

*The following is summarised information from a Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG) Threat Assessment. Where possible, excerpts of the original document have been used. Some details are withheld under section 6(a) of the Official Information Act 1982 as release would prejudice national security.*

## **Threat Assessment: Potential for Violent Extremist Threat to New Zealand's National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme**

Report Date: 19 February 2021

Report No: 21-22-TA

### **Summary of Violent Extremist reactions to COVID-19 vaccination programmes abroad**

- CTAG assesses that anti-vaccination (“anti-vax”, “anti-vaxxer”)<sup>1</sup> movements globally are not inherently violent. However, individuals pursuing an anti-vax agenda abroad have expressed intent to conduct acts of violence against ideological opponents, including health professionals and politicians involved in or promoting vaccine administration, as recently seen in France.
- Anti-vax is primarily a single-issue movement. We assess that the past year has seen an increase in the infiltration or adoption of the movement by other violent extremist ideologies, particularly identity-motivated violent extremism (IMVE) and politically-motivated violent extremism (PMVE). For instance, adherents of the QAnon conspiracy theory believe that the vaccine contains a microchip used for population tracking and control, whereas anti-government extremists seek to portray vaccination efforts – particularly compulsory ones – as unwarranted or unlawful government interference with civil liberties.
- To date, we are aware of limited instances of violent protest in relation to vaccine rollout efforts in the United States:
  - On 31 December 2020, a US pharmacist was arrested for deliberately spoiling 57 doses of the Moderna vaccine; the pharmacist admitted that he was motivated in part by a conspiracy theory alleging COVID-19 vaccines would mutate human DNA.
  - On 31 January 2021, a US anti-vax group staged a protest outside the Dodger Stadium vaccination site in Los Angeles, which forced the site to temporarily halt operations out of safety concerns. The protest group alleged that the vaccines are part of a mind-control project.

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<sup>1</sup> The World Health Organisation defines vaccine hesitancy, which includes the “anti-vax” movement, as a “delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccine services”.