

## **Online hate speech in New Zealand is becoming more targeted — and the system isn't keeping up, Netsafe warns**

*Six years of data shows rising ethnicity and politics-based abuse as global action accelerates elsewhere*

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Online hate speech in Aotearoa New Zealand is increasingly targeting people's ethnicity, race and political views, with young people, Māori and LGBTQIA+ communities facing the greatest harm, according to Netsafe's latest national survey.

The research, based on responses from 1,648 New Zealanders, found 12% were personally targeted by online hate speech in the past year, while 31% witnessed hate speech directed at someone else.

Netsafe has tracked online hate speech trends since 2018, and CEO Brent Carey says the long-term data tells a clear story.

"The nature of online hate in New Zealand is changing. It's becoming more closely tied to identity and politics, and it's hitting the same communities again and again. That's not accidental — it reflects wider global trends and a lack of effective safeguards at home."

### **Long-term trends show growing risk**

Since Netsafe began surveying New Zealanders:

- Ethnicity-based hate speech has risen steadily and is now the most common reason people are personally targeted online (36%)
- Hate linked to political views has increased since 2023
- Young people, Māori and LGBTQIA+ communities remain consistently more exposed than the general population

More than one in five LGBTQIA+ people experienced online hate speech personally in the past year, while over half witnessed it targeting others, often repeatedly.

Carey says these patterns mirror international developments.

"We're seeing similar trends overseas — rising polarisation, reduced content moderation by platforms, and online spaces being used to amplify hostility. The difference is that some countries are moving to close the gaps, while New Zealand is standing still."

### **A growing gap in protection**

The release of Netsafe's findings comes as Australia moved this week to fast-track hate speech legislation, following the Bondi attack, highlighting a growing divergence in how countries are responding to online harm.

Carey says the decision to cancel New Zealand's proposed hate speech reforms has left a gap that is increasingly being exploited online.

“When there’s no clear framework for preventing and responding to online hate, harmful behaviour doesn’t disappear — it escalates. The data suggests that’s exactly what’s happening, particularly for communities who already face discrimination offline.”

Carey says the research underscores the need for a more coherent response.

“Combating online hate requires a mix of smart regulation, platform accountability, education, and accessible support. Right now, those pieces aren’t working together as well as they need to.”

### **Support remains critical**

Although personal experiences of online hate speech have dropped slightly from their peak in 2019–2020, Carey cautions that exposure remains widespread and damaging.

“When a third of the country is seeing hate online, and some people are encountering it constantly, we can’t treat this as background noise. This is about whether people feel safe participating in our digital public life.”

Netsafe encourages anyone affected by online hate speech to seek free, confidential support through its helpline and reporting services.

### **Report to Netsafe**

If you need assistance or support Netsafe has got you covered.

Contact us by completing [an online report form](#), emailing us on [help@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:help@netsafe.org.nz) or texting on 4282.

**Our helpline is open from 9am – 6pm weekdays**

**Our free number is 0508 638 723.**

The full survey is available here: Netsafe 2025 Annual Survey – Online Hate Speech Report: <https://resource.netsafe.org.nz/Netsafe-2025-APS-report-Online-hate-speech-5-Aug-25.pdf>

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### **About Netsafe**

Netsafe is an independent charitable organisation supporting people in Aotearoa to have safe and positive online experiences. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education.