

The Irish Channel

**Investigating an Irish Misinformation Hub,
Political Connections and AI Hallucinations**

Ciarán O'Connor



Amman | Berlin | London | Paris | Washington DC

Copyright © Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2024). Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a company limited by guarantee, registered office address 3rd Floor, 45 Albemarle Street, Mayfair, London, W1S 4JL. ISD is registered in England with company registration number 06581421 and registered charity number 1141069. All Rights Reserved.

www.isdglobal.org

Contents

Overview: The Irish Channel origins	4
Fabrications: The Irish Channel's claims of election interference	5
Digital footprint: The Irish Channel online presence and original content	7
Political connections: The Irish Channel organisation, leadership and Irish Freedom Party links	11
Online operation: 'The Premier Content Network'	14
Conclusion	15
Endnotes	16

Overview: The Irish Channel origins

This report investigates the activities of the Irish Channel, a website and associated social media accounts that has emerged as a highly active hub of misinformation in Ireland.

The website gained notoriety in June 2024 following its publication of an article containing fabricated quotes and false claims alleging election interference during the local elections.¹ This 'election interference' narrative reflected other baseless conspiracies alleging voter fraud was a threat to election integrity in the country.

The Irish Channel website is part of the Premier Content Network which is run by the Digital Publishing Company. Its primary form of content across its range of websites are embedded YouTube videos, likely with the aim of driving traffic to its site and boosting ad revenue. Yet, as this analysis details, this may be in violation of YouTube's terms of service.

This report profiles how original content produced by the Irish Channel contains inaccuracies and falsehoods, as well as content which is supportive of far-right ideologies including hateful anti-immigrant rhetoric. Analysis by ISD also indicates some of this content appears to have been generated using AI, with basic factual errors and non-existent citations being found on more than one article on the Irish Channel website.

Accounts on social media and messaging platforms linked to the Irish Channel were found to feature white supremacist conspiracy theories, antisemitic hate and support for Adolf Hitler.

Additionally, the report highlights how the Irish Channel has forged close ties with the Irish Freedom Party and has, over time, become a key media distribution and broadcasting arm for the party. Many of the most egregious instances of false, misleading and inflammatory claims found in this analysis originated from content published in conjunction with Irish Freedom Party-linked entities and hosted and promoted by the Irish Channel.

This Irish Channel case study illustrates how small, far-right political parties can use digital media platforms and social media accounts to develop alternative media networks, promote their ideology, grow their audience, spread hateful and harmful misinformation and recruit supporters online.

Fabrications: The Irish Channel's claims of election interference

Though it has been active for many years, the Irish Channel came to public prominence in June 2024 when it published an article featuring false claims about election interference in Ireland, tapping into a wider trend of similar claims promoted in the lead up to the local elections. These themes were themselves heavily influenced by similar election denial efforts in the US in 2020/21.

On 8 June, the day after the local and European elections in Ireland, the Irish Channel published an article that claimed that Fine Gael councillors were involved in potential “vote rigging” on 7 June.² The article, whose author was listed as R. McAney, contained basic factual errors, fictitious quotes and an interviewee who does not exist. Its central claims were based on testimony from two anonymous witnesses.

“Reports are surfacing from across Ireland suggesting that Fine Gael councillors may have been involved in transporting large numbers of refugees and immigration applicants to polling stations to secure votes for individual candidates,” the article stated. The piece further claimed that “Fine Gael leader Leo Varadkar has called for a comprehensive review to restore public confidence in

the electoral process” and the party “issued a statement denying any organised effort to manipulate votes.”

This is false. Leo Varadkar was replaced as Fine Gael leader by Simon Harris in March and the statement attributed to Fine Gael in the article is fictitious. In response to an inquiry from The Journal news website, Fine Gael said “This is a completely made up quote and should not be attributed to Fine Gael. We never communicated with that website.”³

Similarly, the article included quotes from Dr. Eoin O'Malley from Dublin City University and Transparency International Ireland (TII) concerning the allegations. Both O'Malley and TII confirmed to The Journal they never made these comments to the Irish Channel. The article also quoted Dr. Claire McNamara, a lecturer in political science at Trinity College Dublin, yet, again, the university confirmed to The Journal that no such person exists on their staff.

Evidence of election interference and unethical activities by Fine Gael cited in the article were based entirely on quotes purportedly provided by two anonymous sources; “one Dublin resident” and “a local community worker”. The article’s claims of “vote rigging” did not even constitute rigging, as the author acknowledged: “While it is not illegal to provide transportation to voters, the ethical implications are significant, particularly if it involves coercion or undue influence.”

Following the publication of The Journal’s article, the Irish Channel published a follow-up piece in response.⁴ This dismissed The Journal’s reporting and questioned its editorial independence by saying it was “aligning closely” with Fine Gael. The Irish Channel reiterated its claims of election manipulation and, once again, quoted TII and the non-existent McNamara in its rebuttal.⁵

ISD has contacted both the Irish Channel and the author to offer a right to reply and to ask for evidence that McNamara exists. We did not receive a response.

In a post on X, the Irish Channel shared a screenshot of a LinkedIn profile for a Claire McNamara in Trinity College, to prove the person quoted in their article exists.⁶ However, as reported by The Journal, this Claire McNamara is neither a doctor nor a specialist in political science, she is instead a postgraduate computer science

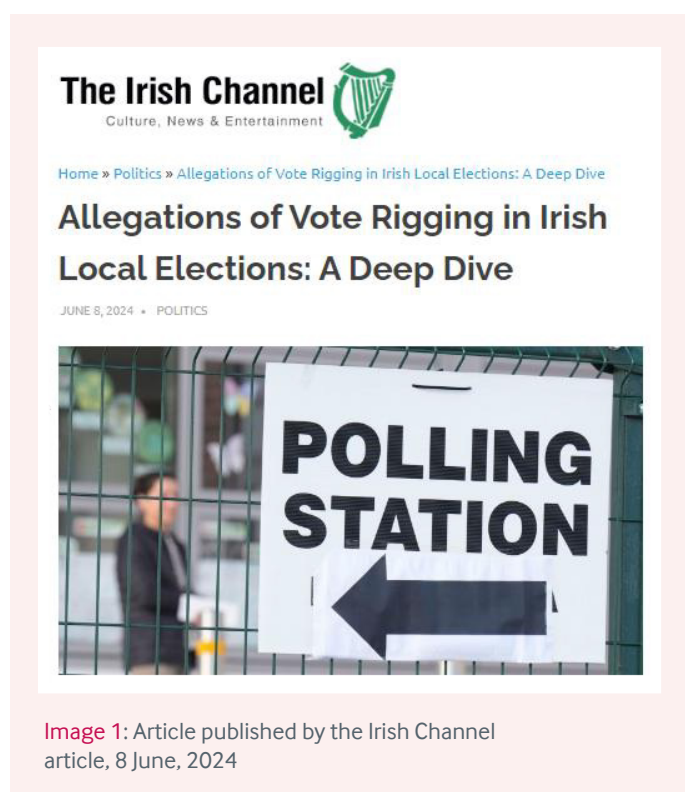


Image 1: Article published by the Irish Channel article, 8 June, 2024

student. That Claire McNamara confirmed to the Journal the quotes are not from her.⁷

Posts promoting the Irish Channel's two pieces received over 28,000 views in posts on X and Telegram.

The Irish Channel's claims of election interference fit into a broader collection of similar false, sensationalist and baseless claims of election fraud that were disseminated across Ireland in the run up to the local elections on 7 June. In late May, ISD analysis noted an uptick in discussions online that claimed that refugees and asylum seekers running or voting in the local election represented a form of election interference and an attempt by the government to "steal the election".

When the Irish Channel published its election interference piece on 8 June, it was promoted among online communities that had spent the previous two weeks consuming similar false claims. One Telegram group chat where the article was shared, for example, featured over 23 separate claims regarding election interference and election fraud in the two weeks preceding voting day. (See Image 2 below). When the article was shared here, it found a receptive information environment that had already been active in sharing sensationalist misinformation on the same theme.

The use of social media to seed claims casting doubt on the integrity of the local elections before voting day in Ireland bore many similarities to the campaign to spread false claims about election fraud in the US during the 2020 presidential election.

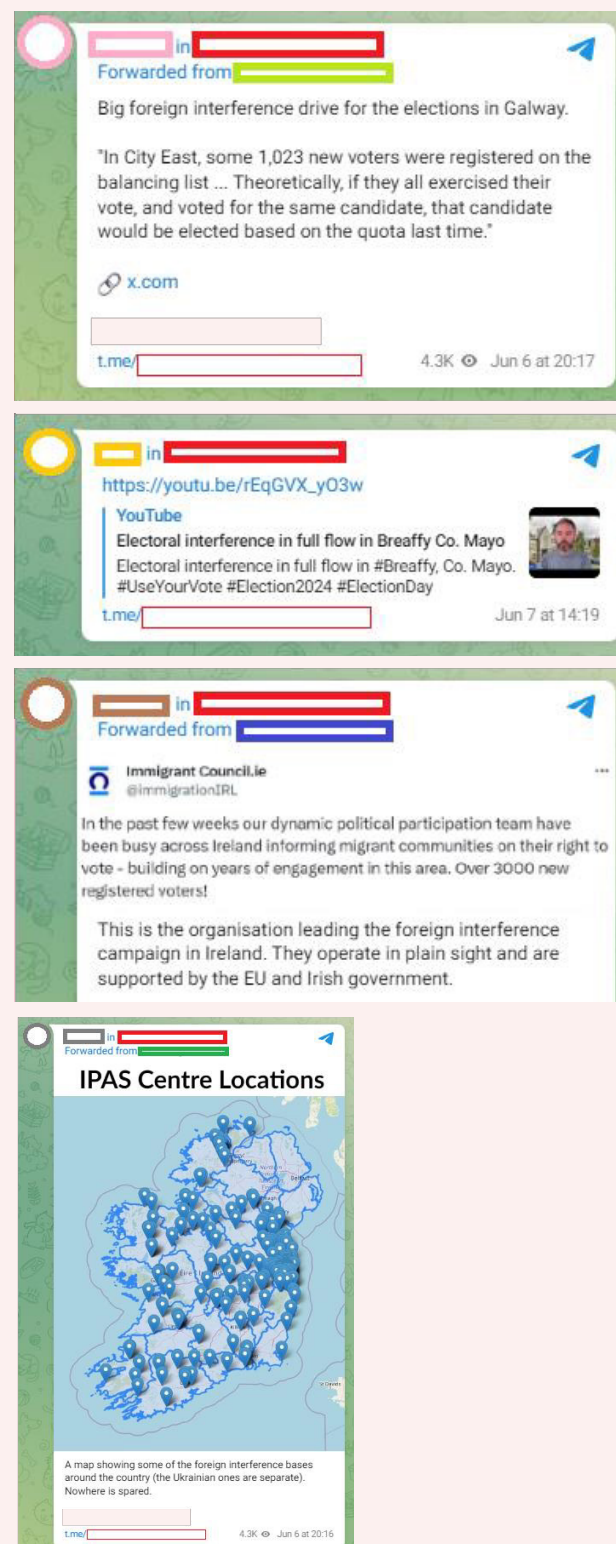


Image 2: Telegram group chat featuring numerous 'election interference claims' pre-election

Digital footprint: The Irish Channel online presence and original content

Online presence

The Irish Channel has been in existence for a number of years. The URL (theirishchannel.com) was registered in February 2020, according to online domain name registries, and the website links to various social media and messaging accounts: Facebook, Twitter, Flipboard, Gettr, a Telegram channel, a now-defunct Telegram group chat and a WhatsApp group chat.

Platform	Followers/subscribers/members
Facebook	873
Twitter	3,997
Flipboard	1,000
Gettr	323
Telegram channel	3,031
WhatsApp group chat	367

Table 1: Table showing followers for Irish Channel-linked social media and messaging accounts

It appears the website operated under a different name prior to 2020. Between October 2019 and August 2020, social media channels linked to the Irish Channel promoted content hosted on ThelrishNews.org, though that URL is now defunct (and is unconnected to the Northern Irish 'The Irish News' organisation).

The Irish Channel Facebook page, created on 10 October 2019, was originally called 'The Irish News' until 17 August 2020 when it was changed to its current name. At present, the page has four administrators, according

to Facebook's page transparency platform. Three of these are based in Ireland and one in the Philippines.

Prior to rebranding as the Irish Channel, ThelrishNews.org published similar content as the current website. Though ThelrishNews.org URL is no longer accessible, archived pages from the site, including the earliest discoverable article from 12 August 2019, show it used an identical website format and content layout as the current ThelrishChannel.com URL.⁸

Social media and messaging accounts for the Irish Channel are almost exclusively used to link to content published on its website. The only exception is its WhatsApp group chat named 'Irish Chat,' which at the time of writing has over 300 members. This group chat, advertised on its website and promoted (including with an invitation link) in Irish Channel social media posts, was found by ISD analysts to contain false, misleading and hateful content and calls for violence regarding immigration, COVID-19, politicians and other topics.⁹

Until late August 2024, the WhatsApp group chat had two administrators. One, a person named Aidan Doran (see later section), uses the chat group to share links to the Irish Channel website. The second administrator, "Gavin", used the chat to repeatedly publish explicit antisemitic slurs and abusive material, alongside content that was openly supportive of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany's treatment of Jewish people (see Image 3). In late August, "Gavin" was removed as an administrator and two others, Anthony Casey and Paul Fitzsimons (see later section), were designated as administrators.

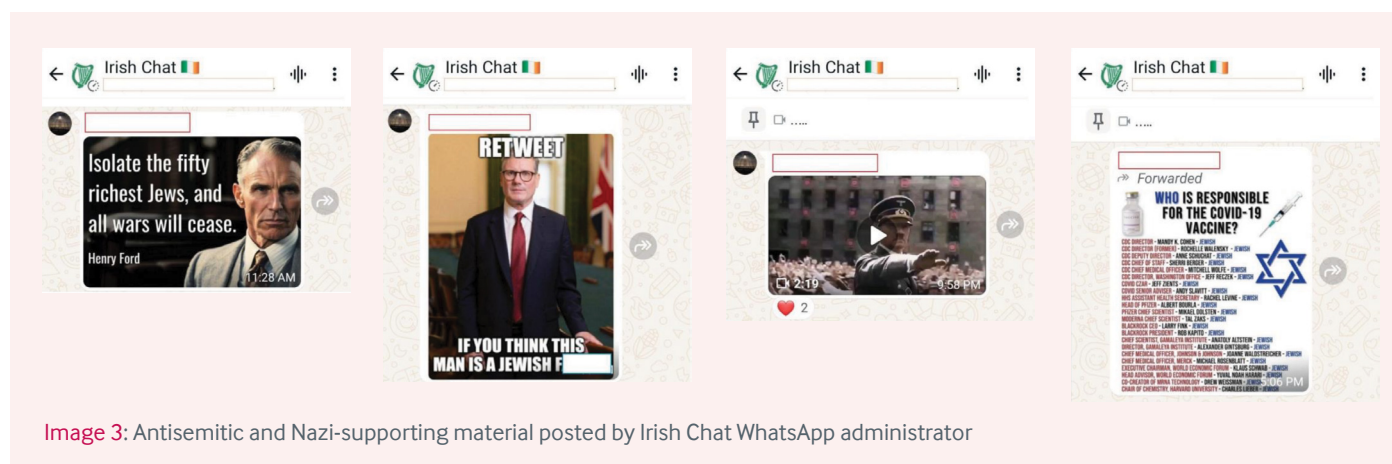


Image 3: Antisemitic and Nazi-supporting material posted by Irish Chat WhatsApp administrator

Embedded and Original Content

The Irish Channel and other websites that are part of the Premier Content Network primarily operate as content aggregators, embedding videos from YouTube on their websites (see next section for information on the Premier Content Network, embedded videos and content aggregation). In practice, this means the vast majority of content on the Irish Channel is produced by others on YouTube and then embedded on the website. There does not appear to be any formal connection between the website and these YouTube channels.

Content embedded by the Irish Channel is typically sourced from either YouTube channels run by news organisations like RTÉ, the Irish Independent and the Irish Daily Mirror, or from YouTube users who produce commentary, vlogs or reaction content in response to news events and current affairs in Ireland.

ISD reviewed the most recent 50 articles published by the Irish Channel in its ‘Irish News’ category (all of which were posted between 6-14 August, 2024) and found that 15 articles featured videos sourced from news organisations and journalists; 34 were sourced from YouTube content creators; and one article was entirely text, produced originally by ‘R McAney’ for the website, on the topic of public sector pensions for military veterans and other professions.

The most popular theme in this sample of Irish Channel articles were videos related to immigration. Six articles (12% of the content analysed) featured news coverage and commentary discussion about immigration while 23 articles (46% of the content analysed) included videos that can be generally categorised as anti-immigrant.

This cohort included videos either supporting anti-immigrant protests in Ireland or the UK; commentary that critiques or regards mass immigration as negative for Ireland for various reasons; or videos that promote false and misleading claims, including conspiracy theories, about immigration. See the table below for more details.

Topic	No. of articles
Anti-immigrant	23
News coverage & commentary related to immigration	6
Economics	5
Olympics news coverage	4
History	4
Housing	2
Free speech	2
Technology	1
Animal welfare	1
Tourism	1
Satire	1

Table 2: Categories of content published by the Irish Channel, 8-14 August

Text articles: R McAney

Although the vast majority of content on the Irish Channel is produced by others on YouTube and embedded on their own website, there are two exceptions. Throughout 2024, the Irish Channel has produced original content in the form of written text articles and a recurring livestream video series/podcast called the Irish Column.

Between April – August 2024, the Irish Channel published 14 articles by ‘R McAney.’ The articles cover general topics such as free speech, economics and transport costs. They also argue about the risks of “unvetted immigration,” the “selling out” of Ireland’s Defence Forces, “green [environmental] ideology” and feature false claims of election interference. Many of the articles contain basic factual errors, as outlined below.

The first McAney article was a piece published on 13 April about the proposed Hate Speech Bill in Ireland. It referenced critical comments made about the bill by Donald Trump Jnr. and described him as the “former president”. There is no record of Donald Trump Snr. (the former President) ever commenting on the proposed bill, but rather the comments were made by his son. The article also described the Irish government as led by the “pro-Treaty party Cumann na nGaedheal.” Cumann na nGaedheal was a political party last active in 1932 when it merged with other parties to form Fine Gael.

Another error evident in a different article claimed Gardai have initiated a criminal investigation into the “deaths of nursing home residents” during the COVID-19 pandemic when, to date, an investigation is underway for just one death, according to reports.¹⁰

A separate article stated, “Senator Barry Crushell was involved in an assault case where he attacked a man in a bar. Crushell settled the case by paying €39,000 in damages.”¹¹ Barry Crushell is not a senator but an employment solicitor and this article likely meant to reference Senator John McGahon who, in 2021, was ordered to pay €39,000 over a 2016 assault.¹² Crushell confirmed to ISD that he is not a senator nor has he ever had to pay damages in relation to any incident.

Many of the articles include citations at the end of each piece but these too were replete with errors. One article quoted at length from a YouTube video by barrister Una McGurk yet, in the references, the URL provided for McGurk’s video instead linked to the YouTube video for Rick Astley’s song Never Gonna Give You Up.¹³

Another article quoted actor Rowan Atkinson’s robust defence of free speech in comments from 2004, yet the reference provided instead linked to a 2012 video of Atkinson speaking on the same topic but not using the words quoted in the article.¹⁴

Lastly, a McAney article argued in favour of public sector pension reform for members of the Defence Forces, Gardaí and nurses. In its reference section, the article cites separate reports from the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation

(INMO) and Oireachtas Library & Research Service.¹⁵ ISD could find no evidence or record of any such reports online. Both organisations confirmed to ISD that they never authored any reports with these titles and both organisations confirmed the referenced reports do not exist.

These examples could be mistakes on the author’s part. Or they could be AI hallucinations. This is the term for when an AI model generates misleading or incorrect information but presents it as factual, correct information in its output. Generative AI’s tendency to include inaccurate, fabricated or unattributable references in its outputs has been well documented by academics and news organisations.¹⁶ Its tendency to mistakenly include links to Rick Astley’s music video and effectively rickroll users has also been noted by researchers and AI developers.¹⁷

It is generally very difficult to establish if generative AI was used to produce text content. Yet, signifiers that do suggest the use of generative AI include easily identifiable factual errors like non-existent quotes or historical information (which was once true but now is incorrect) presented as fact. Research by Cambridge University also pointed to, among other things, consistent and frequent use of Oxford commas in sentences as a telltale sign of content generated by ChatGPT.¹⁸

ISD noted all of these characteristics were present in the McAney-authored Irish Channel articles. A review of the author’s online footprint also found that he is a member of multiple online discussions forums about ChatGPT where users share advice on using the tool, improving their prompts and generating content.

In summary, it appears quite plausible that the Irish Channel has published a number of articles produced using generative AI which contain false information on multiple topics. At the time of writing, The Irish Channel and the listed author of these articles have not responded to ISD’s request for a response to this.

Irish Column

Between March - August 2024, the Irish Channel livestreamed or released over 20 episodes of ‘the Irish Column’, a recurring online news and discussion programme, on its website. The series was available on other social media platforms before it officially became part of the Irish Channel website in 2024. The programme runs for approximately two hours, features commentary

The Voices of Dissent

“This is a massive attack against freedom of speech,” tweeted tech magnate **Elon Musk** upon learning of the Bill’s passage. His sentiments echoed across international platforms, with former US President **Donald Trump Jr.** decrying the legislation as an assault on fundamental rights. Surprisingly, they found common ground with **Paul Murphy**, a socialist politician from the left-leaning People Before Profit party. Murphy’s impassioned pleas during the Dáil debates warned of the creation of “*thought crimes*” and lamented the absence of explicit references to freedom of expression.

The Unusual Alliance

In this charged atmosphere, an unusual alliance has formed. NGOs, free speech groups, and citizens from diverse backgrounds have united in their opposition to the Bill. The Government, led by the pro-Treaty party **Cumann na nGaedheal**, remains steadfast in its defense, emphasizing the need to combat hate crimes. Yet, the chorus of dissent grows louder by the day.

Image 4: Irish Channel article incorrectly naming Donald Trump Jr. as the “former president” and claiming the Irish government is led by Cumann na nGaedheal

and discussion between the hosts and guests, and takes questions from online viewers.

The Irish Column is hosted by Paul Fitzsimons and Anthony Casey, both of whom are members of the Irish Freedom Party (IFP) and candidates for the upcoming general election. Fitzsimons and Casey are usually joined by a rotating panel of guests who are usually also members of the IFP. These include Councillor Glen Moore and party president Hermann Kelly, the latter of which has appeared on 14 of the 24 Irish Column episodes analysed. Other figures who have a history of espousing hard-right and far-right ideologies, such as Councillor Gavin Pepper and members of the Irish People party, have featured as guests in the past.

The Irish Column typically begins with the host(s) showing clips/screenshots of news stories or social media posts from the previous seven days, including regular broadcasts of social media videos published by Hermann Kelly, before they are joined by panellists for a discussion over the course of the programme. The programme features little original reporting and is more of a reaction space where speakers give their thoughts on various issues.

Immigration is the core issue around which most Irish Column episodes focus. Discussions typically feature anti-immigrant perspectives, including talking points that describe the arrival of asylum seekers to Ireland as a new “plantation,” brought there to remove or replace locals. As

ISD has noted in previous research, references to a new “plantation” of Ireland are best understood as a localised Irish conceptualisation of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory.¹⁹ Kelly is a frequent promoter of this phrase. ISD contacted the IFP and Kelly to offer a right to reply to this report. We did not receive a response.

For example, an 11 August 2024 broadcast opened with a pre-recorded video from Kelly in which he said the leading political parties in Ireland are “all in favour of colonisation and all in favour of a new plantation” before his video featured a campaign poster that read “we will not be replaced.” The programme resumed and the hosts dipped in and out of discussing immigration, with Anthony Casey at one point saying “it’s not immigration anymore it’s an invasion, it’s the destruction of Europe.”

Kelly later joined the broadcast and discussed mass immigration before directing his ire against Minister for Integration Roderic O’Gorman who he said “hates Ireland” and is “happy to destroy that [Ireland] so he could rub our noses in diversity.”

Across the series, much focus is given to discussing developments, misinformation and unrest at specific flashpoints linked to anti-immigrant protests such as Coolock and Newtownmountkennedy. Anti-immigrant, nativist and ethnonationalist rhetoric is prevalent throughout.

For example, one episode broadcast in May included the following passage from one contributor: “There is a different level of danger in our cities now, it’s not like it used to be where you could get robbed by a junkie. There’d be no violence, they’d just pin you up against the wall, stick their hand in your pocket and take your wallet. The cities are not safe environments now, there are a different level of people that are capable of different levels of violence. This is main thing about multiculturalism, life isn’t valued the same in different parts of the world and people need to be aware of that.”

Aside from immigration, other frequent topics in the series are COVID-19 and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, as well as advocating for Ireland leaving the EU, anti-LGBTQI+ narratives (primarily focused on transphobic and child grooming conspiracy theories), anti-Muslim rhetoric, anti-abortion narratives, Irish election conspiracy theories, and, lastly, discussion of 5G and flat earth conspiracy theories.²⁰



Image 5: Screenshot from Irish Column video featuring Hermann Kelly poster

Political connections: The Irish Channel organisation, leadership and Irish Freedom Party links

The Irish Channel website is part of a sprawling network of websites and social media accounts that all are part of the Premier Content Network (PCN). The PCN is explored in greater detail in a later section. There are a number of people involved in the production of content for the Irish Channel and its associated titles. This section of the report considers some of the key figures in the network.

Aidan Doran

The Premier Content Network (PCN) is run by the Digital Publishing Company whose founder is Aidan Doran. According to his LinkedIn profile, Doran served as a member of the Military Police in the Defence Forces for 19 years. Online records for domains and companies registered in Ireland show that Doran has been associated with numerous technology companies for over 25 years.

One such company is Techstore.ie which lists Doran on its website and is part of the PCN.²¹ Established in 1996, Techstore.ie's website state they offer a range of technology services including "green technology products," "marketing and promotional solutions," "tracking and telemetry systems" as well as home and vehicle products.

At one time Doran was also associated with a company called Ace Internet Marketing (AIM).²² Their website is now defunct but online archives indicate it was live and operational as far back as 2005. AIM provided search engine optimisation, website analytics and other digital marketing services.

Blog posts published in 2007 by digital marketing consultant Damien Mulley focused on AIM and Doran. In

a 30 October 2007 post on his blog, Mulley wrote that AIM had "wholesale copied and pasted" and stolen content from Irish technology blogs and published it on its own website.²³ Mulley detailed his interactions with Doran over email in a follow up blog post.²⁴ Other blogs active during this time accused AIM of the same.²⁵

During 2022, posts from the Irish Channel on its social media accounts promoted a new political party called Reclaim Ireland. The party had its own (now defunct) website and social accounts where the party president was listed as Aidan Joseph Doran.²⁶ Many subsequent posts from Reclaim Ireland online were signed off by "AJ Doran" who described it as a "populist, anti-corruption party" and claimed to have over 30 candidates ready to run in the next general election.

A review of its social media posts from 2022 found that the party promoted content from British far-right activist Tommy Robinson, published false and unsubstantiated claims about COVID-19 and vaccines, and shared content denying and dismissing climate change.²⁷

In September 2022, Reclaim Ireland announced it was merging with the Irish Freedom Party (IFP) and rebranded its social media channels as the Irish Freedom Movement. Since then, the Irish Freedom Movement has regularly promoted the IFP, shared IFP content and encouraged its followers to officially join the IFP as a member.

ISD contacted Doran to offer a right to reply to this report. We did not receive a response.

Robert McAney

Robert/Robbie McAney began publishing articles with the Irish Channel in April 2024. According to his LinkedIn profile, McAney served as a member of the Military Police in the Defence Forces for almost 24 years. McAney runs a news and information website for Irish military veterans called Irish Defence Forces Veterans News.

McAney's articles for the Irish Channel (covered in greater detail in an earlier section) focus on a variety of topics including immigration, free speech and economics. As noted in an earlier section, a number of these articles contain misinformation on topics such as election interference, numerous basic factual errors and inaccurate and fabricated citations.²⁸



Image 6: Reclaim Ireland social media post announcing its merger with the Irish Freedom Party

As referenced above, it appears as though these articles may have been written using generative AI, although this is not disclosed on the website. McAney's online footprint shows he is active in a number of online discussion forums and social media platforms all focused on how to use ChatGPT.

ISD contacted McAney to offer a right to reply to this report. We did not receive a response.

Anthony Casey

Anthony Casey is a podcaster and member of the Irish Freedom Party (IFP) for which he unsuccessfully ran as a candidate in the June 2024 local elections. At the IFP Ard Fheis in August 2024, he was chosen as the party's candidate for Kildare South in the upcoming general election.²⁹ Casey officially joined the Irish Channel in March 2024 though, before this, he hosted his own podcast.

Since joining the Irish Channel, Casey has been a co-presenter of the recurring Irish Column livestream video series/podcast with Paul Fitzsimons. As noted in an earlier section, the Irish Column series is closely linked to the Irish Freedom Party and regularly features interviews with party President Hermann Kelly. ISD contacted the IFP and Casey to offer a right to reply to this report. We did not receive a response.

Paul Fitzsimons

Paul Fitzsimons is a podcaster and member of the Irish Freedom Party, for which he unsuccessfully ran as a candidate in the June 2024 local elections. At the IFP Ard Fheis in August 2024, he was chosen as the party's candidate for Dublin Bay North in the upcoming general election.³⁰

Fitzsimons joined the Irish Freedom Party in 2022 and prior to this served as a member of the Executive Committee for Reclaim Ireland. In 2024, Fitzsimons was charged with unlawful possession of a knife, failing to comply with garda directions and engaging in threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour in an incident at Talbot Street in Dublin city centre on 5 February 2024.³¹

Since mid 2023, Fitzsimons has hosted the Irish Column livestream video series/podcast. In April 2024, the Irish Channel began hosting the programme on its website. ISD contacted the IFP and Fitzsimons to offer a right to reply to this report. We did not receive a response.

Reclaim Ireland and the Irish Freedom Movement

In April 2022, when Reclaim Ireland was still in existence, the party established group chats on Telegram for the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland. Intended as a place for interested users in each county to communicate and organise, in reality, the group chats have served as distribution channels for content from the Irish Channel's website, including links to the Irish Column series.

After Reclaim Ireland disbanded as a party, merged with the Irish Freedom Party (IFP) and rebranded itself the Irish Freedom Movement, their associated social media accounts became distribution channels for IFP content too, regularly sharing content from the IFP's main channels, including on Telegram.

ISD analysts reviewed these Irish Freedom Movement Telegram group chats and found they contained conspiracy theory content and misinformation. A review of one day's activity in a Kildare-focused group chat in early August found one comment linking to a YouTube video promoting the Great Replacement theory and another comment promoting anti-vaccine conspiracy theories. These appeared next to comments linking to content on the Irish Channel website.



Image 7: Telegram messages from Kildare-focused group chat

A similar review of one day's activity in a Dublin-focused group chat in late August found one comment using "plantation" in reference to content about immigration in Ireland, while another post featured COVID-19 conspiracy theories and claimed, during the pandemic, hospitals were "ordered" to "murder the unvaccinated" as part of a "mass genocide" campaign orchestrated by government. These posts too appeared next to comments linking to content on the Irish Channel.³²

These spaces have become localised hubs through which interested parties can easily access and share misleading, hateful or conspiracy content. Links to the Irish Freedom Party are apparent from these chats. One administrator of the Dublin group chat is Fitzsimons and one administrator of the Kildare group chat is Casey. By forging a relationship with the IFP and forming close links to the party, the Irish Channel could be argued to have, in effect, become a media and broadcasting arm for the IFP.

Online operation: 'The Premier Content Network'

The Irish Channel website is part of a sprawling network of websites and social media accounts that all are part of the Premier Content Network (PCN).

The Premier Content Network (PCN), run by the Digital Publishing Company (DPC), whose founder is Aidan Doran, consists of at least 43 websites and over 150 associated social media accounts on various platforms for these websites.

The network includes websites for many different topics such as jewellery, history, natural health, sports, technology, off-grid living, DIY and classic rock music. Most of the social media platforms are made up of Facebook pages, Telegram channels and Telegram group chats and, though there are many, they do not attract large followings. Most Facebook pages, for example, have fewer than 10,000 likes.

Relatively small audiences have not detracted from what are highly active websites that post dozens of new articles weekly. The articles published on the PCN's vast array of websites are identical in format. An article features an embedded YouTube video, usually recently uploaded on that platform and related to the website's topic, and the headline and text of the article are copied directly from the title and description used by the YouTube user for their video.

Articles end by listing the name of the YouTube channel to credit them and then encouraging visitors to the PCN website to "support our sponsors" before a collection of

programmatic ads, generated by the Taboola advertising platform, load at the bottom of the screen.

The PCN is a classic content aggregator operation and is a practice commonly used by digital marketing and online news websites to drive traffic to their website. There are typically no formal connections between the website and the YouTube user in question, the website merely embeds videos which is permitted by Google when the YouTube user enabled the "allow embeds" option on their account.

Yet, it's possible the PCN's form of content aggregation could violate YouTube's terms of service. In YouTube's guidelines on 'Permissions and Restrictions' regarding accessing content on the platform, including the embedding of videos on websites, YouTube says you are not allowed to: "use the Service to: (a) sell any advertising, sponsorships, or promotions placed on, around, or within the Service or Content, other than those allowed in the Advertising on YouTube policies (such as compliant product placements); or (b) sell advertising, sponsorships, or promotions on any page of any website or application that only contains Content from the Service or where Content from the Service is the primary basis for such sales (for example, selling ads on a webpage where YouTube videos are the only content of value)."

By embedding a YouTube video and using the YouTube video title and description as their own article headline and text, and by publishing these 'articles' in combination with advertising, the PCN websites' behaviour could match the description of the violation set out in YouTube's terms of service. ISD has contacted Google for comment on this and we are awaiting a response.

For comparison, when news organisations publish online articles which feature embedded YouTube videos, alongside advertising, they are often accompanied by original reporting or commentary from the news organisation. Such activity likely means they do not fall foul of YouTube's stipulations stating embedded videos cannot be the "primary basis for such [advertising] sales", for example, "where YouTube videos are the only content of value." In the case of articles on PCN websites, embedded YouTube videos do appear to be the "only content of value" in each article.

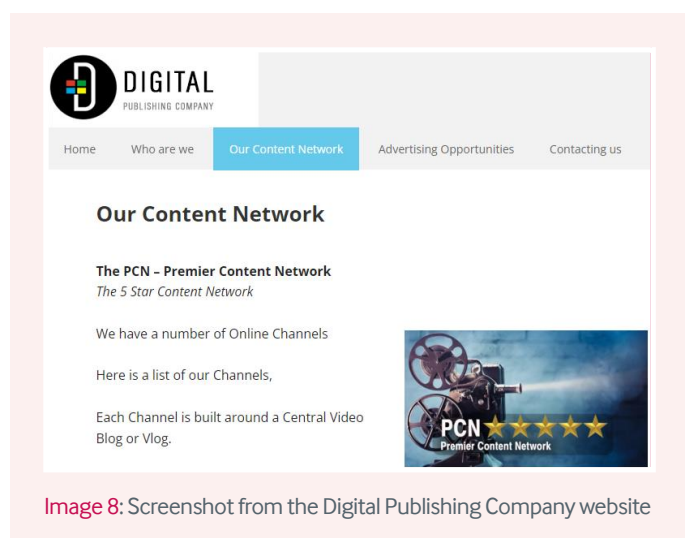


Image 8: Screenshot from the Digital Publishing Company website

Conclusion

This report highlights the role of the Irish Channel as a hub for misinformation content in Ireland, which has been observed to publish false claims about electoral fraud and immigration. The channel's dissemination of false claims surrounding election integrity are part of a broader strategy among groups and communities in Ireland seeking to undermine public trust in democratic processes, as observed in other countries like the US in recent years.³³

The Irish Channel's endorsement of far-right ideologies, its promotion of conspiratorial and hateful anti-immigrant content and its close ties with the Irish Freedom Party illustrate its growing impact, making it a prominent actor in the spread of misinformation in Ireland. This report details one set of actors but by no means is this trend exclusive to the Irish Channel. Numerous examples exist both within and beyond Ireland and contribute to greater polarisation, potential harms against public institutions and minority communities, and a threat to democratic societies.

Endnotes

- 1 Shane Raymond, "Debunked: Fabricated quotes and made-up commentators feature in 'vote-rigging' news story," TheJournal.ie. 12 June 2024. Link: <https://www.thejournal.ie/factcheck-debunk-election-interference-vot-rigging-claims-asylum-seekers-fine-gael-6407123-Jun2024/>
- 2 Robert McAney, "Allegations of Vote Rigging in Irish Local Elections: A Deep Dive," The Irish Channel. 8 June 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/QxX8o>
- 3 Ibid 1
- 4 The Irish Channel, "Examining the Journal's Attack on the Integrity of Irish Channel Reporting," 13 June 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.ph/NQXwk>
- 5 Ibid 4
- 6 X.com/IrishChannell, 12 June 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/wip/PGJRH>
- 7 Ibid 1
- 8 The Irish News, "Leo Varadkar says Brexit Deal Possible by End of October after Meeting Boris Johnson," 12 October 2019. Link (archived): <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221145003/https://www.theirishnews.org/leo-varadkar-says-brexit-deal-possible-by-end-of-october-after-meeting-boris-johnson/>
- 9 ISD is not publicly sharing this content but we have archived messages, images and content from this group chat demonstrating the various themes mentioned.
- 10 A: Robert McAney, "Criminal Investigations in Irish Nursing Homes : A Summary," The Irish Channel. 19 May 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/JNajK>,
B: Conor Gallagher, "Up to 30 nursing homes could face criminal charges over Covid deaths ", The Irish Times. 21 September 2023. Link: <https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2023/09/21/garda-nursing-home-inquiry-could-see-up-to-30-homes-facing-criminal-investigation-over-covid-deaths/>
- 11 Robert McAney and J Mack, "Double Standards and Political Divide : Soldier vs. Senator," The Irish Channel. 11 July 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/Xm5Z2>
- 12 BreakingNews.ie, "Fine Gael Senator John McGahon ordered to pay €39,000 over assault outside pub." 2 July 2024. Link: <https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/fine-gael-senator-john-mcgahon-ordered-to-pay-e39000-over-assault-outside-pub-1645133.html>
- 13 A: Robert McAney, "Controversy Surrounds Shelved EU Asylum and Migration Pact in Irish Dáil Debate," The Irish Channel. 16 June 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.ph/H83al>,
B: YouTube/Rick Astley, "Never Gonna Give You Up (Official Music Video)," 25 October 2009. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQw4w9WgXcQ>
- 14 Robert McAney, "The Indispensable Role of Free Speech in Preserving a Democratic Society," The Irish Channel. 11 August 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/MjHc7>
- 15 Robert McAney, "The Single Pensions Act : A Disservice to Those Who Serve Ireland," The Irish Channel. 13 August 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/QulFT>
- 16 A: The University of Waterloo – Library, "ChatGPT and Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI): Incorrect bibliographic references," 2023. Link: https://subjectguides.uwaterloo.ca/chatgpt_generative_ai/incorrectbibreferences#:~:text=The%20issue,only%20the%20second%20one%20exists,
B: Bhattacharyya M, Miller VM, Bhattacharyya D and Miller LE, "High Rates of Fabricated and Inaccurate References in ChatGPT-Generated Medical Content," Cureus. 19 May 2023. Link: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10277170/>,
C: Matteo Wong, "Generative AI Can't Cite Its Sources," The Atlantic. 26 June 2024. Link: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2024/06/chatgpt-citations-rag/678796/>
- 17 A: Amanda Silberling, "This founder had to train his AI not to Rickroll people," Tech Crunch. 21 August 2024. Link: <https://techcrunch.com/2024/08/21/this-founder-had-to-train-his-ai-to-not-rickroll-people/>,
B: Know Your Meme, "Rickroll." 10 December 2008. Link: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rickroll>
- 18 Rosalind Moran, "Does ChatGPT make the grade?," Cambridge University. 28 March 2024. Link: <https://acquiabigstaging.cambridgedev.org/news-and-insights/news/does-chat-gpt-make-the-grade-cambridge-research>
- 19 Aoife Gallagher, Ciarán O'Connor and Francesca Visser, "Uisce Faoi Thalamh: Topic Analysis," the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. November 2023. Link: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Uisce-Faoi-Thalamh_Topic-Analysis.pdf

-
- 20 ISD is not publicly sharing this content but we have archived content from this series demonstrating the various themes mentioned.
- 21 Techstore.ie, "About us." August 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/PecSc>
- 22 A: Techstore.ie, "Top paid Directories." 29 November 2006. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/FMFRB>,
B: Ace Internet Marketing, "Internet marketing services for business," November 2007.
Link (archived): <https://web.archive.org/web/20071104143551/http://www.aceinternetmarketing.ie/>
- 23 Damien Mulley, "Ace Internet Marketing – How about NOT stealing my content?", Mulley.net. 30 October 2007.
Link: <http://www.mulley.net/2007/10/30/ace-internet-marketing-how-about-not-stealing-my-content/comment-page-1/#comments>
- 24 Damien Mulley, "Ace Internet Marketing (the ones whole stole from me) – More veiled threats and admission of guilt", Mulley.net.
2 November 2007. Link: <http://www.mulley.net/2007/11/02/ace-internet-marketing-the-ones-whole-stole-from-me-more-veiled-threats-and-admission-of-guilt/>
- 25 Lex Referenda, "Ace Marketing? Ace Chancers!." 30 October 2007.
Link (archived): <https://web.archive.org/web/20071102061832/http://www.lexferenda.com/30102007/ace-marketing-ace-chancers/>
- 26 A: Reclaim Ireland, December 2021.
Link (archived): <https://web.archive.org/web/20211201155645/http://www.reclaimireland.ie/>,
B: Telegram/Reclaim Ireland (Irish Freedom Movement), 11 March 2022.
Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/RcqG7> <https://archive.fo/RcqG7>
- 27 ISD is not publicly sharing this content but we have archived content demonstrating the various themes mentioned.
- 28 Ibid 1
- 29 X.com/Anthony Casey, 27 August 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/Zia6E>
- 30 X.com/Hermann Kelly, 24 August 2024. Link (archived): <https://archive.fo/FEt6h>
- 31 Andrew Phelan, "Irish Freedom Party candidate facing weapons and public order charges," Sunday World. 12 June 2024.
Link: <https://www.sundayworld.com/crime/courts/irish-freedom-party-candidate-facing-weapons-and-public-order-charges/a443306080.html>
- 32 ISD is not publicly sharing this content but we have archived content from this group chat demonstrating the various themes mentioned.
- 33 The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 19 January 2021.
Link: https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-long-road-to-the-capitol-laying-the-groundwork/
-



Amman | Berlin | London | Paris | Washington DC

Copyright © Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2024). Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a company limited by guarantee, registered office address 3rd Floor, 45 Albemarle Street, Mayfair, London, W1S 4JL. ISD is registered in England with company registration number 06581421 and registered charity number 1141069. All Rights Reserved.

www.isdglobal.org