruths about

⁵³² Short, Dylan. "Former Trump medical adviser has been invited to meet with Alberta officials: Premier Smith" Calgary Herald, November 7, 2022. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/former-trump-medical-advisor-has-been-invited-to-meet-with-alberta-officials-premier-smith>.

⁵³³ Bennett, Dean. “Premier Danielle Smith consulting with former Trump adviser could affect health system, NDP says” CBC News, Nov 09, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-consulting-with-former-trump-adviser-could-affect-health-system-ndp-says-1.6646650>.

Alberta Health Services' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and has a naive view of how difficult it is to recruit health-care workers.”⁵³⁴

- “She seems to like shooting from the hip,” Dagnone said on Thursday of Smith's decision. “She doesn't believe in being informed before making these huge, huge decisions that have an impact on the health of Albertans.”
- **Smith Challenging Prosecutor:** January 19, 2023. CBC reported that “A staffer in Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's office sent a series of emails to the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service, challenging prosecutors' assessment and direction on cases stemming from the Coutts border blockades and protests”⁵³⁵
- February 9 2023: during a live press conference Premier Smith referred to working to grant amnesty for those charged with non-violent COVID-related charges, such as street preacher and political activist Artur Pawlowski whom Smith had met with in 2022. ^{536 537}
- **Take Back Alberta spreads into power:** 2023 “At the end of February, political organization Take Back Alberta managed to win 28 of the 30 positions up for re-

⁵³⁴ French, Janet. “Premier Danielle Smith fires Alberta Health Services board appoints administrator” CBC News, Nov 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/danielle-smith-alberta-health-services-board-administrator-john-health-minister-jason-copping-1.6655400>.

⁵³⁵ Grant, Meghan. “Alberta premier's office contacted Crown prosecution about Coutts cases: sources” CBC News, Jan 19, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-premier-office-emails-prosecutors-coutts-1.6719743>.

⁵³⁶ Black Matthew. “Smith sticks to her story on prosecutors, denies seeking amnesty for controversial pastor” Edmonton Journal, Feb 09, 2023. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/smith-sticks-to-her-story-on-prosecutors-denies-seeking-amnesty-for-controversial-pastor>.

⁵³⁷ Alberta Government, “CORRECTION*: Statement: Premier Danielle Smith” March 29th, 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86837CCB50BB8-CB1F-4883-C625969B6B8D9586>.

election on the UCP's Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre constituency association board.”⁵³⁸

- This would not be the only area that Take Back Alberta would spread to.
“Since rallying to knock out Kenney, it has continued organizing within the UCP, winning positions on constituency boards and supporting candidates, including Chelsae Petrovic in Livingstone-Macleod and Eric Bouchard in Kenney's old riding of Calgary-Lougheed.”⁵³⁹
- March 29, 2023: Premier Danielle Smith published a statement about the CBC article referencing her statements about granting amnesty for “those charged with non-violent, non-firearms COVID-related charges.”⁵⁴⁰
 - “Later today, in an effort to continue their campaign of defamatory attacks against me and my office staff, the CBC intends to release an article about a conversation I had with an individual named Artur Pawlowski.”
- **Smith Threatens CBC over Coutts Reports:** April 4, 2023, “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith is threatening legal action against the CBC if the corporation doesn't retract and apologize for recent reporting about the premier and COVID-19-related criminal cases related to last year's Coutts, Alta., blockade.”⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁸ Rodriguez Michael, “Candidate disqualified from UCP nomination set to take on Nixon as independent” Calgary Herald, Mar 15, 2023, <https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/candidate-disqualified-from-ucp-nomination-set-to-run-as-independent>.

⁵³⁹ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta's ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, May 14th, 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

⁵⁴⁰ Alberta Government, “CORRECTION*: Statement: Premier Danielle Smith” March 29th, 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86837CCB50BB8-CB1F-4883-C625969B6B8D9586>.

⁵⁴¹ Mazerolle, John. “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith threatens CBC with legal action over Coutts blockade stories” CBC News, Apr 04, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/danielle-smith-cbc-1.6799473>.

3.2: Notable case

In this section, we will examine an important case from the latter half of the pandemic. We will look at the resulting documents from the lawsuit brought by the parents with children who were put at greater risk of infection in response to mask mandates being lifted on February 14, 2022. This is useful to us because of the unique information about Alberta's internal justification and decision-making process for this action, which was made public.

3.2.1: 2022 School Masking Removal Case

The results of this court case found that the decision to lift the mandates was "unreasonable because it was based on an interpretation of the Public Health Act as giving final authority over public health orders to elected officials."⁵⁴² This ruling however did not put the masking requirements for schools back in place, as it was found that sufficient evidence of the impact of those who brought the case was not proven.⁵⁴³

That said, the outcome of this case is not our main concern. What was especially relevant to our purposes were the internal documents related to how the Alberta government decided to remove masking in schools. While the documentation provided was not all that was used, as some of their documents were not shared due to "cabinet confidentiality," what we do have is still very illustrative and helpful to our purposes.⁵⁴⁴

After the internal documentation was released the President of the Alberta Federation of Labor (AFL), who was involved in the case on behalf of the parents, Gil

⁵⁴² Grant, Meghan. "‘Unreasonable' order lifting Alberta school mask mandate made by politicians not Hinshaw: judge" CBC News, Oct 27, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/school-mask-mandate-alberta-unreasonable-judge-decision-lagrange-1.6631695>.

⁵⁴³ CM v Alberta, 2022 ABKB 716, October 26th, 2022. https://albertacourts.ca/docs/default-source/qb/judgments/cm-v-alberta-2022-abkb-716---decision.pdf?sfvrsn=38b46182_5

⁵⁴⁴ Lee Jennifer, "Alberta government memos on school masking 'damning,' union leader says" CBC News, Jun 03, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-government-mask-mandates-1.6477208>.

McGowan stated, “The limited documents that were disclosed to us suggest very strongly the government made this decision to lift the mask mandate based on politics and a desire to cater to the anti-mask crowd rather than on science and a concern about what would be in the public interest.”⁵⁴⁵ When these documents were examined for this thesis, a similar conclusion was reached.

In many cases, statistics in support of the removal of masks would be given with no, or limited citation, such as the claim made in tab 10 pdf page 196 of the collective documents file that "Negative effects of mask-wearing for children (see TAB 6): Masks can disrupt learning and interfere with children's social, emotional, and speech development by impairing verbal and non-verbal communication, emotional signaling, and facial recognition." ⁵⁴⁶ However, when you go back and look at tab 6 you find that the memo contained making this claim cites no sources, only making this and similar claims without additional context or information. Additionally, claims such as this seem to ignore other studies that had been publicly available at the time these documents would have been compiled, such as one published in 2020 related to masking children during the pandemic and emotional communication by Ashley L. Ruba and Seth D. Pollak, which found that the ability of children to recognize emotions was not hindered by masks, and only felt that additional work should be done to monitor this topic. ⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ Lee Jennifer, “Alberta government memos on school masking 'damning,' union leader says” CBC News, Jun 03, 2022.

⁵⁴⁶ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, “Amended Certified Record of Proceedings” Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg. 68.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/0hnig08elapj3im/Amended%20Amended%20Certified%20Record%20of%20Proceedings%20filed%20July%2012%2C%202022.pdf?dl=0>

⁵⁴⁷ Ruba, Ashley L., and Seth D. Pollak. “Children’s Emotion Inferences from Masked Faces: Implications for Social Interactions During COVID-19.” PloS one 15, no. 12 (2020): e0243708–e0243708.

The quality and contents of the sources that were referenced in the Alberta government decision justification document, even if not properly cited, provided ranged quite wildly. Most of these sources suggested that masking was effective, such as the information received from a study done by the Alberta school system that "school boards without mask mandates at the start of the school year (September 2021) had three times more outbreaks in their schools in the first few months of the school year. In addition, case, and hospitalization rates per 100,000 population in Alberta for children (five to 11 years old) and adults (30 to 59 years old) were lower in areas where mask mandates were required."⁵⁴⁸.

Some sources were more tepid in their stance, such as a literature review that was referred to but not cited on masking in school settings found that "associations between COVID-19 and the use of masks in educational settings was inconclusive, but some studies showed higher rates of COVID-19 in schools without mask requirements for students."⁵⁴⁹

Those few referred to within the documents, which had found that masks in schools had no effect in preventing disease spread, were associated with groups accused of spreading COVID-19 misinformation, such as the Brownstone Institute. It was described in the Alberta Government's internal document as "a US think tank opposed to COVID measures".⁵⁵⁰ The Brownstone Institute has been accused directly of spreading

⁵⁴⁸ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, "Amended Certified Record of Proceedings" Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg. 173.

⁵⁴⁹ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, "Amended Certified Record of Proceedings" Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg. 87.

⁵⁵⁰ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, "Amended Certified Record of Proceedings" Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg 69.

misinformation about Covid-19⁵⁵¹ ⁵⁵² and has claimed that “the daily new cases and hospitalization rates among children in states with and without school mask mandates are nearly identical.”⁵⁵³ This same institute has published work claiming that labeling ideas such as theirs as misinformation is akin to “Nazism, Stalinism, Maoism, and similar anti-liberal regimes” was meant to crush opposition⁵⁵⁴. Brownstone's view of misinformation had COVID-19 particularly in mind, as they made the point that it was wrong to "police" ideas such as the use of Ivermectin and Hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID, a widespread misinformation narrative, or to even question the effectiveness of masking.

In addition to the literature, sources referred to in their internal documents, the government also was seen to have observed internal health data from the Alberta Health dashboard and compared it to other statistics from other provinces and countries, while also examining the current and planned public health restrictions in other provinces.

This data makes the decision to lift the mandate even more startling. As seen in these internal decision-making documents, while there was a reduction in hospitalization numbers, Alberta's hospitals still had more people being admitted than at any time previously in the pandemic, except for the previous month when the current wave caused the case numbers to reach this height for the first time.⁵⁵⁵ So the situation was still not

⁵⁵¹ Media Bias Fact Check, “Brownstone Institute – Bias and Credibility” Media Bias Fact Check <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/brownstone-institute-bias/>.

⁵⁵² Gorski David, “Brownstone Institute admits that the Great Barrington Declaration was wrong (without actually admitting it was wrong)” Science Based Medicine.org, February 20, 2023. <https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/brownstone-institute-admits-that-the-great-barrington-declaration-didnt-get-every-detail-right/>.

⁵⁵³ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, “Amended Certified Record of Proceedings” Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg 69.

⁵⁵⁴ Klein Daniel, “Misinformation Is a Word We Use to Shut You Up” Brownstone Institute, May 31, 2023. <https://brownstone.org/articles/misinformation-a-word-used-to-shut-you-up/>.

⁵⁵⁵ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, “Amended Certified Record of Proceedings” Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg. 195 & Pg.209.

under control and a majority of the information examined by the government suggested that masking was highly likely to be helpful or possibly helpful with only a few opposing voices. Additionally, most other provinces during this time were not lifting their restrictions at the same rate as Alberta ⁵⁵⁶

Lastly, their claims related to protecting the mental health of students by removing masking made in these documents is disproven by information we have previously covered in this thesis, which showed that mental health issues and suicide rates for young people went down during the pandemic. ⁵⁵⁷

This suggests that while the Alberta government did have access to ample evidence that masking was more likely beneficial than not in a school setting, it decided against using this information as the basis for its decision in favor of something else. This decision was also made by the elected officials, an act which was found unreasonable by the court. ⁵⁵⁸ There is still some uncertainty as to whether they used misinformation peddling sources that they referred to in their documents as the sole basis for their decision, or if the real influences were not included in these documents or even in the missing decision documents. This does show a willingness to recognize the existence of wide-ranging information but not the ability to draw the suggested conclusion from that evidence, which suggests that there was a high likelihood that misinformation was either the reason for this decision or was at least used as support to arrive at a pre-determined

⁵⁵⁶ Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, "Amended Certified Record of Proceedings" Dropbox, July 12, 2022. PDF Pg. 247-266

⁵⁵⁷ Pierre, Joe. "Suicide in the Pandemic: A Prediction That Didn't Come True". Psychology Today, July 29, 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psych-unseen/202107/suicide-in-the-pandemic-prediction-didnt-come-true>.

⁵⁵⁸ Grant, Meghan. "'Unreasonable' order lifting Alberta school mask mandate made by politicians not Hinshaw: judge" CBC News, Oct 27, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/school-mask-mandate-alberta-unreasonable-judge-decision-lagrange-1.6631695>.

conclusion. This also increases the likelihood that the convoy and border protests, which occurred just before this removal, influenced this decision meaning that many streams of misinformation all converged at this point to lead to this decision.

3.3: In Summary

In this chapter, we examined the possibility of the influences of misinformation on many areas of Alberta's pandemic response. We did so while using the understanding of misinformation and public health policy that was collected within the previous two chapters. We did this to both understand the context behind public health actions and how misinformation works to effectively look at each timeline snapshot on its own and as part of an ongoing story.

With the analysis done in this chapter, the next and final chapter will hypothesize about the potential and likely effects of misinformation on Alberta's pandemic response. The collective hypotheses we come to will serve to answer, to the best of our ability, the question posed at the beginning of this thesis: 'Was there an effect of misinformation on Alberta's public health response to the Covid-19 pandemic and, if so, how much of an effect?'

There is no way to prove definitively the size and scope of an effect because doing so would require intimate knowledge of many people's internal motivations, thoughts, and beliefs. With that said, this work is confident that there is enough evidence present to allow for a reasonable hypothesis to be reached. The hope is that answering the question posed by this work will benefit policymakers in understanding how misinformation can alter a public health response and thus help them determine what methods they can then implement, relevant to their situation, to maintain a public health

response that is guided by data and expert advice for the benefit of their population, while limiting the confusion and lack of compliance which further risks the quality of public health policy.

Conclusion

4.1: Introduction

In this thesis paper, we approached the question of whether misinformation influenced Alberta's public health policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. We started by examining misinformation and its effects to determine to what degree and in what manner misinformation could have had an impact on public policy. Next was an examination of aspects of Alberta's public health policy in and out of a pandemic to be able to understand how the system we are examining works, who are the relevant actors and what their powers and responsibilities are, and how these each change and adapt to a pandemic.

Using this as context for the work, we then examined Alberta's public health policy and related misinformation to determine where an impact could have been, so as to not ascribe impact to a misinformation narrative before it existed. We also looked at the results of Alberta's public health response to see what weak points there were, what criticism others made, and how the Alberta government and other groups have suggested the response could have been improved.

This conclusion chapter will use the analysis of the previous chapter, which looked at public health policy and misinformation in the context of one another as well as the hypothesis of each sub-section of that chapter, to create a unified hypothesis and a more direct answer to the question posed at the start of this work. This means that, by the end of this section, we will have presented whether this work believes that misinformation influenced Alberta's public health

policy during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as in what areas of the policy we believe the impacts were most centralized.

4.2: Hypothesis

In the first subsection of Chapter 3, we briefly examined an early lack of communication from the Alberta government. We begin by mentioning it here because, as we stated, the lack of communication from the government created a natural narrative gap⁵⁵⁹ when Albertans entered the early days of COVID-19 without an official Alberta-based source of information providing them with updates on the topic, what they should do, or if they should even be worried. While there was little known about the virus at this point, an acknowledgment of that fact and reassurance that the government was monitoring the situation and would update the population as the government was able, would have served to not leave so many questions and fears open to manipulation. So, as context for all other analyses, we know that Alberta's people were left vulnerable to the effects of misinformation.

When examining the sub-sections of the previous chapter's analysis, two misinformation narratives and one movement seem to have had an outsized influence. All three have some amount of overlap and all have some connection to the New World Order conspiracy narratives or QAnon. The two narratives are the economic shutdown theory and the great reset theory. The economic shut down theory, introduced by former leader of the Wexit party Peter Downing, suggested that “Covid lockdowns were meant to hurt the economy to replace the "climate change" scare “which failed to do so.”⁵⁶⁰ The great reset theory was pushed by the current leader

⁵⁵⁹ Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz, and John Cook. “Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing.” (Page 12-13).

⁵⁶⁰ Phillips, Kurt. “FAR-RIGHT CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACIES” Canadian Anti-Hate Network, March 16, 2020. https://www.antihate.ca/far_right_coronavirus_conspiracies.

of the national Conservative Party of Canada, Pierre Poilievre. This narrative suggested that "global elites [are] preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab."

⁵⁶¹ Lastly, the freedom trucker convoy took elements of the two narratives and brought them to new and different extremes.

When we look at the snapshots that these three affected, we find consistent moments where there was a high likelihood that Alberta's public health policy was influenced by them. This pattern of possible effect suggests that Alberta's public health policy was affected in several ways by misinformation. Close to the beginning of the pandemic, the economic shutdown theory seems to have shifted the goals of Alberta's pandemic response away from preventing infection to protecting the economy and returning daily life to normal as quickly as possible while ignoring the ongoing situation. Then as the pandemic continued, fears of government control from the great reset theory alongside fears of economic hardship from the economic shutdown theory kept Alberta hesitant to enact public health orders and anxious to lift them when in place.

This led to greater confusion and discord in the public health approach than was necessary and increased frustration in the population as mandates were put in place and lifted almost at random, while both being treated as needing to be avoided and contrary to the public good. This was coupled with the government's hesitation, as well the government's insistence on getting back to normal and working for a "best summer ever" without restrictions. The frustration then served as greater fertilizer for misinformation and helped grow the national freedom trucker convoy and the local Coutts border blockade.

⁵⁶¹ Boutilier, Alex. "A Conservative MP warns that Justin Trudeau wants a 'Great Reset.' Conspiracy theorists are worried, too" Toronto Star, Nov. 20, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/11/19/a-conservative-mp-warns-that-justin-trudeau-wants-a-great-reset-conspiracy-theorists-are-worried-too.html>.

The convoy and blockade heralded a massive shift in Alberta's public health policy as was discussed in the previous chapter. This led to greater refusal to implement mandates and removals of some existing mandates, such as the school mask mandates, as well as bans on local areas putting mandates in place. Lastly, the convoy and blockade led to Take Back Alberta working to change the leadership of the UCP and remove Premier Kenney from his position. The replacement of a premier is a clear effect, even if Premier Smith had not gone on to spread further misinformation herself.

So, we can see a line of events that fit our understanding of how misinformation can affect people. We start with a confusing and terrifying time at the beginning of the pandemic when there were no government communications, leaving a gap in information and strong emotions looking for an outlet. We then see the leaders of the Wexit party and the national Conservative party spreading misinformation into that space, either motivated by a legitimate belief in the narratives or to use the narrative as disinformation to achieve a political end goal. That misinformation then led to a confused public health response, which was ineffective in preserving the health and lives of the population while somewhat effective at protecting the economy. That, in itself, is an answer to our question but the effects did not end there, as the confused and ineffective pandemic response led to greater fear as people continued to be infected and the state of people's lives could be changed on a whim with very little reasoning given. This confusion and fear then blossomed into more effects through the convoy, Take Back Alberta, and the replacement of Premier Kenney with Premier Smith, as well as the increasing influence that Take Back Alberta has had in Alberta's politics.

What this shows us is that misinformation's effects are not confined to one area. While we did find, in our analysis, a long series of large effects that misinformation had on Alberta's

public health policy, it is clear that the establishment of the TBA and the switch to the UCP being led by Premier Smith are not effects that will be limited to the lifespan of the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, when approaching policy creation of any kind it is prudent to do so with a knowledge of how misinformation can affect people and account for these effects in your approach. If the policy will be dealing with a topic for which there is a current risk of or existing fear, then it would benefit from clear communication. You cannot simply work in the background waiting for your final round of spellchecks to be complete before speaking with the public. This does not mean you need to shotgun random information out into the public sphere while you are learning more and working to decide on how your policy will address the situation, but you do need to give people enough to know that the situation is being worked on and in what ways they could expect solutions to come. You also need to make a continuous effort to listen to public concerns and address them as best as possible, by providing timely communication and information.

When working through a slow political process or waiting for the glacial movement of the scientific process to provide you with the knowledge and evidence you need, you must be aware that people's emotions will move faster than that, and that misinformation will be keeping up with people's need to understand. You need to account for the ongoing emotional human element in politics because fear will not wait for a completed policy brief. This does not mean that we don't need one, but it means that people need to be reassured one is coming and be informed about how that will happen.

As a final statement, this thesis suggests that it is highly likely that Alberta's pandemic response to the COVID-19 pandemic was influenced by misinformation continuously in several ways that will continue long after the pandemic. The resulting information of this thesis also

suggests that this work will be beneficial to policy creation and various government actors in showing how misinformation can impact not only public health policy but government actions and policy in general. This must be especially considered when approaching high-emotion, fear-inducing topics, and situations to prevent or reduce the impact of misinformation.

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[1.6357173#:~:text=The%20country's%20top%20doctor%20says,sense%20of%20normalcy%2C%22%20Dr.](https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/top-doctor-says-canada-is-past-peak-of-omicron-fuelled-wave-of-covid-19-1.6357173#:~:text=The%20country's%20top%20doctor%20says,sense%20of%20normalcy%2C%22%20Dr.)

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<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182412894>.

Appendix A: Merged timeline

2017

- **Sprinkles of QAnon:** “The QAnon theory now connects **antivaccine, anti-5G conspiracies**, antisemitic and antimigrant tropes, and several bizarre theories that the world is in the thrall of a group of pedophile elites set on global domination in part aided by ritualistic child sacrifice.”⁵⁶²
- **Pizza Gate and Bieber:** “The false theory targeting Democrats, now fueled by QAnon and teenagers on TikTok, is entangling new targets like Justin Bieber”⁵⁶³
- ***Out of the Shadows*:** “Out of Shadows, a 77-minute “documentary” that appeared in April on YouTube, seemingly out of the blue, from a former stuntman named Mike Smith. The film alleges, among other things, that Hollywood is run by Satanic pedophilia rings that distribute propaganda through films like *Zoolander*, the music videos of Katy Perry and Lady Gaga, and a discreet set of symbols, including the words “television” (tell-a-vision), “channel” (psychic communication), and “Hollywood” (named, they say, for the holly plant—which is poisonous and was once used in Druid rituals).”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² Gallagher Aoife, Jacob Davey, and Mackenzie Hart. "The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017", ISD Global, 2020. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf>.

⁵⁶³ Kang ,Cecilia and Sheera Frenkel. “‘PizzaGate’ Conspiracy Theory Thrives Anew in the TikTok Era” New York Times, June 27, 2020.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200627091004/https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/27/technology/pizzagate-justin-bieber-qanon-tiktok.html>.

⁵⁶⁴ Hitt, Tarpley. "Inside 'Out of Shadows': The Bonkers Hollywood-Pedophilia 'Documentary' QAnon Loves" *The Daily Beast*, Aug. 06, 2020. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/inside-out-of-shadows-the-bonkers-hollywood-pedophilia-documentary-qanon-loves>

2020

January

- January 20th: First Covid-19 test performed in Alberta ⁵⁶⁵

- **5G:** “. Some believe COVID-19 symptoms are a form of “mass injury” caused by 5G telecommunications technology, which has weakened the population’s immune system. Others insist the pandemic is a deliberate ploy to allow the authorities to install 5G infrastructure under cover of the social isolation lockdown.” ⁵⁶⁶
 - “Conspiracy theories linking 5G technology to COVID-19 have become so pervasive that Canada’s intelligence service is warning of possible extremist attacks on sites associated with the wireless network.” December 3, 2020⁵⁶⁷
- **Stolen from Canadian Lab:** “Social media posts falsely claim that a “Chinese spy team” working in a Canadian government lab sent “pathogens to the Wuhan facility” before the coronavirus outbreak in China. Two Canadian agencies have told us those claims are wrong.” ⁵⁶⁸
 - “Baseless stories claiming that the two scientists are Chinese spies and that they smuggled the coronavirus to China’s only Level 4 lab in Wuhan last year have been spreading on all major social media

⁵⁶⁵ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”. Global News, December 28, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7538547/covid-19-alberta-health-timeline/>.

⁵⁶⁶ 30. Dornan, Christopher. "SCIENCE DISINFORMATION IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC" June 2020. <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ScienceDisinformation-PPF-June2020-EN.pdf>. (page 17 pdf)

⁵⁶⁷ Bell, Stewart. “CSIS warns about conspiracy theories linking COVID-19 to 5G technology” Global News”, December 4, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7496689/csis-conspiracy-theories-coronavirus-covid-19-5g-technology/>.

⁵⁶⁸ Spencer, Saranac Hale. “Coronavirus Wasn’t Sent by ‘Spy’ From Canada” Fact Check.org. January 28, 2020. <https://www.factcheck.org/2020/01/coronavirus-wasnt-sent-by-spy-from-canada/>.

platforms and on conspiracy theorist blogs. One article from a conspiracy blog was shared more than 6,000 times on Facebook on Monday.”⁵⁶⁹

- **The Lab Leak Theory:** an “alternative theory (of covid’s origins) posits that the pandemic began after SARS-CoV-2 leaked from a laboratory in Wuhan, potentially the Wuhan Institute of Virology. A joint study by the World Health Organization and Chinese scientists in January and February 2021 considered this scenario “extremely unlikely.” From the earliest days in the pandemic, it was represented as a conspiracy theory built on misinformation and fear.”⁵⁷⁰
 - “To be clear, the so-called Wuhan lab-leak theory isn’t back in the news because any major piece of evidence has been uncovered to give it credence. What has changed is calls from scientists in the field, the Biden administration, and others to investigate it properly — because even the head of the World Health Organization says that hasn’t happened yet.”⁵⁷¹
- **False Health Advice:** “Social-media users have been sharing advice on ways to treat or prevent the disease. But at least some of the tips have proved to be misleading or false... One such claim - shared 16,000 times on Facebook -

⁵⁶⁹ Pauls, Karen, and Jeff Yates. "Online claims that Chinese scientists stole coronavirus from Winnipeg lab have 'no factual basis'" CBC, Jan 27, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/china-coronavirus-online-chatter-conspiracy-1.5442376>.

⁵⁷⁰ Ryan, Jackson. "How the coronavirus origin story is being rewritten by a guerrilla Twitter group" CNET. April 15, 2021. <https://www.cnet.com/science/features/how-the-coronavirus-origin-story-is-being-rewritten-by-a-guerrilla-twitter-group/>.

⁵⁷¹ Gollom, Mark. "Why the Wuhan lab-leak origin theory of the COVID-19 virus is being taken more seriously" CBC. May 28, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-19-wuhan-lab-leak-theory-1.6042038>.

advises users in the Philippines to "keep your throat moist", avoid spicy food and "load up on vitamin C" in order to prevent the disease... Journalists and fact-checkers have found posts with identical or slightly altered wording - said to be from local health authorities - are also being circulated on Facebook and WhatsApp in Canada, Pakistan and India."⁵⁷²

February

- February 24th: Retroactive tests would later determine the first Covid-19 case in Alberta was on this date, this was not realized until months later.⁵⁷³

March

- March 5: Alberta identifies what is believed its first COVID-19 case, this is the first case known to the public.⁵⁷⁴
- March 9: Chief Medical Officer of Health Doctor Deena Hinshaw stated, "At this point, it is likely we will be dealing with this virus worldwide for many months to come."⁵⁷⁵
- March 12th: Alberta's first restrictions were put in place, and gatherings with more than 250 people were canceled.⁵⁷⁶
- March 15: Alberta cities declare a state of local emergency. closing most non-essential businesses and services.
 - o "Alberta cancels all school classes and declares a provincial public health state of emergency the following day."⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷² BBC Monitoring. "China coronavirus: Misinformation spreads online about origin and scale" January 30, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-51271037>.

⁵⁷³ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

⁵⁷⁴ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta" Calgary Herald, Mar 15, 2022. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/two-years-of-covid-19-a-timeline-of-the-pandemic-in-alberta>.

⁵⁷⁵ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

⁵⁷⁶ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

⁵⁷⁷ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta".

- March 17th: Alberta declares a state of public health emergency⁵⁷⁸
 - o A ban on gatherings of 50 or more put in place⁵⁷⁹
- March 18: When asked about the impact restrictions were having on the economy, Dr. Hinshaw stated “In order to save lives, I have had to make recommendations that will take away livelihoods for many Albertans over the next several weeks to months”⁵⁸⁰
- March 19: “Alberta recorded the first COVID-19 death in the province”⁵⁸¹
- March 27th: “The province announced many non-essential businesses would temporarily close and that gatherings would be limited to 15 people.”⁵⁸²
- March 28, “the UCP government announced that they would redirect \$128 million from the K–12 education budget to their COVID response”⁵⁸³
 - o **Economic Shutdown “Ploy”**: Former Leader of Wexit Canada (The Maverick party) Peter Downing, used his personal Twitter account to suggest that the Covid lockdowns were meant to hurt the economy to replace the "climate change" scare" which fail to do so.⁵⁸⁴
 - o **Chinese Virus**: US President Donald Trump referred to Covid as the "Chinese Virus" and then defended his use of the term "It's not racist at all.

⁵⁷⁸ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁵⁷⁹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic” Toronto Star, Sept. 16, 2021. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/09/16/how-we-got-here-a-timeline-of-albertas-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.html>.

⁵⁸⁰ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁵⁸¹ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁵⁸² Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁵⁸³ Farhadi Beyhan, Winton Sue. “Building a Plane While Flying: Crisis Policy Enactment During COVID-19 in Alberta Secondary Schools” Journal of Teaching and Learning Vol. 15, No. 2 (2021), pp. 117–132 <https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v15i2.6725>. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1313646.pdf>.

⁵⁸⁴ Phillips, Kurt. “FAR-RIGHT CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACIES” Canadian Anti-Hate Network, March 16, 2020. https://www.antihate.ca/far_right_coronavirus_conspiracies.

No, not at all. It comes from China, that's why. It comes from China. I want to be accurate," Trump told reporters at a press conference.”⁵⁸⁵

April

- April 6th: “Alberta chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw recommends the use of non-medical face masks when physical distancing is difficult.”⁵⁸⁶
- April 7th: “Premier Jason Kenney addressed the province in a televised speech warning Albertans about the dangers of the virus.”⁵⁸⁷
- April 13th: “Alberta Health expanded testing to include all Albertans with symptoms.”⁵⁸⁸
- April 23: Alberta chief medical officer of Health Dr. Deena “Hinshaw restricts gatherings of more than 15 people.”⁵⁸⁹
- April 30th: “Details of the provincial relaunch were released.”⁵⁹⁰
 - o **Ivermectin**: “Caly et al. at Monash University in Australia recently published a paper in *Antiviral Research*, reporting that ivermectin, a medication widely used for the treatment of certain parasitic diseases in humans and livestock animals, inhibits the replication of SARS-CoV-2 in cell culture (Caly et al., 2020)⁵⁹¹. Despite the authors' cautious conclusion that ivermectin "warrants further investigation for possible benefits in humans," the paper has excited widespread interest on medical and veterinary websites, which often

⁵⁸⁵ Georgiou, Aristos. “WHO Expert Condemns Language Stigmatizing Coronavirus After Trump Repeatedly Calls It the 'Chinese Virus'” News Week, August 19th, 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/who-language-stigmatizing-coronavirus-trump-chinese-1493172>.

⁵⁸⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁵⁸⁷ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁵⁸⁸ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁵⁸⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁵⁹⁰ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁵⁹¹ Caly, Leon, Julian D. Druce, Mike G. Catton, David A. Jans, and Kylie M. Wagstaff. "The FDA-Approved Drug Ivermectin Inhibits the Replication of SARS-CoV-2 in Vitro." *Antiviral Research* 178 (2020): 104787–104787.

incorrectly describe the drug as a treatment or cure for COVID-19. These inappropriate statements led to a warning by the US FDA, that ivermectin in veterinary products should not be used for human therapy”⁵⁹²

- **Bill Gates and Covid Micro Chips:** “A conspiracy theory falsely claims Bill Gates is plotting to use COVID-19 testing and a future vaccine to track people with microchips. The Gates Foundation has advocated for expanded testing and has funded vaccine research, but neither of those involves implanted microchips.”⁵⁹³
 - "On April 6, Emerald Robinson, White House correspondent for the conservative website Newsmax, tweeted about Gates with a reference to another debunked conspiracy theory and concluded, "He controls global health policy. What's the plan? Using vaccines to track people"... Two days later, Fox News host Laura Ingraham asked U.S. Attorney General William Barr about Gates favoring "what some would say, tracking mechanisms."
- **The Epoch Times’s Claim:** “The Epoch Times, a newspaper that has polarized people over its content, is coming under fire for advancing a conspiracy theory about the origin of the coronavirus — and having it delivered straight into people's mailboxes unsolicited...a special eight-page edition of the paper exploring the idea that the virus that causes COVID-19

⁵⁹² Bray, Mike, Craig Rayner, François Noël, David Jans, and Kylie Wagstaff. "Ivermectin and COVID-19: A Report in Antiviral Research, Widespread Interest, an FDA Warning, Two Letters to the Editor and the Authors' Responses." *Antiviral Research* 178 (2020): 104805–104805.

⁵⁹³ Spencer, Saranac Hale. “Conspiracy Theory Misinterprets Goals of Gates Foundation” Fact Check.org, April 14, 2020. <https://www.factcheck.org/2020/04/conspiracy-theory-misinterprets-goals-of-gates-foundation/>.

was created as a biological weapon and arguing it should be called "the CCP virus," a reference to the Chinese Communist Party."⁵⁹⁴

May

- May 3: "The end of the province's first wave of the virus."⁵⁹⁵
- May 13: "Alberta enters Stage 1 of its COVID-19 relaunch, letting businesses like restaurants and retailers reopen, but Calgary and Brooks are singled out of the relaunch due to ongoing meat-plant outbreaks. Both municipalities are allowed to join in the relaunch on May 25."⁵⁹⁶
- May 29th: "Alberta Health expanded testing to include all Albertans with or without symptoms who wanted to receive a test."⁵⁹⁷
 - o **Gates Becomes the Covid "Boogeyman"**: "In a 2015 speech, [Bill Gates](#) warned that the greatest risk to humanity was not nuclear war but an infectious virus that could threaten the lives of millions of people. [That speech](#) has resurfaced in recent weeks with 25 million new views on YouTube — but not in the way that Mr. Gates probably intended. Anti-vaccinators, members of the conspiracy group QAnon and right-wing pundits have instead seized on the video as evidence that one of the world's richest men planned to use a pandemic to wrest control of the global health system."⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁴ Bellemare, Andrea and Jason Ho and Katie Nicholson. "Some Canadians who received unsolicited copy of Epoch Times upset by claim that China was behind virus" CBC News, Apr 29, 2020.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/epoch-times-coronavirus-bioweapon-1.5548217>.

⁵⁹⁵ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta".

⁵⁹⁶ Newsroom Staff, "Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta".

⁵⁹⁷ Karstens-Smith Breanna, "A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta".

⁵⁹⁸ Wakabayashi, Daisuke, Davey Alba, and Marc Tracy. "Bill Gates, at Odds With Trump on Virus, Becomes a Right-Wing Target" The New York Times, April 17, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/technology/bill-gates-virus-conspiracy-theories.html>.

- “In posts on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, he is being falsely portrayed as the creator of Covid-19, as a profiteer from a virus vaccine, and as part of a dastardly plot to use the illness to cull or surveil the global population.”
 - “The wild claims have gained traction with conservative pundits like Laura Ingraham and anti-vaccinators such as Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Mr. Gates has emerged as a vocal counterweight to President Trump on the coronavirus.”
 - “Bill Gates is easily transformed into a health-related meme and figure because he’s so well known,” said Whitney Phillips, an assistant professor at Syracuse University who teaches digital ethics. “He’s able to function as kind of an abstract boogeyman.”⁵⁹⁹
- **The Big Four:** A “study published in May at Carleton University indicated 46 per cent of Canadians believed at least one of four unfounded COVID-19 theories: the virus was engineered in a **Chinese lab**; the virus is being spread to cover up the effects of **5G** wireless technology; drugs such as **hydroxychloroquine** can cure COVID-19 patients; or rinsing your nose with a **saline solution** can protect you from infection.”⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁹ Wakabayashi, Daisuke, Davey Alba, and Marc Tracy. "Bill Gates, at Odds With Trump on Virus, Becomes a Right-Wing Target".

⁶⁰⁰ Kestler-D'Amours, Jillian. "COVID-19 conspiracy theories creating 'public health crisis' in Canada" The Canadian Press, August 3, 2020. <https://www.cp24.com/news/covid-19-conspiracy-theories-creating-public-health-crisis-in-canada-1.5049460?cache=%3FclipId%3D89680>.

June

- June 12: “Stage 2 of Alberta’s relaunch begins a week ahead of schedule, with businesses like massage clinics, theatres and libraries allowed to reopen.”⁶⁰¹
 - o “Calgary’s local state of emergency expires after three months, with Alberta following on June 16.”⁶⁰²
 - o **First Dose Deaths:** “Several social media users are sharing a two-minute video featuring an interview with Judy Mikovits in which she alleges that “at least 50 million Americans would die, probably from the first dose” if a COVID-19 vaccine was mandated for the whole population. This claim is unfounded.”⁶⁰³

July

- July 21:” Alberta announces schools will reopen in September with added safety measures.”
 - o “Calgary makes mask use mandatory in indoor public spaces effective Aug. 1.”
 - o “COVID-19 case counts begin to surge, with nearly 10,000 confirmed cases and 202 deaths.”
- July 27: “The curve is no longer flat,” Dr. Hinshaw announced as caseloads skyrocketed, prompting questions about whether Alberta reopened too quickly.”⁶⁰⁴
- July 30: “Serology testing suggests nearly 36,000 Albertans had COVID-19 by mid-May, far higher than official counts.”⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁰² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁰³ Reuters Staff. “Fact check: Unfounded claim that 50 million Americans would die from COVID-19 vaccine” Reuters. June 23, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-mikovits-vaccine-50-idUSKBN23U2I2>.

⁶⁰⁴ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁶⁰⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Alberta chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena “Hinshaw urges mask use, but Alberta does not introduce a mandate.”⁶⁰⁶
- **Anti-Mask:** “MONTREAL -- A lively crowd gathered outside Francois Legault's office in downtown Montreal in mid-July to send a message to the Quebec premier: his government cannot force them to wear masks in indoor public spaces to fight the spread of COVID-19.”⁶⁰⁷
 - “The anti-mask movement is not unique to Quebec, nor are masks the only source of conflict in the country when it comes to public health directives around the novel coronavirus. But the issue is one of several at the heart of a growing online movement of disinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada.”
 - “Researchers say conspiracy theories about COVID-19 are spreading at an alarming rate across the country - and they warn misinformation shared online may lead to devastating consequences and push Canadians to shun important safety measures.”

August

- Aug. 4: “Alberta mandates mask use for its back-to-school plan for students in grades 4 to 12.”⁶⁰⁸
- Aug. 20: COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Alberta. Alberta's chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw suggests young people and indoor gatherings are driving the spread.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁰⁷ Kestler-D'Amours, Jillian. “COVID-19 conspiracy theories creating 'public health crisis' in Canada”.

⁶⁰⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁰⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- August 21st: “Teachers, parents and students across the province hold rallies to protest the UCP’s school re-entry plan, which does not include funding to reduce class sizes. Concerns also grow around topics such as ventilation, sanitation, and staffing.”⁶¹⁰

September

- Sept. 1: Students head back to school, while Alberta public health services release data suggesting Alberta has entered its second Covid wave.⁶¹¹
 - o “Kenney says his government has accepted that COVID-19 infections in schools are inevitable and don’t warrant closing down all classrooms: "It's time to go back to some kind of normal.”⁶¹²
- Sept. 21: “Alberta Health Services staff work to contain multiple COVID-19 outbreaks at Foothills Medical Centre.”⁶¹³
 - o **QAnon Comes to Canada:** “Conspiracy theories, including those propagated by the once-fringe QAnon movement, have gained traction as the COVID-19 pandemic fuels fear, social and economic insecurity, and mistrust in authorities, experts in Canada say.”⁶¹⁴
 - “It's hard to say where the discredited QAnon belief system begins and ends, he said, describing it as a multifaceted conspiracy theory that's become increasingly overarching since the first so-called "Q drop," a post by an anonymous user called Q on the online forum 4chan in late 2017.”

⁶¹⁰ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶¹¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶¹² Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶¹³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶¹⁴ Owen, Brenna. “Canada not immune to QAnon as pandemic fuels conspiracy theories, experts say” CTV News, December 11, 2020. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/canada-not-immune-to-qanon-as-pandemic-fuels-conspiracy-theories-experts-say-1.5226762>.

- “QAnon draws on and fuels an array of beliefs, he said, from anti-Semitism to white nationalism to the idea that U.S. President Donald Trump is secretly working to take down a cabal of corrupt, Satan-worshipping liberal elites who are abusing and trafficking children for sex.”
- “Anti-mask and anti-vaccination movements are among those drawing from QAnon as a kind of "floating resource," Amarasingam said.”
- “QAnon message boards were set alight after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a United Nations conference this fall that the pandemic is an opportunity to "reset" and reimagine economic systems to address challenges such as poverty and climate change, said Amarasingam... "They interpreted it as a kind of slip-up," he said. "Like it was showing evidence that there was this master plan at work, that COVID could have indeed been a hoax that was planned by powerful elites to then bring about all these new economic and social changes, or large-scale societal shifts."

October

- Oct. 8: “Voluntary" COVID-19 restrictions come to the AHS Edmonton zone amid a surge in infections.” Other areas of Alberta such as Calgary see no new measures.⁶¹⁵
- Oct. 12: Spread caused by Thanksgiving gatherings cements the reality that Alberta is experiencing a second wave.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶¹⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- October 13: “The province shifted to appointment-only COVID-19 tests as drop-in testing proved to only account for a small amount of confirmed cases.”⁶¹⁷
- Oct. 26: “Alberta imposes a mandatory 15-person limit on social gatherings for Calgary.”⁶¹⁸
- October 27: “Alberta Health rushed to hire contact tracers after Dr. Hinshaw admitted the existing staff could not keep up with new cases.”⁶¹⁹

November

- Nov. 5: “Alberta’s contact tracing system is overwhelmed by surging case counts. The system doesn’t recover until February.”⁶²⁰
- Nov. 12: “Hundreds of Alberta doctors sign a letter urging the province to enter a circuit-breaker lockdown to curb the second wave.”⁶²¹
 - o “Restaurants and bars face tighter restrictions, including an earlier last call for alcohol, but the province stops short of more strict restrictions.”
- November 20: “Our current situation is grim,” Dr. Hinshaw said as Alberta broke record after record with climbing case counts.”⁶²²
- November 21: “Alberta Health Services said intensive care units across the province were approaching capacity limits as hospitalizations increased.”⁶²³
- Nov. 24: following weeks of rising COVID-19 case numbers, “Alberta announces new restrictions, banning social gatherings, closing high schools and limited attendance at places of worship.”⁶²⁴

⁶¹⁷ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁶¹⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶¹⁹ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁶²⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶²¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶²² Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁶²³ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁶²⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- November 26: “Recordings of health meetings were leaked to the CBC and appeared to show the tension between Dr. Hinshaw and the Alberta government pandemic response team. Dr. Hinshaw called the leak "a personal betrayal.”⁶²⁵
 - **Pierre Poilievre and the “Great Reset Theory”**: “Pierre Poilievre has been posting messages to social media and on his constituency website about "global elites preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab.”⁶²⁶
 - “In real life, the “Great Reset” is a rather modest vision put forward by the World Economic Forum, best known for organizing an annual talk-fest of business leaders and thinkers in the Swiss village of Davos... There’s nothing secret about it. You can find all the details on the forum’s website. In a nutshell, it argues that the pandemic has laid bare inequities in society and calls for post-COVID policies that would reduce that inequality.”⁶²⁷
 - “In the wilder corners of the Internet the “Great Reset” has become code for an alleged plot by a cabal of globalist elites to impose a new socialist order on the unwitting masses. In its most extreme form, the theory posits that the pandemic was deliberately let loose by those same elites looking for an excuse to carry out their nefarious plans... The conspiracy mongers had a field day last week when Prime

⁶²⁵ Karstens-Smith Breanna, “A timeline of COVID-19 in Alberta”.

⁶²⁶ Boutilier, Alex. “A Conservative MP warns that Justin Trudeau wants a ‘Great Reset.’ Conspiracy theorists are worried, too” Toronto Star, Nov. 20, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/11/19/a-conservative-mp-warns-that-justin-trudeau-wants-a-great-reset-conspiracy-theorists-are-worried-too.html>.

⁶²⁷ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy” Toronto Star, Nov. 23, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2020/11/23/pierre-poilievre-is-flirting-with-the-far-right-by-pushing-great-reset-conspiracy.html>.

Minister Justin Trudeau spoke (virtually) to a United Nations meeting and said the pandemic provided an opportunity for a “reset” of economic and social policies. Aha! cried the conspiracists; Trudeau’s clearly part of the secret plot to destroy capitalism”⁶²⁸

- “Poilievre posted a petition on his website under the scary, all-caps headline “STOP THE GREAT RESET.” It says “global financial elites” are pushing the agenda, and “Canadians must fight back against global elites preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab.” “Protect our freedom,” it concludes. Tens of thousands have signed.”⁶²⁹

December

- Dec. 8: Lockdown-style restrictions come to Alberta. Non-essential businesses closed, and all social gatherings were banned.⁶³⁰
- Dec. 15: “Long-term care residents receive the first doses of COVID-19 vaccine in Alberta”⁶³¹

2021

January

- Jan. 8: “Increasing numbers of medical workers are made eligible to receive the Covid vaccine.”⁶³²
- Jan. 14: “Alberta eases restrictions for outdoor gatherings and allows personal services businesses to reopen as case counts slowly decline.”⁶³³

⁶²⁸ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy”

⁶²⁹ Star Editorial Board. “Pierre Poilievre is flirting with the far right by pushing ‘Great Reset’ conspiracy”

⁶³⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Jan. 18: “Premier Jason Kenney says Alberta will run out of vaccine as Pfizer shipments to Canada halt.”⁶³⁴
- Jan. 29: “Alberta announces it will ease some restrictions on restaurants, indoor fitness and kids’ sport on Feb. 8.”⁶³⁵

February

- Feb. 3: Alberta's chief medical officer of health Dr. Deena Hinshaw bragged that Alberta had “bent the curve” citing falling case counts.⁶³⁶
 - o Fifty Covid-19 variant cases were Identified.
- Feb. 24: Vaccine appointments for those born in 1946 or earlier became available. However, “technical problems cause headaches, but more than 50,000 seniors book slots, with some getting immunized the same day.”⁶³⁷
- Feb. 26: “Health Canada regulators approve the AstraZeneca vaccine”⁶³⁸
- **Its Official, It’s an Infodemic:** the rate of dispersal of both real information and misinformation reached a level where WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, decided they needed to raise the alarm that “we’re not just fighting an epidemic, we’re fighting an infodemic.”⁶³⁹ This resulted in muddied waters which made it difficult for the general public to find proper health information and advice for making good health choices.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³⁵ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶³⁹ World Health Organization. “WHO publishes public health research agenda for managing infodemics” World Health Organization. February 2, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-02-2021-who-public-health-research-agenda-for-managing-infodemics>.

⁶⁴⁰ World Health Organization. “WHO publishes public health research agenda for managing infodemics”

- **No Power to Mask:** Education Minister Adriana LaGrange “said "school boards will not be empowered" to require masking.”⁶⁴¹

March

- March 1: “Gyms and libraries are allowed to reopen in Alberta.” All other businesses are still closed.⁶⁴²
- March 8: “After a week delay due to rising case numbers, former Health Minister Tyler Shandro announced Alberta will enter the second step of its economic relaunch plan”⁶⁴³
- March 10: “AstraZeneca vaccine booking opens in Alberta.”
- **Anti-Asian Hate and Violence:** Malformation throughout the pandemic caused a rise in violence and hate directed towards people of Asian descent and Asian communities, a report in March compiled by the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter, Chinese Canadian National Council Social Justice, Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, and the Civic Engagement Network-Society of Canada, documented this increase in hate and violent acts.⁶⁴⁴
- **Ivermectin Steps in:** “The Canadian Covid Care Alliance, a group of mostly unidentified doctors and scientists, promotes ivermectin, a drug used to treat parasites, as a solution for COVID-19, even though overwhelming research shows it doesn’t work on the virus.

⁶⁴¹ Hardcastle, Lorian, and Ubaka Ogbogu. “Alberta’s new chief medical officer must be independent, not sidelined” Nov 15, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/opinion-alberta-chief-medical-officer-hinshaw-joffe-danielle-smith-1.6652235>.

⁶⁴² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁴³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁴⁴ Kong Justin and Jessica Ip and Celia Huang and Kennes Lin "A year of Racist attacks: Anti-Asian Racism across Canada one year into the Covid-19 Pandemic" Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto chapter. March 2022. https://mcusercontent.com/9fbfd2cf7b2a8256f770fc35c/files/35c9daca-3fd4-46f4-a883-c09b8c12bbca/covidr racism_final_report.pdf.

The co-founder of the group, Ira Bernstein, is under investigation by the Ontario college.”⁶⁴⁵

April

- April 6: “Premier Jason Kenney announced the province will reintroduce restrictions on restaurants, fitness centers, and retail due to spiking variant cases and hospitalizations.”⁶⁴⁶
 - o “Citing widespread rule-breaking and new COVID-19 variants, Kenney announces that Alberta is in a third wave of the pandemic, as the province averages 1,000 new cases each day.”⁶⁴⁷
- April 7: “While Alberta doctors say the latest restrictions imposed were not enough, 16 UPC MLAs released a public letter saying the restrictions moved the province “backward.”⁶⁴⁸
 - o “Fifteen UCP MLAs release a public letter criticizing new measures, despite the fact Alberta has the highest case counts and some of the loosest public health restrictions in the country.”⁶⁴⁹
- April 29: “Alberta sets daily active COVID case records as the government tightens restrictions; Kenney also threatened possibly implementing curfews if cases continued to rise.”⁶⁵⁰
- **GraceLife:** After following public health guidelines up until this point, the church became a flashpoint in the battle between religious liberty and covid restrictions in Canada. “The church continued to hold over-capacity indoor services throughout

⁶⁴⁵ Weeks, Carly. “Physicians who spread misinformation may be eroding trust in health care system, experts say” The Globe and Mail, March 6, 2022. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-physicians-who-spread-misinformation-may-be-eroding-trust-in-health/>.

⁶⁴⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁴⁷ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁴⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁴⁹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁵⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

COVID's second wave, despite surging infections and multiple public health orders mandating limits on in-person worship. Pastor James Coates spent 35 days in remand for repeatedly refusing to abide by the rules.”⁶⁵¹

- “The story took another dramatic turn April 7 when Alberta Health Services ordered GraceLife closed, preventing access to the building by erecting layers of fencing around the property”
- The church leader later made public statements showing regret for the church's initial compliance to health orders “In his affidavit, Coates said the church's initial move to online worship was a product of "ignorance concerning COVID-19 and its severity." He latched onto Premier Jason Kenney's references to COVID as an "influenza" that usually only kills the sick and elderly.”

May

- May 4: “With more than 23,000 active cases in Alberta and the highest case rate per population in Canada, Kenney announced a new set of restrictions which included K-12 students moving online, restaurants moving to takeout service only, closure of personal care businesses, and capacity restrictions on outdoor social gatherings, places of worship, and funerals.”
 - List of restrictions announced.⁶⁵²
 - Effective May 5th
 - Post-secondary learning shifts online.
 - Faith services are limited to 15 people in person.
 - Indoor fitness centers closed for one-on-one training.

⁶⁵¹ Wakefield, Jonny. “GraceLife: How an Edmonton-area church became the centre of Alberta's COVID-19 fight” Edmonton Journal, April 14, 2021. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/gracelife-tick-tock>.

⁶⁵² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Retail capacity is limited to 10 percent of the fire code, bottoming out at 5 customers.
- Outside social gatherings are limited to 5 people and indoor gatherings are still prohibited.
- Funerals & Weddings are limited to 10 people.
- Effective May 7th
 - Kindergarten through grade 12 schooling shifts to home learning until May 25.
- Effective May 9th
 - Outdoor recreation with those outside of your household or outside of the two-person bubble of someone living alone is prohibited.
 - All indoor recreation in public is prohibited.
 - In-person dining on patios for services venues is prohibited, only takeout/ delivery is allowed.
 - Hair and nail salons and all other aesthetic wellness businesses such as tattoo parlors must close.
- May 18: Premier Jason “Kenney announces more than 50 per cent of Albertans aged 12 and over have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.”⁶⁵³
- May 26: Premier Jason “Kenney announces the controversial three-stage Open for Summer plan, and says all restrictions could be lifted in Alberta by July.”⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁵⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Open for summer replaced “the “Path Forward” framework ... Tied to both vaccination rates and hospitalizations, the plan aims to drop all restrictions by July.”⁶⁵⁵
- **Suicide Rate Myth Debunked:** Early on there had been predictions that Suicide rates would raise especially for youth during the pandemic, though this assumption many went on to claim to be the case that restrictions were causing a raise in the suicide rate, however, it was found by a University of British Columbia report that this was not only false but that during the pandemic Suicide rates conversely declined. ⁶⁵⁶

June

- June 18: “With over 70 per cent of eligible Albertans receiving at least one dose of vaccine, Kenney announced all restrictions would be lifted on July 1.”⁶⁵⁷

July

- July 1: “Rules around indoor and outdoor social gatherings, capacity limits in businesses and other venues, recreation, large events like concerts or sports and other settings were lifted.”⁶⁵⁸
 - “Alberta becomes the first Canadian jurisdiction to drop all restrictions after hitting the government’s goal of getting a first dose into 70 per cent of the eligible population. “Don’t live in fear,” Kenney told Albertans, before promising the “best summer ever.””⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁵ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁵⁶ Pierre, Joe. "Suicide in the Pandemic: A Prediction That Didn't Come True". Psychology Today, July 29, 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psych-unseen/202107/suicide-in-the-pandemic-prediction-didnt-come-true>.

⁶⁵⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁵⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁵⁹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

- July 5: “A Calgary city council vote went 10-4 in favor of rescinding its mandatory masking rules.”⁶⁶⁰
- July 12: Despite Manitoba and Quebec having announced vaccine passport programs, “Kenney says Alberta will not move in that direction.”⁶⁶¹
- July 28: Cases continued to rise in Alberta “Dr. Hinshaw announced starting Aug. 16, provincial masking would no longer be required for transit, taxis and rideshares. It continued to be recommended in schools.”⁶⁶²
 - o “And that there will no longer be a legally required isolation period should someone test positive for COVID-19.”⁶⁶³

August

- Aug. 9: “With concerns mounting regarding the Delta variant, the Alberta Medical Association Section of Pediatrics penned a letter to Kenney, pleading with the province to keep public health measures in place.”⁶⁶⁴
 - o “Expressing grave concern over Alberta’s decision to eliminate COVID-19 testing and tracing, and its plan to end mandated isolation for positive cases.”⁶⁶⁵
- Aug. 13: “Due to public pressure and rising case counts, the provincial government announced it would be taking a step back from lifting public health measures, and instead keeping them in place for an additional six weeks.”

⁶⁶⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁶¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁶² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁶³ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁶⁴ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁶⁵ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

- “Following weeks of pressure, the Alberta government reverses course, extending remaining public health restrictions for six more weeks. "We are not going backward. We are pausing to monitor and assess before taking a step forward," Hinshaw said.”⁶⁶⁶
- **Alberta Court Disproves Covid?** “a video posted to the right-wing video hosting platform Bitchute falsely claimed that a Canadian man, Patrick King, had successfully shown in court that COVID-19 is a "hoax," and as a result, government restrictions intended to slow the spread of the virus had been lifted.”⁶⁶⁷
 - King didn't win but rather had to pay a fine. COVID-19 is not a hoax, and related restrictions meant to slow the spread in Alberta were lifted not because of King's case, but because health experts there said high vaccination rates made severe outcomes from contracting the disease less likely.⁶⁶⁸⁶⁶⁹

September

- Sept. 1: “During a Q&A marking his first appearance since Aug. 9, Kenney says the coming fourth wave will be a “wave of the unvaccinated.” He said if the province, which lagged most in Canada in terms of vaccination, had 90 per cent vaccine coverage there would not be meaningful pressure on the health-care system.”⁶⁷⁰
 - “Kenney addresses Albertans for the first time since Aug. 9, after modelling from a team of independent pandemic researchers suggests a health crisis is

⁶⁶⁶ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁶⁷ Palma, Bethania. “No, a Canadian Court 'Victory' Didn't Prove COVID 'Is a Hoax'” Snopes. Aug 10, 2021. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/alberta-court-ruling/>.

⁶⁶⁸ Palma, Bethania. “No, a Canadian Court 'Victory' Didn't Prove COVID 'Is a Hoax'”

⁶⁶⁹ Reuters Fact Check. “Fact Check-Alberta court case not linked to lifting of COVID-19 restrictions” Reuters, August 7, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-alberta-case-idUSL1N2PE0EX>.

⁶⁷⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

unavoidable unless there is strong action. It is later confirmed that Kenney took a two-week vacation in Europe in late August.”⁶⁷¹

- 2021 Sept. 3rd, A survey suggests “Over 75% of Albertans would support a vaccine passport”.⁶⁷²
- Sept. 3: Kenney offers \$100 gift cards to Albertans who currently weren’t vaccinated if they got vaccinated.⁶⁷³
 - “Calgary restores its mask bylaw and declares a state of local emergency as case counts ramp up.”
 - “For the love of God, please get vaccinated now,” “If you are unvaccinated, it is urgent that you protect yourself.” Kenney told the media.⁶⁷⁴
- Sept. 7th: “Twelve Alberta mayors call for Kenney to bring in provincewide COVID-19 vaccine passport rules.”⁶⁷⁵
- Sept 13th: “Hinshaw admits lifting all public health restrictions in July was the wrong move. “The expectations did not match the reality,” Hinshaw said.”⁶⁷⁶
 - "Hinshaw says she looked at the evidence, consulted with colleagues, and watched modeling in early summer — all of which led her to recommend that Alberta move toward "endemic" at the outset of summer. "The move to endemics was too early," she said."⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷¹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁷² Kost Hannah, “Over 75% of Albertans would support vaccine passport, survey suggests” CBC News, September 3 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-vaccine-passport-kenney-leger-poll-covid-1.6164353>.

⁶⁷³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁷⁴ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁷⁵ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁷⁶ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁷⁷ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

- Sept. 15: Premier Jason Kenney “declares a state of public health emergency in Alberta and introduces a number of new restrictions.”⁶⁷⁸
 - “Despite having promised for weeks that the province would not do so”⁶⁷⁹ Premier Kenney “also announced the implementation of a vaccine passport program – also known as the Restriction Exemption Program.”
 - “Kenney defends his decision to lift restrictions during the summer, but says he is sorry for being “too enthusiastic” that the province would be open for good and for underestimating the virus.”⁶⁸⁰
- Sept 28: “Cases in children reach a record high not seen since during the pandemic.”⁶⁸¹

October

- Oct. 5: “Alberta rolls out its first COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for the general public”⁶⁸²
- Oct. 28: The Alberta government “announces that support workers from the Canadian Red Cross, Canadian Armed Forces and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador are no longer needed, about one month after it was announced they would assist in the province’s strained hospitals.”⁶⁸³
- **Ivermectin Hits Home:** “Reports to poison centers concerning ivermectin as a prevention or treatment for COVID-19 have increased over the summer months. Health Canada is reminding Canadians not to use ivermectin to prevent or treat

⁶⁷⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁷⁹ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁸⁰ Assaly Richie, “How we got here: A timeline of Alberta’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

⁶⁸¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁸² Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁸³ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

COVID-19. Canadian poison centers have seen an increase in reports concerning ivermectin over the summer. There is no evidence that ivermectin works to prevent or treat COVID-19, and it is not authorized for this use. To date, Health Canada has not received any drug submission or applications for clinical trials for ivermectin for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19.”⁶⁸⁴

- **4 Covid Denying Doctors:** “The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) says it has been forced to take four doctors to court in order to get them to cooperate with investigations over issuing medical exemptions for a COVID-19 vaccine or testing.”⁶⁸⁵

November

- Nov. 4: “The province’s health minister reveals Alberta cancelled an estimated 15,000 surgeries as it scrambled to preserve health-care capacity during the fourth wave of COVID-19.”⁶⁸⁶
- Nov. 24: “Vaccine bookings for Alberta children aged 5-11 opens.”
- Nov. 25: “Scientists announce they’ve detected a new variant of COVID-19 in South Africa with unusual mutations. The variant is named Omicron.”⁶⁸⁷
- Nov. 30: “The Omicron COVID-19 variant is confirmed in Alberta”⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁴ Government of Canada. "Public advisory: Ivermectin not authorized to prevent or treat COVID-19; may cause serious health problems" Government of Canada, October 19th, 2021. <https://recalls-rappels.canada.ca/en/alert-recall/ivermectin-not-authorized-prevent-or-treat-covid-19-may-cause-serious-health-problems>.

⁶⁸⁵ Rodrigues, Gabby. “Ontario physicians’ watchdog takes 4 doctors to court over COVID-19 vaccine, testing exemptions” Global News, November 3, 2021. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8345949/ontario-doctors-covid-vaccine-exemptions-cpso-court-action/>.

⁶⁸⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁸⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁸⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- **An Ontario MPP’s Message:** “A message regularly appears from Ontario MPP Randy Hillier, posted on Hillier’s Facebook page on Nov. 15, falsely claiming Public Health Ontario (PHO) is investigating 37 possible deaths due to vaccines.”⁶⁸⁹
- **Court Cases Weaponized:** “Over the past 19 months, Alberta has seen church leaders, business owners and others challenge public health restrictions in the court system...But health law experts and far-right researchers say they've seen a shift in the nature of the court challenges in the province... Alberta is seeing a growing number of court cases come forward challenging the science behind COVID-19, public health restrictions and vaccines.”⁶⁹⁰

December

- Dec. 15: “Premier Jason Kenney announces rapid COVID-19 antigen tests will be made available to Albertans as the province also lifts some restrictions around indoor gatherings.”⁶⁹¹
- Dec. 21: “Alberta opens up its booster shots to anyone aged 18 or older and announces capacity limits on certain indoor venues, as well as restricted liquor serving hours in an attempt to bring down rapidly rising COVID-19 cases brought on by the Omicron variant.”⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁹ Stewart, Ashleigh. “The great COVID-19 infodemic: How disinformation networks are radicalizing Canadians” Global News, December 18, 2021. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8450263/infodemic-covid-19-disinformation-canada-pandemic/>.

⁶⁹⁰ Dubois, Stephanie. “Misinformation in the courtroom: How cases challenging COVID-19 restrictions in Alberta have shifted” CBC, Nov 22, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/misinformation-in-the-courtroom-how-cases-challenging-covid-19-restrictions-in-alberta-have-shifted-1.6254417>.

⁶⁹¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁶⁹² CTV News Edmonton “Alberta opens COVID-19 vaccine boosters to all adults, reduces attendance at large venues”, CTV News, December 21, 2021. <https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/alberta-opens-covid-19-vaccine-boosters-to-all-adults-reduces-attendance-at-large-venues-1.5715178>

- **Lethbridge MP Spreads Misinformation:** “Lethbridge Conservative MP Rachael Thomas is facing questions after suggesting vaccinated people are more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 than the unvaccinated.”⁶⁹³
- **Take Back Alberta:** Founded in December 2021⁶⁹⁴ or sometime in 2022⁶⁹⁵, “by right-wing activist David Parker, its leadership team also includes CFO Marco Van Huygens’s, a Fort Macleod town councilor who was one of the anti-government protesters charged last year with participating in the Coutts border crossing blockade”⁶⁹⁶
 - o David Parker “worked for Kenney and helped him form the UCP in 2017. But when Kenney began imposing rules and jailing pastors during the pandemic, Parker organized against him.”⁶⁹⁷

2022

January

- Jan. 17: “Health Minister Jason Copping tests positive for COVID-19 as the number of hospitalizations for the virus top 1,000.”⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹³ Marczuk, Karsen. “Lethbridge MP wants unvaccinated to be ‘respected, appreciated’ in the community” CTV News, Dec. 21, 2021. <https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/lethbridge-mp-wants-unvaccinated-to-be-respected-appreciated-in-the-community-1.5716118>.

⁶⁹⁴ Bratt Duane, Biggs Sarah, “Opinion: Take Back Alberta wields ‘disproportionate’ power in provincial politics” Calgary Herald, Mar 04, 2023. <https://calgaryherald.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-take-back-alberta-wields-disproportionate-power-in-provincial-politics>

⁶⁹⁵ Take Back Alberta, “About us” Takingbackalberta.ca, <https://www.takingbackalberta.ca/about>.

⁶⁹⁶ Fawcett Max, “How Take Back Alberta is taking over the United Conservative Party”, Canada’s National Observer

⁶⁹⁷ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, may 14th 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

⁶⁹⁸ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

- Jan. 25: “Health Minister Jason Copping announces an initial shipment of Pfizer’s COVID-19 anti-viral drug Paxlovid has arrived in the province, with 3,200 courses of treatment available to eligible Albertans beginning Jan. 31.”⁶⁹⁹
- Jan. 28: “A convoy of truckers rolls into Ottawa and sets up a protest against vaccine mandates and other health measures in that city’s downtown.”⁷⁰⁰
- Jan. 29: “Truck drivers and other protesters set up a blockade at Alberta’s Coutts border crossing with the U.S.”⁷⁰¹
- **The Canadian Covid Care Alliance (CCCA):** “A video produced by a group claiming to represent Canadian doctors and health care professionals alleges that the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine is dangerous. But the video repeats several previously debunked assertions about the safety of the shot, experts say the benefits outweigh the risks of rare side effects, and the Canadian government recommends it to prevent hospitalization and death.”⁷⁰²
- **Even more, Covid Denying doctors:** “More than 40 physicians are currently being investigated by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) for promoting unproven treatments for COVID-19 or sharing unverified information about its vaccines, Global News can reveal... The revelation comes after Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott publicly urged the CPSO to crack down on a group of doctors accused of spreading unverified medical information about the vaccines after the situation was brought to light in a Global News investigation.”⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁷⁰⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁷⁰¹ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁷⁰² Goldhamer, Marisha. “Video repeats false claims about safety of Pfizer’s Covid-19 vaccine” AFP Canada, 04 January 2022. <https://factcheck.afp.com/http%253A%252F%252Fdoc.afp.com%252F9VJ3DA-1>.

⁷⁰³ Stewart, Ashleigh. “40 Ontario physicians currently being investigated for COVID-19 issues: College” Global News, January 19, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8524589/ontario-physicians-investigation-covid-19/>.

- **The Freedom Convoy:** “Thousands of protesters began occupying the streets of Ottawa just less than three weeks ago... pledging to stay until all COVID-19 mandates and restrictions were removed.”⁷⁰⁴
- **Coutts Boarder Protest:** “A truck convoy of anti-COVID-19 vaccine mandate demonstrators block a highway at the busy border crossing in Coutts.”⁷⁰⁵

February

- Feb. 9: “Premier Jason Kenney announces the vaccine passport program, known officially as the Restrictions Exemption Program, will end at midnight. He also announces plans to end other health restrictions such as capacity limits in smaller venues in the following days.”⁷⁰⁶
- Feb. 14: “Students in Alberta are no longer required to wear masks.”⁷⁰⁷
 - o “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invokes the Emergencies Act over an ongoing protest in the nation’s capital by truckers and others opposed to health restrictions.”
- Feb. 15: “Protesters at the Coutts border blockade pack up and head for home, one day after RCMP seized illegal weapons and arrested 13 people.”⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁴ CBC News. “The convoy crisis in Ottawa: A timeline of key events”, CBC, Feb 17, 2022.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/timeline-of-convoy-protest-in-ottawa-1.6351432>.

⁷⁰⁵ Dryden Joel, Grant Meghan, “Border protests in Coutts, Alta., a 'concrete manifestation' of risk to Canada: Rouleau” CBC News, February 17th 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/coutts-alberta-diagonon-paul-rouleau-1.6751945#:~:text=CBC%20News%20Loaded-.Border%20protests%20in%20Coutts%2C%20Alta.%2C%20a%20concrete%20manifestation,to%20invoke%20the%20Emergencies%20Act>

⁷⁰⁶ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁷⁰⁷ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁷⁰⁸ CBC News, “Mounties seize guns and arrest 13 protesters at border blockade in Alberta” CBC News, Feb 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/coutts-protest-blockade-arrests-rcmp-monday-1.6351112>.

- Feb. 18: Canada’s “top doctor Theresa Tam says Canada is past the peak of the COVID-19 wave caused by the Omicron variant and is ready to move out of a crisis response.”⁷⁰⁹

March

- March 1: “Most health restrictions are lifted in Alberta, with the exception of certain health care settings.”⁷¹⁰
 - o “Premier Jason Kenney says any attempt by municipalities to bring in their own health restrictions will be blocked by the province.”
- March 8th: it was announced that “Effective March 10 at 4 p.m., Alberta Health Services (AHS) will no longer require proof of COVID-19 vaccination or regular rapid testing of its current workers.”⁷¹¹
- **From Covid to Ukraine:** “As the tire tracks fade from the so-called “freedom convoy” that occupied downtown Ottawa streets, some of the Telegram forums devoted to the convoy have taken up the torch of a new cause: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine...Much like the misinformation that fueled some of the trucks headed for Ottawa, conspiracy theories are at the core of some of their conversations about Ukraine — leading them to decry Western intervention in the conflict, or in some cases, express outright support for Russia.”⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁹ The Canadian Press, “Top doctor says Canada is past peak of Omicron-fuelled wave of COVID-19”. CBC News, Feb 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/top-doctor-says-canada-is-past-peak-of-omicron-fuelled-wave-of-covid-19-1.6357173#:~:text=The%20country's%20top%20doctor%20says,sense%20of%20normalcy%2C%22%20Dr.>

⁷¹⁰ Newsroom Staff, “Two years of COVID-19: A timeline of the pandemic in Alberta”.

⁷¹¹ Alberta Government. “AHS mandatory vaccination policy lifted” Alberta.ca, Mar 08, 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=8206835279AEF-F976-3D2F-EAA53CFCDD239C52>.

⁷¹² Gilmore, Rachel. “‘Freedom convoy’ forums find new focus: disinformation about Russia-Ukraine war” Global News, March 8, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8659667/ukraine-russia-convoy-misinformation-conspiracy/>.

April

- April 6th: The Alberta government announced that it “is expanding eligibility for fourth doses of COVID-19 vaccine and Paxlovid treatment to protect those most at risk from severe outcomes.”⁷¹³

June

- June 13th: “Alberta will take the final step in its plan to ease public health measures as the province moves past the Omicron BA.2 wave and COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to decline.”⁷¹⁴
 - o Public health measures would end effect on Jun 15. After which point isolation and making would be recommended but not mandatory.
- June 29th: Minister of Health Jason Copping published a statement about the current state of the Covid-19 pandemic in Alberta.
 - o “Today’s COVID-19 update is more good news for Albertans and for our health-care system. The Omicron wave continues to recede. Levels of the virus in wastewater are trending down across the province, including in Edmonton and Calgary, and are at or near the levels before Omicron in many centers.”
 - o “The number of COVID-19 patients in hospital continues to drop.”
 - o “Our hospitals and other services remain under strain, especially in Edmonton and Calgary, for the same reasons as in other provinces: a wave of patients in recent months, plus the impact of the past two years on the health workforce.”

⁷¹³ Alberta government, “Alberta expands access to fourth vaccine doses” Alberta.ca, April 6th 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=822960A564540-9E17-A696-8D1B30A93143EF97>

⁷¹⁴ Alberta Government “Alberta to lift remaining health restrictions” Alberta.ca, June 12th, 2023. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=83071B896298F-E65E-B3B8-D14840FE40EFD1F>.

- “These pressures will ease as the Omicron BA.2 wave recedes and we get through the current wave of other respiratory viruses. And we’re continuing to add capacity. Alberta Health Services has now opened 26 of the 50 new ICU beds funded in Budget 2022 and nine new ambulances will be on the streets in Edmonton and Calgary by the end of this month.”
- “It’s been a tough spring for our health system in Alberta and across Canada. We know the pandemic is not over. We have to expect cases to increase again, most likely in the fall, and we’re preparing for that. We’ll continue to closely monitor the emergence of new variants and keep Albertans informed of the risks from the pandemic and how we’re responding to them.”

July

- July 19th: Alberta expanded Covid-19 boosters to those over the age of 18 to “provide Albertans with more choices about increasing their protection against COVID-19 based on their personal risk factors.”⁷¹⁵
- July 29th: “COVID-19 vaccine appointments are available for children between six months and five years of age starting Aug. 2.”⁷¹⁶
- **Freedom Convoy Head, bailed out:** July 26th, 2022, "Freedom Convoy organizer Tamara Lich has again been granted bail."

August

- August 28th: eligibility for the booster was expanded to kids aged 5-11⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁵ Alberta Government, “Expanding COVID-19 booster choices for those 18+” Alberta.ca, July 19th 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=84282EA99A2B3-CAB4-5B7F-725C6A3812CCBE2D>.

⁷¹⁶ Alberta Government “Rollout of COVID-19 vaccine for children under” July 29th 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=84349F2BF1BC8-B69E-ED80-0B6C1B4CC1D1CDA0>.

⁷¹⁷ Alberta Government, “Boosters expand to kids aged 5-11” August 26th 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=844648BFECF81-03B4-4A75-B3377ED1E6AD24D7>.

- **Warnings of Convoy Unearthed:** August 17th, 2022, “Newly disclosed documents show federal intelligence officials warned decision-makers that the police dispersal of Freedom Convoy protesters in Ottawa last winter could prompt an "opportunistic attack" against a politician or symbol of government." This was concerning a threat highlighted for February 24th, 2022.⁷¹⁸
 - o “Ideologically motivated extremists would likely use police enforcement "to encourage violent revenge or as further evidence of government 'tyranny,'" the four-page assessment said.”

- **Mask Mandate Removal in Court:** August 18th, 2022, “A court hearing on the Alberta government's abrupt removal of a mandatory mask mandate for schoolchildren heard Thursday from a government lawyer who rejected a suggestion the decision was fueled by growing tensions at the Coutts border crossing in February.”⁷¹⁹
 - o Lawyers representing immunocompromised children pushed back and “said the decision to remove mask mandates in Alberta schools was not consistent with public health advice and instead was made by government officials for political reasons, including "quelling protests" at the Coutts border crossing.”

⁷¹⁸ Bronskill, Jim. “Intelligence report flagged possible 'violent revenge' after Ottawa protest shutdown” CBC News, Aug 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/intelligence-report-freedom-convoy-police-breakup-warning-1.6553466>.

⁷¹⁹ Labby, Bryan. “Alberta government lawyers reject claim school mask mandate lifted due to 'combustible' border protest” CBC News, Aug 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-cmoh-hinshaw-cabinet-mask-schools-1.6555650>.

- **The Queen of Canada:** August 18th, 2022, “A few dozen people had gathered outside the city's police station after an appeal from a QAnon conspiracy theorist, who purports to be the "Queen of Canada," for citizens to arrest local officers.”⁷²⁰
- **Dutch Farmers Fertilizers Misinformation:** August 25th, 2022, "supporters of the Freedom Convoy movement have continued to hold anti-mandate demonstrations across the country... they also featured a new — and perhaps surprising — symbol: The flag of the Netherlands was being waved alongside the more familiar Maple Leaf and F--k Trudeau banners... The red, white, and blue flag is meant to be a show of solidarity with Dutch farmers protesting their government's efforts to halve emissions linked to nitrogen-based fertilizers by the end of the decade" This was linked to "Far-right media and conservative politicians stoking misinformation about an early plan to cut emissions”⁷²¹
 - o “In Canada, many within the convoy movement see the Dutch farmers as allies in a global fight against an array of policies they maintain are too progressive, such as public health mandates or emission targets... "The far right wants to think of it as a transnational movement," said Bàrbara Molas, a research fellow at the International Centre for Counterterrorism (ICCT) in The Hague.”

⁷²⁰ Fraser, David. “QAnon-inspired protest in Peterborough, Ont., prompts investigation” CBC News, Aug 18, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/protest-peterborough-arrest-special-investigation-1.6552575>.

⁷²¹ Montpetit, Jonathan. “Canada's convoy movement waved the Dutch flag. Then conspiracy theories swirled about fertilizer and bugs” CBC News, Aug 25, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/freedom-convoy-farmers-protest-netherlands-dutch-flag-1.6558902>.

- “As the convoy movement organized solidarity rallies for the Dutch farmers in July, its leaders warned that Canadian farmers would soon find themselves in a similar position”

October (Smith Era)

- October 14: “Danielle Smith reiterated in her first press conference as Alberta premier that she intends to amend the Alberta Human Rights Act to protect people from losing their jobs because of vaccine status.”⁷²²
 - She previously talked about this during her campaign.
- **Smith’s win backed by Take back Alberta:** Premier Smith was sworn in as premier on October 2022⁷²³ replacing Premier Kenny. The group Take Back Alberta born from the misinformation fueled convoy movement credibly claimed to have played a role in Smiths win.⁷²⁴
 - Now former premier Kenney would refer to his loss in connection with Take Back Alberta as “The lunatics,” he said, “are trying to take over the asylum.”⁷²⁵
- **Chief Medical Officer Replaced:** October 11th-22nd 2022, Premier Smith said she would Replace Chief Medical Officer of Health Hinshaw with the plan to “recruit a new team of advisers in public health who consider COVID-19 an endemic disease.” As she did not believe that Covid should still be considered a pandemic, and that "A

⁷²² Markusoff Jason. “Danielle Smith wants vaccine status to be a human right. Expect a petri dish of problems” CBC news, Oct 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/danielle-smith-vaccine-human-rights-analysis-1.6615900>.

⁷²³ Alberta, “Premier Danielle Smith” Alberta.ca, <https://www.alberta.ca/premier.aspx>.

⁷²⁴ Fawcett Max, “How Take Back Alberta is taking over the United Conservative Party”. Canada’s National observer, march 30th 2023, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2023/03/30/opinion/how-take-back-alberta-taking-over-united-conservative-party>.

⁷²⁵ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global news, May 14, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

- lot of the bad decisions were made by Alberta Health Services based on bad advice from the chief medical officer of health," Hinshaw was removed a week after the 11th.⁷²⁶
- **Vaccinated Blood Refused:** October 13th, 2022, “Alberta physicians are raising the alarm about a dangerous trend — fueled by misinformation — that could cost lives... patient recently refused to consent to a blood transfusion if it came from a donor who had received the COVID-19 vaccine”⁷²⁷
 - “This is not an isolated incident in Alberta... "We're seeing it about once or twice a month, at this stage. And the worry is of course that these requests might increase," said Dr. Dave Sidhu, the southern Alberta medical lead for transfusion and transplant medicine.”⁷²⁸
 - **The Tragedy of the Unvaccinated:** “One of Smith's key leadership campaign promises, which she's apparently determined to carry through, is to enshrine protections in the Alberta Human Rights Act for people based on vaccination status.”⁷²⁹
 - “Premier Danielle Smith's remarks that the unvaccinated have been more discriminated against than any other group in the last half-century — a 50-

⁷²⁶ CBC News. “Dr. Deena Hinshaw out as Alberta's chief medical officer of health” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/deena-hinshaw-alberta-chief-medical-officer-of-health-mark-joffe-covid-19-pandemic-1.6651416>.

⁷²⁷ Lee, Jennifer. “Doctors seeing resistance to blood transfusions over unfounded COVID vaccine concerns” CBC News, Oct 13, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-blood-transfusions-resistance-covid-1.6613841>.

⁷²⁸ Lee, Jennifer. “Doctors seeing resistance to blood transfusions over unfounded COVID vaccine concerns” CBC News, Oct 13, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-blood-transfusions-resistance-covid-1.6613841>.

⁷²⁹ Markusoff, Jason. “Danielle Smith wants vaccine status to be a human right. Expect a petri dish of problems”, CBC News, Oct 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/danielle-smith-vaccine-human-rights-analysis-1.6615900>.

year spell that's been marked by systemic racism against various groups, the rise of Islamophobia and transphobia, ongoing homophobia and anti-Semitism, continued mistreatment of Indigenous people, and on and on.”

- **Smith’s Desire to Pardon:** “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith confirmed... she may pardon people who were given tickets during the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁷³⁰
- **Court finds Alberta Unreasonable:** “An Alberta judge has ruled the February order lifting the requirement for schoolchildren to mask was "unreasonable" because it was ultimately made by cabinet and not the chief medical officer of health (CMOH), which is a breach of the Public Health Act.”⁷³¹
- **Take Back Alberta takes back the UCP:** “In October, Take Back Alberta mobilized en masse to vote in half the governing board of the UCP.”⁷³²
 - o “(The board) can remove the party membership of any member with a majority vote including a leader,” Parker tells the Grande Prairie crowd.”

November

- **Trump’s Advice:** “During a forum ahead of the Brooks-Medicine Hat byelection... Smith said a group of doctors who are advising her has reached out to Dr. Paul Alexander, a Canadian researcher and former adviser to a member of U.S. President

⁷³⁰ Green, Arthur C. “EXCLUSIVE: Smith considering pardoning lockdown, mandate charges during pandemic” Western Standard, Oct 21, 2022. https://www.westernstandard.news/news/exclusive-smith-considering-pardoning-lockdown-mandate-charges-during-pandemic/article_33395522-517c-11ed-b0b0-6f775a765211.html.

⁷³¹ Grant, Meghan. “‘Unreasonable’ order lifting Alberta school mask mandate made by politicians not Hinshaw: judge” CBC News, Oct 27, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/school-mask-mandate-alberta-unreasonable-judge-decision-lagrange-1.6631695>.

⁷³² Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global news, May 14, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

Donald Trump’s administration. Alexander pushed for a herd immunity approach in 2020”⁷³³

- November 9th, 2022, “Alberta's Opposition leader said Premier Danielle Smith is not leading a government guided by science by consulting a former COVID-19 medical adviser of former U.S. president Donald Trump, who calls vaccines "bioweapons".”⁷³⁴
 - “Paul Alexander has referred to COVID-19 vaccines as bioweapons.”
 - “[Dr. Paul Alexander] is a conspiracy theorist whose ideas have been discredited by all reasonable folks in the scientific and medical community," NDP Leader Rachel Notley said on Wednesday after delivering a speech addressed to the Rural Municipalities of Alberta convention.”
 - “The very act of suggesting that she will be consulting with him is going to destabilize our healthcare system," Notley said.”
- **Removing the Mask:**” Thousands of Alberta children are home from school with respiratory illnesses, but Alberta Premier Danielle Smith says a school mask mandate is not on the table, and she plans to prevent school boards from invoking them.”⁷³⁵
 - “Premier Smith has not embraced the decision's confirmation of the CMOH's legal authority, or the legitimacy of schools and other entities enacting their

⁷³³ Short, Dylan. "Former Trump medical adviser has been invited to meet with Alberta officials: Premier Smith" Calgary Herald, November 7, 2022. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/former-trump-medical-advisor-has-been-invited-to-meet-with-alberta-officials-premier-smith>.

⁷³⁴ Bennett, Dean. “Premier Danielle Smith consulting with former Trump adviser could affect health system, NDP says” CBC News, Nov 09, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-consulting-with-former-trump-adviser-could-affect-health-system-ndp-says-1.6646650>

⁷³⁵ Bellefontaine, Michelle. “Premier Danielle Smith rules out mask mandates despite widespread school illness” CBC News, Nov 14, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/premier-danielle-smith-rules-out-mask-mandates-despite-widespread-school-illness-1.6651417>.

own public health policies. Instead, she stated she will not permit mask mandates in schools and will ensure her government alone makes public health decisions for schools.”

- **Smith’s Alleged Lies about Care Workers:** November 17th, 2022, “A now-fired AHS board member said Alberta's premier spread mistruths about Alberta Health Services' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and has a naive view of how difficult it is to recruit health-care workers.”⁷³⁶
 - “Former senior health administrator Tony Dagnone was reacting to Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's removal of 11 AHS board members on Thursday. She has replaced them with an administrator, Dr. John Cowell, who will serve in the role for at least six months.”
 - “She seems to like shooting from the hip,” Dagnone said on Thursday of Smith's decision. "She doesn't believe in being informed before making these huge, huge decisions that have an impact on the health of Albertans.”

December

- **The expectation of a New Convoy:** On December 1st, 2022, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's national security adviser told a parliamentary committee that the federal government is already preparing to deal with a new convoy protest planned for February 2023.

⁷³⁶ French, Janet. “Premier Danielle Smith fires Alberta Health Services board appoints administrator” CBC News, Nov 17, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/danielle-smith-alberta-health-services-board-administrator-john-health-minister-jason-copping-1.6655400>.

2023

January

- January 19th: “Premier Danielle Smith is establishing an expert panel to review the legislation and governance practices used by the Government of Alberta during the management of the COVID-19 public health emergency and to recommend changes necessary to improve government response to future health emergencies.”⁷³⁷
- **Smith Challenging Prosecutor:** January 19th, 2023. CBC reported that “A staffer in Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's office sent a series of emails to the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service, challenging prosecutors' assessment and direction on cases stemming from the Coutts border blockades and protests”⁷³⁸
 - o January 21st, 2023, “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith said she has called for a review that she says will examine emails between her office and Crown prosecutors.”⁷³⁹
 - o January 26th, 2023, “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith should call an independent investigation into contact between her office, the justice minister's office and Crown prosecutors to put questions to rest, one political scientist says.”⁷⁴⁰
 - “University of Calgary political science professor Lisa Young says questions about the actions of Smith and her staff may follow them until an impartial third-party can look at the evidence.”

⁷³⁷ Alberta Government, “Improving Alberta’s response to public health emergencies” Alberta.ca, Jan 19, 2023. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86404F47300F9-D122-5701-9E14BBC5D4AAFF3E>.

⁷³⁸ Grant, Meghan. “Alberta premier's office contacted Crown prosecution about Coutts cases: sources” CBC News, Jan 19, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-premier-office-emails-prosecutors-coutts-1.6719743>.

⁷³⁹ Markus, Jade. “Alberta premier orders review after CBC reports of emails over Coutts cases between her office, prosecution” CBC News, Jan 21, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-smith-premier-emails-review-1.6722080>.

⁷⁴⁰ French, Janet. “Independent probe into contact between Alberta premier's office, prosecutors needed, says political scientist” CBC News, Jan 26, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/independent-probe-into-contact-between-alberta-premier-s-office-prosecutors-needed-says-political-scientist-1.6726473>.

- January 28th, 2023, “The Justice Department said Monday it had done a four-month search of ingoing, outgoing and deleted emails” concerning “whether Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's office interfered with Crown prosecutors”⁷⁴¹
 - “The review was ordered by Smith a week ago to respond to allegations in a CBC story that reported a staffer in the premier's office emailed prosecutors last fall to question decisions and direction on cases stemming from a blockade at the Canada-U. S. border crossing at Coutts, Alta”
 -
- **Smith Intervened Inappropriately:** January 25th, 2023. CBC reported that “Premier Danielle Smith pressured the attorney general and his office to intervene in COVID-related court cases” an act deemed inappropriate according to a source close to the situation and that her goal was to make the charges go away.⁷⁴²
 - “This specifically included the prosecution of Artur Pawlowski, a pastor charged with two counts of criminal mischief and a charge under Alberta's Critical Infrastructure Defense Act related to the Coutts border blockade.”
 - Smith would later call for CBC to retract this story as well as the connected report from the 19th, claiming they are defamatory.
 - January 27th, 2023, “CBC News stands by Coutts story despite statement from Danielle Smith's office”⁷⁴³

⁷⁴¹ Bennett, Dean. “Alberta Justice spokespeople deliver duelling statements on prosecutor email review” CBC News, Jan 28, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-justice-dept-emails-1.6729648>.

⁷⁴² von Scheel, Elise. Grant, Meghan. French, Janet. “Premier pressured justice minister's office to get rid of COVID charges, sources say” CBC News, Jan 25, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-premiers-office-attorney-general-1.6724455>.

⁷⁴³ Fenlon, Brodie. “CBC News stands by Coutts story despite statement from Danielle Smith's office” CBC News, Jan 27, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/editorsblog/cbc-stands-by-coutts-story-1.6728100>.

February

- February 9th: during a live press conference Premier Smith referred to working to grant amnesty for those charged with non-violent Covid related charges, such as street preacher and political activist Artur Pawlowski whom Smith had met with in 2022.⁷⁴⁴⁷⁴⁵
- February 23rd: The COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities report was published but the Auditor General of Alberta⁷⁴⁶, this report reviewed “the public health response by the Department of Health (Alberta Health) and Alberta Health Services (AHS) to COVID-19 in Alberta’s 355 publicly funded continuing care facilities. We audited what Alberta Health and AHS did to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in these facilities during waves one and two of the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁷⁴⁷
 - o The report found that “we concluded that Alberta Health and AHS had processes to respond to COVID-19 in continuing care facilities, but that improvements can be made.”⁷⁴⁸
- **Take Back Alberta spreads into power:** “At the end of February, political organization Take Back Alberta managed to win 28 of the 30 positions up for re-election on the UCP’s Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre constituency association board.”⁷⁴⁹
 - o This would not be the only area that take back Alberta would spread to,” Since rallying to knock out Kenney, it has continued organizing within the UCP,

⁷⁴⁴ Black Matthew. “Smith sticks to her story on prosecutors, denies seeking amnesty for controversial pastor” Edmonton Journal, Feb 09, 2023. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/smith-sticks-to-her-story-on-prosecutors-denies-seeking-amnesty-for-controversial-pastor>.

⁷⁴⁵ Alberta Government, “CORRECTION*: Statement: Premier Danielle Smith” March 29th 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86837CCB50BB8-CB1F-4883-C625969B6B8D9586>.

⁷⁴⁶ Alberta Auditor General, “COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities” Alberta Health Services, February 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230303073925/https://www.oag.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/oag-covid19-cont-care-facilities-feb2023.pdf>.

⁷⁴⁷ Alberta Auditor General, “COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities”

⁷⁴⁸ Alberta Auditor General, “COVID-19 in Continuing Care Facilities”

⁷⁴⁹ Rodriguez Michael, “Candidate disqualified from UCP nomination set to take on Nixon as independent” Calgary herald, Mar 15, 2023, <https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/candidate-disqualified-from-ucp-nomination-set-to-run-as-independent>.

winning positions on constituency boards and supporting candidates, including Chelsae Petrovic in Livingstone-Macleod and Eric Bouchard in Kenney's old riding of Calgary-Lougheed."⁷⁵⁰

March

- March 29th: Premier Danielle Smith published a statement about the CBC article referencing her statements about granting amnesty for “those charged with non-violent, non-firearms COVID-related charges.”⁷⁵¹
 - “Later today, in an effort to continue their campaign of defamatory attacks against me and my office staff, the CBC intends to release an article about a conversation I had with an individual named Artur Pawlowski.”
 - “During a live press conference on Feb. 9, 2023*, I referenced this very conversation where Mr. Pawlowski expressed his frustration to me with pandemic-related public health orders. This should come as no shock since I spent a lot of time before and during my leadership campaign talking to hundreds of Albertans about COVID-related public health orders and violations.”
 - “As I have previously stated, I had my staff work with the Ministry of Justice to determine if anything could be done to grant amnesty for those charged with non-violent, non-firearms COVID-related charges.”
 - “As also indicated previously in multiple interviews, I received a legal brief from the Ministry of Justice recommending against pursuing amnesty further,

⁷⁵⁰ Bennett Dean, “Take Back Alberta’s ‘prince of woke’ looks to return power to the people” Global News, may 14th 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9697493/take-back-alberta-david-parker-may-2023/>.

⁷⁵¹ Alberta Government, “CORRECTION*: Statement: Premier Danielle Smith” March 29th 2023, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86837CCB50BB8-CB1F-4883-C625969B6B8D9586>.

as several matters involving this issue were and still are before the courts. I have followed that advice.”

- “At no time have I spoken with anyone from the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service, nor to my knowledge have any of my office’s staff. Allegations to the contrary are defamatory and will be dealt with accordingly.”

- **Covid Origin Misinformation Challenged:** March 17th,2023, "Genetic material collected at a Chinese market near where the first human cases of COVID-19 were identified show raccoon dog DNA commingled with the virus, suggesting the pandemic may have originated from animals, not a lab, according to a group of international scientists... Other experts have not yet verified their analysis, which has yet to appear in a peer-reviewed journal.”⁷⁵²

April

- April 20th, 2023, Responses to the Preston Manning-led &2 million COVID-19 review panel were obtained by Post media through a freedom of information request.⁷⁵³
 - The panel started in January and asked Albertans one question via an online survey which asked, "What changes should be made, if any, to the laws of Alberta to better equip the province to cope with future public health emergencies?"

⁷⁵² The Associated Press. “Newly available COVID-19 origins data could point to raccoon dogs in Wuhan market, study says” CBC News, Mar 17, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-animal-origins-1.6782273>.

⁷⁵³ Black Matthew, “Reliance on expertise, stronger CMOH the most common early replies to Manning-led COVID-19 review panel” Edmonton Journal, Apr 20, 2023. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/reliance-on-expertise-stronger-cmoh-the-most-common-early-replies-to-manning-led-covid-19-review-panel#:~:text=Politics-,Reliance%20on%20expertise%2C%20stronger%20CMOH%20the%20most%20common%20early%20replies,politicians%2C%E2%80%9D%20reads%20one%20reply>.

- “The 2,225 responses from the survey’s first week — received by the government between Jan. 19 and Jan. 26.”
- “The government is scheduled to release an interim report and recommendations by June 30 with the final report to come by Nov. 15.”
- “The NDP has pledged to end the panel should it be elected as government in May.”
- “Calls for greater reliance on medical expertise and a strengthened, more independent role for the chief medical officer of health were the two most frequent subjects of early responses.”
 - “The most common replies stressed the need for increased reliance on medical and scientific expertise, a decreased emphasis on the opinion of politicians, and greater use of peer-reviewed data to form evidence-based solutions.”
 - “Responses in this category amounted to just over 17 per cent of all replies, or 350 in total.”
 - “The next most common category of response echoed a similar message in calling for greater powers and autonomy for the province’s chief medical officer of health (CMOH).”
 - “Answers specifically calling for a strengthened CMOH made up 16.6 per cent of all replies, or 339 in all.”
- “The third and fifth most common types of replies took more skeptical views of government’s role and public health measures.”

- “Just over 15 per cent of replies, or 310 in total, called for weakened or eliminated public health measures, specifically, mandates for masking and physical distancing.”
 - “About eight per cent of replies indicated some of form of dissent, most often challenging the validity of the survey, the panel or Manning’s leadership of it.”
 - “Slightly more than three per cent of all replies denied the ongoing pandemic was a health threat at all, or echoed conspiracy theories involving the World Health Organization, World Economic Forum, and computer chips implanted in vaccines, often followed by a call for criminal charges to be laid against government and health-care leaders.”
- **Smith Threatens CBC over Coutts Reports:** April 4th, 2023, “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith is threatening legal action against the CBC if the corporation doesn't retract and apologize for recent reporting about the premier and COVID-19-related criminal cases related to last year's Coutts, Alta., blockade.”⁷⁵⁴
 - “In a letter addressed to CBC editor-in-chief Brodie Fenlon and verified by CBC News, lawyer Munaf Mohamed, writing on Smith's behalf, demands the corporation retract its reporting and publish an apology online and in news broadcasts "informing readers that it has no evidence of dishonesty or direct contact between the premier (or anyone in her office) and Alberta Crown prosecutors about any specific COVID-19-related prosecutions.”

⁷⁵⁴ Mazerolle, John. “Alberta Premier Danielle Smith threatens CBC with legal action over Coutts blockade stories” CBC News, Apr 04, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/danielle-smith-cbc-1.6799473>.

- “Asked for comment, CBC's head of public affairs Chuck Thompson said in an email, "As we've said all along, we stand by our journalism on this story and, if necessary, will defend it in court."

May

- May 4, 2023, “the International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee of the WHO downgraded the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee determined that COVID-19 is now an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).”⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁵ Infection Prevention and Control Canada, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) SARS-CoV-2” Ipac-canada.org, <https://ipac-canada.org/coronavirus-resources#:~:text=On%20March%2011%2C%202020%20the,19%20viral%20disease%20a%20pandemic.>