



Adriana LeGrange came under fire on social media.

Photo courtesy the government of Alberta



New Democrat Brooks Arcand-Paul has been a target of hate on social media.

Photo courtesy Brooks Arcand-Paul

‘Tweet others as you wish to be tweeted’ — or not

A glimpse into the current state of social media discourse and its impact on public figures in Alberta

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Editor’s Note: Following is the first story in a series on social media roles, effects and strategies in politics and public life, especially at the provincial level in Alberta.

A former Alberta cabinet minister and deputy premier, Thomas Lukaszuk regularly comments on-line — sometimes bitingly — about the news and politics of our times.

But he strives to adhere to a doctrine carved into a wooden plaque that somehow came into his possession, perhaps as a gift: “Tweet others as you wish to be tweeted,” it reminds him.

“I often ask myself: how would I receive the message I’m posting?” says Lukaszuk, the member for Edmonton-Castle Downs from 2001 to 2015 under the old Progressive Conservatives.

“The person it’s aimed at should know that I know more than I’m tweeting,” he says. “That I’m actually holding back, that I’m being kind as I try to get a point across.”

Now the CEO and a partner with Canadian Halal Financial Corporation, Lukaszuk is in the news these days for his Forever Canadian campaign and referendum initiative. Forever Canadian aligns him against Albertans who in the past may well have supported the Progressive Conservatives, back when it was the dominant party in a right-leaning province.

But even in the stormy waters of Alberta’s renewed conversation about separation, Lukaszuk does his best to keep things from being personal or angry.

And foul language? That’s a hard no in the tiny part of the social media universe Lukaszuk can control — his own image and his own voice.

The state of the socials

Not so careful or self-restrained are untold millions of others. And their negative effects on elected officials and democracy itself are only starting to be measured and understood — even though by some definitions social media is nearly three decades old.

Commentary that’s threatening, abusive and often anonymous shows no signs of tapering off. Self-regulation from major players is limited at best and their processes are often opaque.

Major platforms have scaled back content controls. Complicating matters is that they limit the data they make available to organizations like the Samara Centre for Democracy, says Alex MacIsaac, senior research co-ordinator with the organization.

“Recent changes in digital platform trust-and-safety approaches indicate that the state of social media will continue to worsen,”



MacIsaac says. Several platforms have changed community guidelines to remove user protections, and Samara has also noted layoffs of “massive portions of their trust-and-safety departments.”

Cofounded by Alison Loat and Michael MacMillan in 2007, Samara bills itself as Canada’s leading non-partisan organization focused on strengthening and protecting Canadian democracy. Among its initiatives is a machine learning system called SAMbot that sorts tweets during election campaigns.

“The largest challenge we’ve faced as researchers on this topic is access to social media data,” MacIsaac asserts.

“Major platforms have always been largely unco-operative with civil society’s appetite for access to even simple social media data, and in recent years platforms have become even more restrictive in terms of what’s accessible and who can access data from them for public interest research.”

F-bombs and more

But it doesn’t take long for anyone with the Internet and a search engine to find abusive and threatening content attached to major political names.

When Lukaszuk tweeted that it’s “time to shut that down” in reference to separatism in Alberta, one commenter responded: “Canada is a socialist (expletive) and you can (expletive) off.”

Another time on X, the former Twitter, Lukaszuk was called “fascist scum” for saying two Freedom Convoy participants would look good wearing orange, an apparent allusion to prison garb.

Meanwhile, sitting members in Lukaszuk’s old haunt deal with a barrage of on-line abuse, regardless of their side of the floor.

Adriana LaGrange, who once had a rock thrown through the window of her Red Deer-North constituency office, is a former education minister and now the minister of primary and preventative health services.

“Address the measles crisis, you (expletive) idiot” is a recent X reply to a LaGrange post.

Said another X user: “You are vertically and mentally challenged. Just resign.” What LaGrange’s height has to do with anything wasn’t made clear.

Another comment hints at personal repercussions for LaGrange because of her handling of health care. “Life has a funny way of evening things out you ghoul.”

Replying to a LaGrange tweet about seeking input from health workers on branding a new provincial health corporation, an X user wrote: “Can you just (expletive) off already grifter? You will go down in history as being the single (expletive) health minister in Alberta. What an absolute (expletive) piece of (expletive) human being you are.”

LaGrange’s office did not respond to multiple *Macleod Gazette* requests for an interview. In fact no elected members of the UCP agreed to take part in this series, after the paper made requests to specific members and an overall request through the premier’s office.

A personal toll

Nasty comments aren’t reserved for

members of the ruling party. And members of the LGBTQ-plus community, as well as anyone who stands up for them, always attract spikes in abusive commentary, multiple studies have noted.

On Reddit, a legacy post calls Brooks Arcand-Paul a pile of excrement. The member for Edmonton-West Henday, a gay Indigenous man, has also been called a cuck — a derogatory term derived from cuckhold that’s taken on a life of its own on the Internet. And he’s been told on Reddit to “get stuffed.”

Posts like those take a personal toll, says Arcand-Paul, the NDP’s critic for Indigenous relations. Threats, dehumanization and expressions of anger can be emotionally devastating, especially when they combine with the ups and downs of their target’s personal life.

But Arcand-Paul insists he was not naïve about what lay ahead when he decided to run for office.

He remembers schoolyard banter in Morinville, south of his home community of Alexander First Nation in north-central Alberta.

“I was not, you know, misled,” says Arcand-Paul, who ran successfully in Alberta’s 2023 general election.

“I knew racism and homophobia were omnipresent in interactions, in jokes, in off-the-cuff remarks. But it was never direct. It was never hurtful. And it was never like there was violence attached to it.”

Inspired by the rise of Rachel Notley and the NDP on the provincial scene, Arcand-Paul relocated his emerging legal career from Toronto in 2017. The University of Alberta graduate had finished law school in Ontario and articulated with the province’s Department of the Attorney General.

Before seeking office in Alberta, he entered private practice. Twice he worked directly as counsel for individual First Nations, one of them his own.

One stretch of public derision over a statement he made in the legislature meshed with private pain — a cousin had been shot dead by police — to put him “in a really dark place,” Arcand-Paul admits. The noise was amplified by mainstream media stories and opinion pieces.

So he closed his X account. Today, support staff assist him in monitoring posts and shielding him from the more egregious comments that make the digital rounds. He carefully curates the platforms he does use to protect himself, his friends and his colleagues.

Among the people he turned to for advice was Janis Irwin, an NDP colleague more experienced in government and public life.

Queer and female, Irwin doesn’t shield herself from the digital world, where her feeds are a mix of her private and public personas.

“I love telling other politicians and people getting started, don’t do what Janis Irwin does,” quips the provincial member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, “because I do my own social media.”

Next time: more about individual approaches to social media and the statistical story in Alberta and beyond.