

Coronavirus outlaws: How an infringement on freedom has divided democracy

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The Covid-19 pandemic has established a new class of social outliers. Over the previous two months I have been conducting anthropological fieldwork on social media platforms that promote free speech and thus becoming a haven for Covid-19 critics, anti-maskers and conspiracy theorists. Though they may have different beliefs, they are united virtually to protest oppression from the government and mainstream media who threaten their fundamental morals. Through interviews and participant observation, I have discerned that patriots and anarchists, educated and uneducated alike have come together under the palpable threat of losing their freedom. Freedom to give their opinion, to go outside, to wear a mask.

In the past year, burdensome restrictions on citizens have exacerbated a divide which has formed a breeding ground for fake news and hate speech on an unprecedented scale. An 'us and them' narrative has been constructed within anti-Covid-19 communities leading them to draw resemblance between Western society and Nazi-Germany. The pandemic, then, has kindled a new social movement which is sick of the democratic social contract.

This research shows how the rise of punitive control in the past decade, accelerating in the past year by the government and media has aggravated individuals from all walks of life to unite in virtual pockets, circulate fake news and preach hate speech. Until now they have been ignored by the government and blocked from mainstream social media. My research aims to overcome this by detailing what motivates these people in order to find solutions to this social divide.