



Reference: IR-01-22-24298

28 September 2022

Scott  
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Tēnā koe Scott

***Request for information***

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request of 15 August 2022 for various activism and protest report documents. Responses to your questions are set out below.

*ONE: "New Zealand's Activism Landscape" 12 October 2021*  
*TWO: [NIC-SR-211021] "Protests and Activism" 21 October 2021*

As you may be aware, the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) has commenced an independent investigation and review (Review) of the policing of the occupation on and around Parliament grounds in Wellington during February and March 2022 (Protest). Details of the scope of the Review are available on the IPCA's website: <https://www.ipca.govt.nz/Site/parliament-protest/scope-of-the-review.aspx>. You will note this scope includes Police management of intelligence.

While this Review is underway, information relating to the issues under investigation and review is expected to be the subject of examination by the IPCA under its powers of investigation under the IPCA Act 1988. With this Review commenced, there is a strong public interest in allowing these matters to be considered in the round by the IPCA.

It is in the public interest for the Review to be completed without earlier predetermination of the matters it is considering. The two documents you have requested have been provided to the IPCA as part of the Review. This information is therefore withheld under section 9(2)(ba)(ii) of the OIA, to protect information which any person has been or could be compelled to provide under the authority of any enactment, where the making available of the information would be likely otherwise to damage the public interest.

The IPCA anticipates the Review will be completed and reported on by 31 March 2023. Police recognises the importance of transparency in these matters and looks forward to

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the release of the IPCA's report, at which time more detailed information regarding the Police response to the Protest will be publicly available.

*THREE: "OSINT Collection Summary" 8 October 2021. For the avoidance of doubt, I am referring to the OSINT Team report referred to in this document published by DPMC (page 2, paragraph 9):*

<https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/Proactive-Releases/Reviews-and-audits/10-Aug-2022/The-Evolving-Picture-of-Online-Offline-Activism-Linked-to-the-COVID19-Pandemic.pdf>

A copy of the Open Source Intelligence Team (OSINT) Collection Summary of 8 October 2021 titled *Inauthentic account presence in anti-vaccination Facebook groups* is attached. Please note that some information has been withheld from this document under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, to protect the privacy of natural persons.

*I would also like to request copies of these two documents related to Police's update of the National Risk Register Risk Profile – Civil Unrest in August 2020: FOUR: The presentation or report delivered by Police in August 2020 to the Security Intelligence Board on the topic of their update to the Civil Unrest Risk Profile. I would also like to request a copy of the Work Programme that accompanied this update*

This part of your request has been withheld in full under the following sections of the OIA:

- section 6(a), to protect the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand; and
- section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty.

These papers were prepared as part of the Security Intelligence Board's risk governance discussions on National Risk Register risks. The National Risk Register is a classified document that includes a diverse range of nationally significant hazards and threats across several broad domains. National Risk Register Risk Profiles (and related advice on these) are internal government documents, that can contain sensitive information and advice on these nationally significant risks. These are not made publicly available in order to protect their integrity as tools for officials to offer free and frank expression of opinion on the risks and their management, and in some cases to protect the security and defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand.

*FIVE: A copy of the Civil Unrest Risk Profile*

This part of your request was transferred to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) on 2 September 2022, as this information is more closely connected with the functions of DPMC.

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You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review my decision if you are not satisfied with the response to your request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at: [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz).

Yours sincerely



**Dan Wildy** PhD  
Director National Intelligence  
New Zealand Police

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<b>NAME</b>	Inauthentic account presence in anti-vaccination Facebook groups
<b>ASSESSED GROUPS</b>	s.9(2)(a) OIA New Zealand Peoples Positive Support Page NZDAAR
<b>VALID AT</b>	October 8, 2021

### BACKGROUND

- The Open Source Intelligence Team proactively scans for concerning information on issue motivated activist groups. This scanning aims to enhance public and staff safety through ensuring early awareness of potential public disorder.
- In the course of scanning anti-vaccination groups the OSINT Team identified some group members behaving unusually. This included posting comments with strange turns of phrase, odd punctuation, and the relative over-sharing of URLs for mis/disinformation websites. A cursory review of accounts acting unusually suggested many of these accounts were inauthentic.
- The OSINT Team believes inauthentic accounts are either automated (ie, “bot”) accounts, seemingly part of large automated account networks, or secondary accounts operated by individuals (otherwise known as “false” or “fake” accounts).
- Beginning on 9 August 2021, searches were undertaken in three prominent New Zealand-focused anti-vaccination groups to attempt to identify the extent of inauthentic account presence in the groups. A secondary goal was to identify the reason why inauthentic accounts were active in the groups.
- The three main groups searched are:
  - s.9(2)(a) OIA (29,500 members)
  - NZDAAR (2,600 members)
  - New Zealand Peoples Positive Support Page (11,300 members)
- These groups are broadly anti-vaccination and vaccine mandate, and laden with a range of conspiracy ideologies.
- A lot of misinformation is spread through these communities. The OSINT Team has seen up to 100 posts a day shared in some groups. Typical content includes articles espousing misinformation regarding Covid-19 or vaccination rates, and opinion pieces relating to New Zealand’s COVID response.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Searching for inauthentic accounts identified that approximately 20% of accounts analysed in each group were likely inauthentic. This was consistent across the three groups (pages 3-5, 7).
- Of these potentially inauthentic accounts, the majority were assessed as at **MEDIUM likelihood** of being inauthentic (pages 3-5).
- Inauthentic accounts regularly spread international anti-vaccination commentary, and shared URLs to mis/disinformation websites. Some accounts did not appear to share anything, but contributed in the groups by liking certain posts and comments.
- The OSINT Team was initially concerned that mis/disinformation sites pushed within these groups could possibly be a part of state influence campaigns, or simply aimed to exploit the audience through the sale of alternative health products. No evidence was identified to strongly support either conclusion.
- Most articles shared by inauthentic accounts were internationally-focused and predominantly shared vaccine and COVID-related misinformation from the United States of America.
- A ‘control’ topic group, “NZ Organic Gardening”, was also scanned for inauthentic accounts. Of the 200 accounts surveyed, only 3% were identified as being probably inauthentic. Of these, only two accounts appeared to be from overseas (page 6).
- In contrast, 62% of likely inauthentic accounts seen in the anti-vaccination groups appear to be based overseas. The top three overseas countries listed were:
  - United States of America (27 total accounts, 29%)
  - Australia (11 total accounts, 12%)
  - Canada (10 total accounts, 11%)
- The reason so many inauthentic accounts are operating in New Zealand anti-vaccination groups is not clear. If they are not there for commercial gain, a number of risks present themselves. For example, due to the nature of commentary within these anti-vaccination groups, a potential for inauthentic accounts to inflame emotions among members exists. This could lead to potential protest or lawbreaking actions, members taking untested medications, or other, unforeseen outcomes.
- The groups have grown quickly – members are encouraged to add their family, friends and even strangers to the communities.
- Examples of posts made by members have been included on page 9. These posts display the style of rhetoric and posting typical for the studied groups.
- A limitation of our research is that identifying bot accounts is difficult. This, and other limitations have been included in this document (page 10).



### MEASURING INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNT PRESENCE IN GROUPS

To conduct the analysis a sample of accounts was sought from the three key anti-vaccination Facebook groups and the control group. Two different search methods were used:

1. A targeted search, looking for accounts that posted a lot of links (useful for larger groups where membership changes quickly).
2. A dip-sample search, looking at new accounts that had recently joined (useful for smaller groups where posting frequency was lower).

In total 1,000 accounts were surveyed. The sampled accounts were assessed against a [bot scoring matrix](#) published by the American non-profit journalist coalition FirstDraft. The matrix was developed to assess account behaviours in an attempt to identify to what degree a Twitter account could be classified as *likely* a bot or fake. We assessed that the scoring matrix was well-suited to adaption to the Facebook context.

Below is the criteria created for the purposes of assessing the sampled accounts:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Recent account creation date                              | 10. Using awkward turns of phrase                   |
| 2. Lack of personal information                              | 11. Re-posting the same link within groups          |
| 3. Overseas place of residence                               | 12. High/small numbers of friends or followers      |
| 4. Little to no link to New Zealand ( <i>Likes, Groups</i> ) | 13. Possible bot accounts as linked friends         |
| 5. Generic profile and cover photos                          | 14. Member in a number of anti-vaccination groups   |
| 6. Use of more than one language                             | 15. Odd posting behaviour (spamming, same phrases)  |
| 7. Sharing multiple international narratives                 | 16. Possible name change from username              |
| 8. Sharing links with 'ly' in the URL                        | 17. Possible takeover/hack of account               |
| 9. Sharing inflammatory memes or information                 | 18. Few reliable news sources in information shared |

Each sampled account was scored between 1 and 18 depending on how many criteria the account matched. The following scoring system was used to determine the likelihood a sampled account was inauthentic. Any account scoring 6 or high is assessed as *probably inauthentic*.

0 to 5 points: **Low**

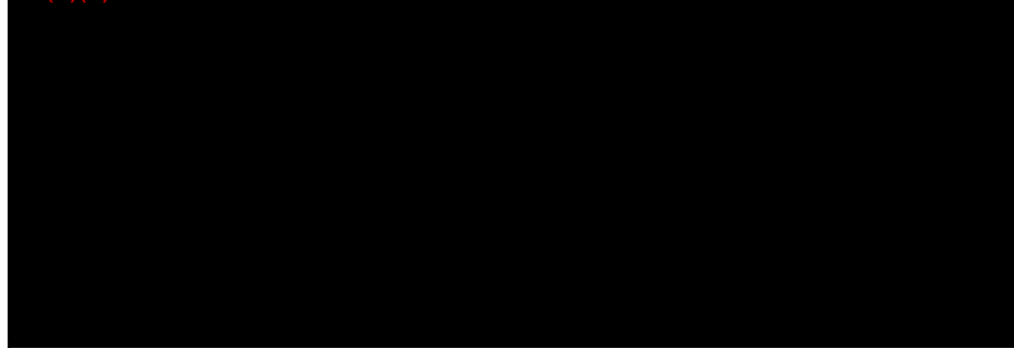
6 to 11 points: **Medium**

12 to 18 points: **High**



### KEY GROUPS RESEARCHED

s.9(2)(a) OIA



s.9(2)(a) OIA

Joined + Invite

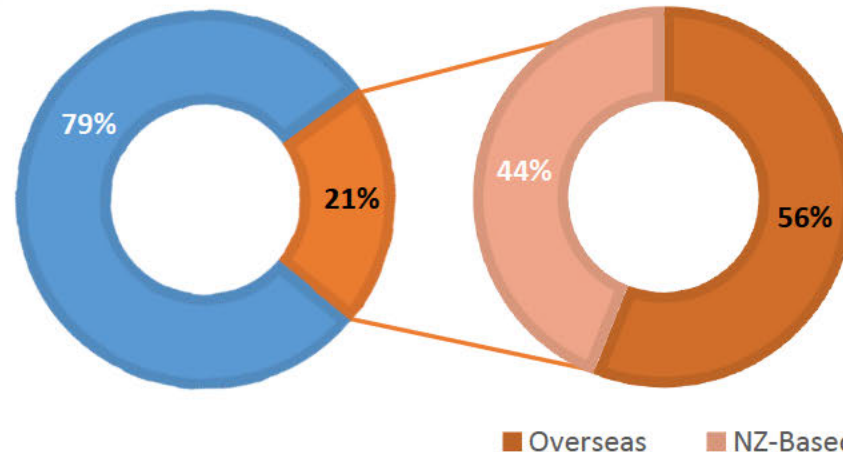
**Name:** s.9(2)(a) OIA  
**Number of Members:** 29,500 members  
**Creation Date:** 27 June 2021  
**URL:** s.9(2)(a) OIA

313 accounts were analysed within s.9(2)(a) OIA and the following information was found:

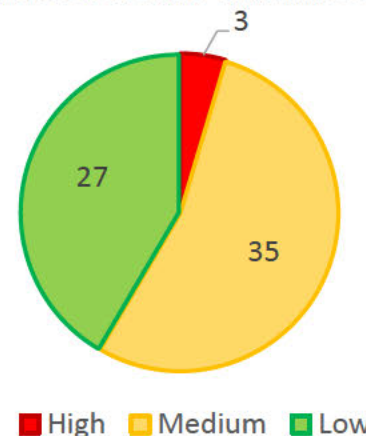
- 66 accounts were found to be probably inauthentic.
- 36 of these inauthentic accounts were found to provide an overseas location of residence.
- 41 of these inauthentic accounts were either new Facebook accounts or look to have been repurposed from legitimate accounts in the past (that is, stolen or hacked accounts).



Authentic Inauthentic



### Inauthentic Account Likelihood Score





### KEY GROUPS RESEARCHED



#### NZDAAR

Private group · 2.5K members

s.9(2)(a) OIA

Joined + Invite

**Name:** NZDAAR (New Zealand Deaths and Adverse Reactions)

**Number of Members:** 2.6k members

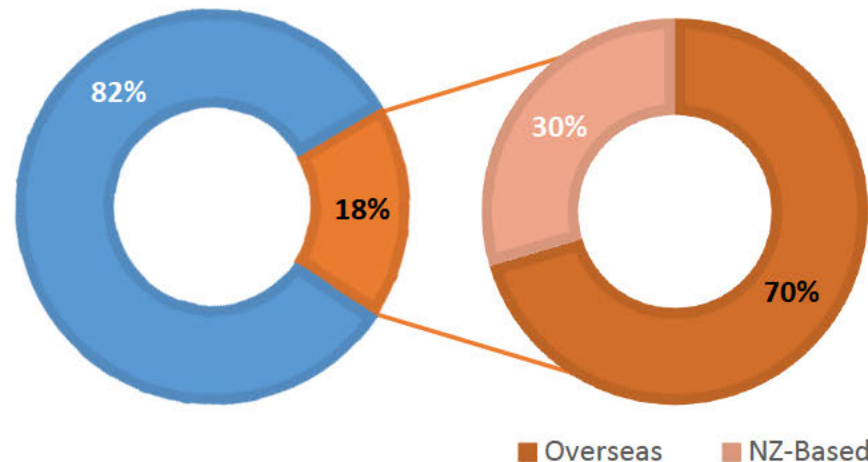
**Creation Date:** 28 December 2020

**URL:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/thehealthforumnz>

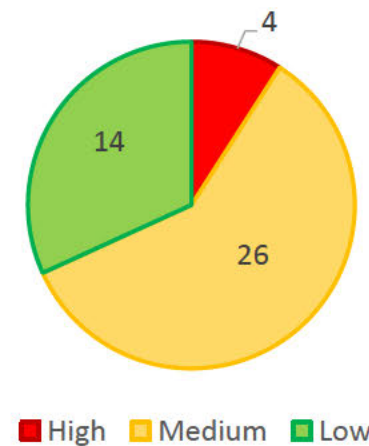
275 accounts were analysed within 'NZDAAR', and the following information was found:

- 44 accounts were found to be probably inauthentic.
- 30 of these inauthentic accounts were found to provide an overseas location of residence.
- 18 of these inauthentic accounts were either new Facebook accounts or hacked or stolen accounts.

Authentic Inauthentic



### Inauthentic Account Likelihood Score



High Medium Low



### KEY GROUPS RESEARCHED



#### New Zealand Peoples Positive Support Page

Private group · 10.6K members

s.9(2)(a) OIA

Joined + Invite

**Name:** New Zealand Peoples Positive Support Page

**Number of Members:** 11.3k members

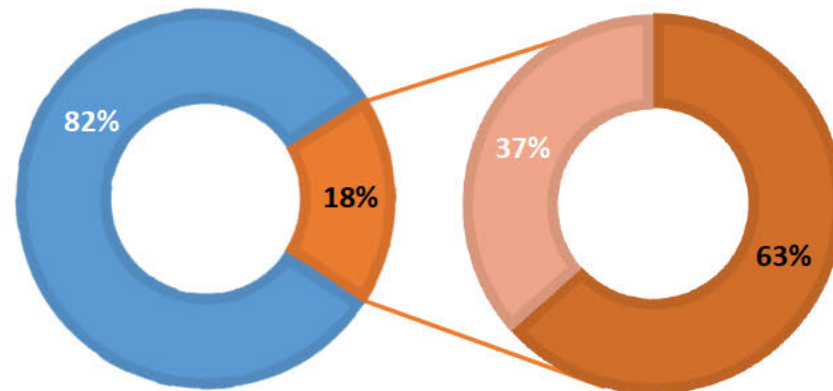
**Creation Date:** 19 June 2021

**URL:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/236541467943658>

219 accounts were analysed within 'New Zealand Peoples Positive Support Page', and the following information was found:

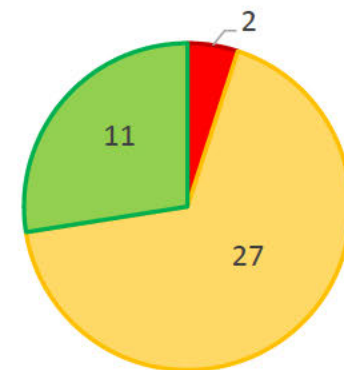
- 40 accounts were found to be probably inauthentic.
- 26 of these inauthentic accounts were found to provide an overseas location of residence.
- 15 of these inauthentic accounts were either new Facebook accounts or hacked or stolen accounts.

Authentic Inauthentic



Overseas NZ-Based

### Inauthentic Account Likelihood Score



High Medium Low





### COMPARISON TO NON-ISSUE MOTIVATED CONTROL GROUPS

A 'control' topic group "NZ Organic Gardening" was looked at in order to compare its metrics to the groups of interest. 200 individual accounts were examined and the following data was collected:



**NZ Organic Gardening**

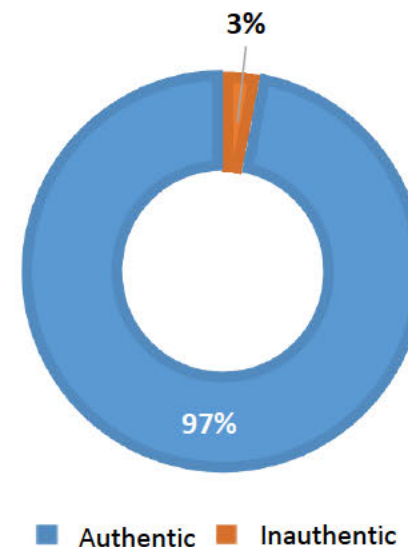
**Name:** NZ Organic Gardening

**Number of Members:** 12,252 members

**Creation Date:** 15 December 2015

**URL:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/770622626398630>

Although there was a small probably inauthentic account presence (four out of 200 accounts), these accounts did not appear to comment or post anything to the group.



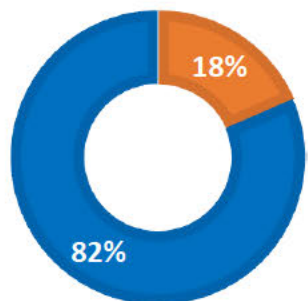
*Due to the comparatively small number possibly inauthentic accounts within the control group, the location and likelihood of these accounts was not analysed.*



### ANALYSIS – COMBINED INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNT STATISTICS

On this page, combined statistics are displayed for various factors across the three assessed groups.

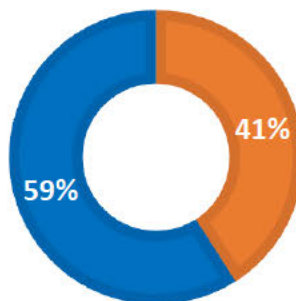
#### OVERALL INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS



■ Inauthentic ■ Authentic

- 18% of accounts across all groups of interest were assessed as probably inauthentic.
- In the control group only 3% of accounts were assessed as probably inauthentic.

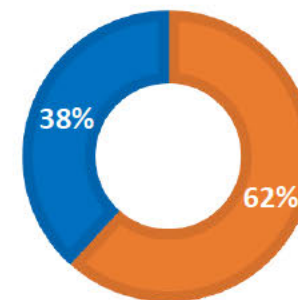
#### INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS IN MULTIPLE ANTI-VACCINATION GROUPS



■ Yes ■ No

- Inauthentic accounts appear to be pulled into, or join, a large number of anti-vaccination groups.

#### OVERSEAS VS LOCAL INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS



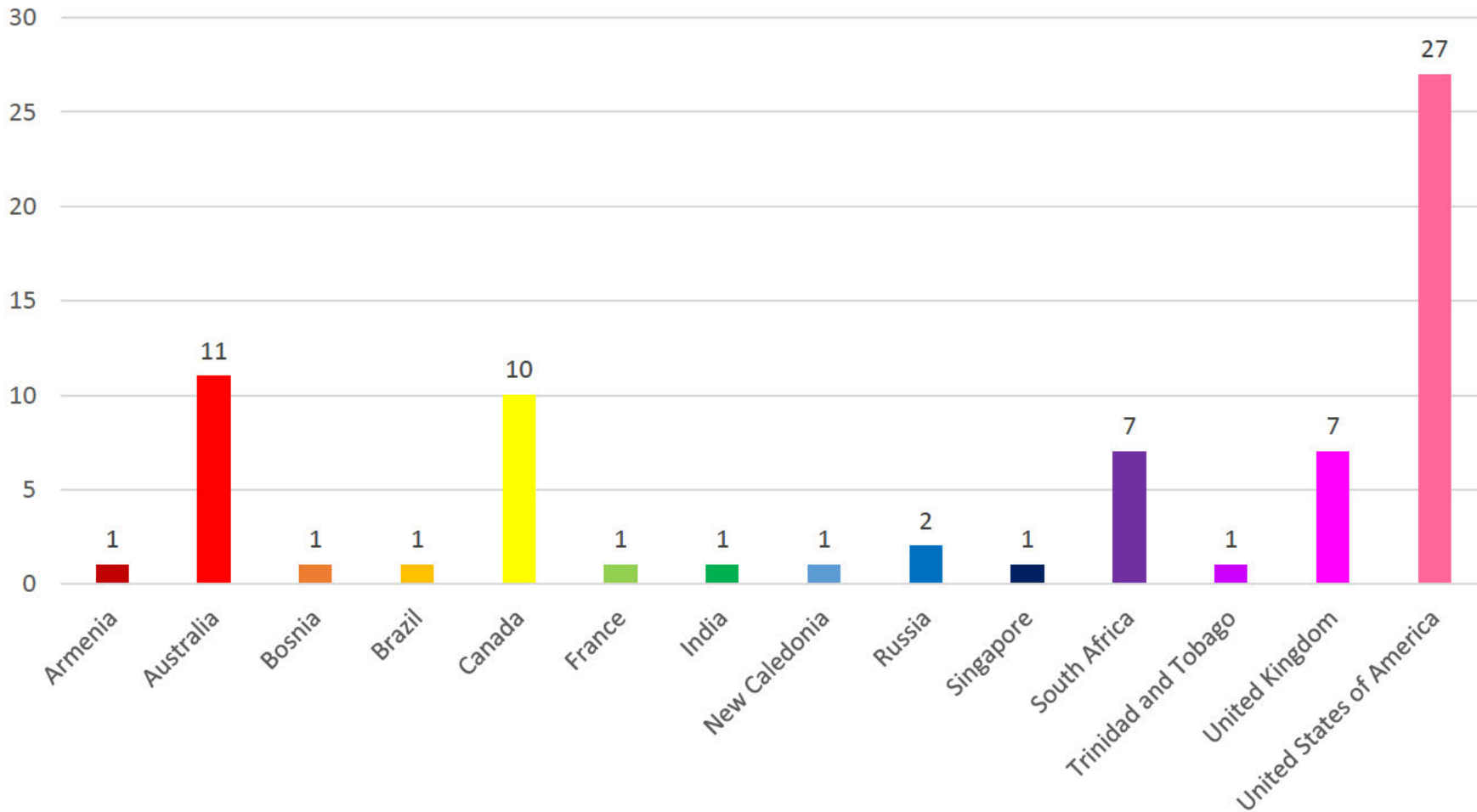
■ Overseas ■ NZ-Based

- Assessed likely authentic accounts within the groups searched appear to be predominantly New Zealand-based.
- Inauthentic accounts more frequently display indicators that they are based or connected to overseas locations.



### ANALYSIS – LOCATION LISTED ON INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS

The following graph shows a count of the locations listed on the profiles of probably inauthentic accounts:



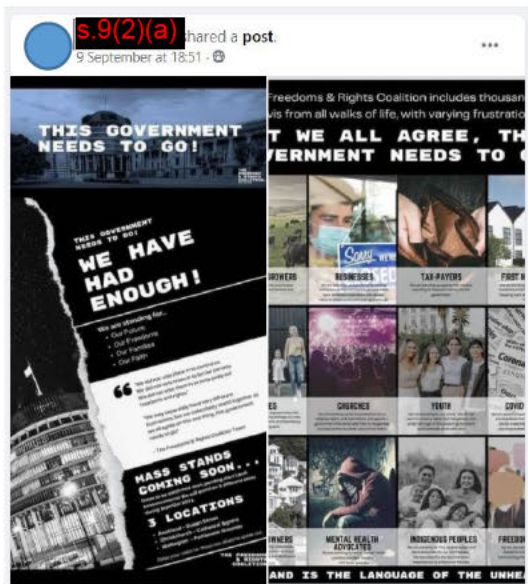


### INFORMATION SHARING – LAWBREAKING, STAFF & PUBLIC SAFETY RISK

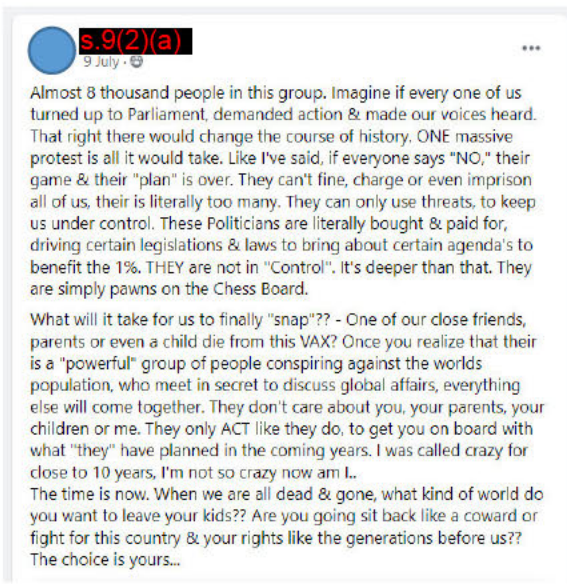
- 18. A large number of posts are made to the assessed groups daily. These posts typically promote anti-government sentiment, share conspiracy theories, attempt to organise members to protest, or push obscure remedies for COVID-19.
- 19. The OSINT Team assesses that it is possible that inauthentic account membership and engagement in issue-motivated groups could:
  - Make legitimate members believe they are part of a much larger public movement than they really are.
  - Promote misinformation through their posting or interaction with posts that agitate members.
  - Promote lawbreaking through posting incitement or interacting with similar posts.
- 20. Detailed analysis of the behaviour and intensions of inauthentic accounts has not been possible during the timeframes given to this study.
- 21. Shown on this page are some examples of what members typically post in these groups:



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/830605394267330/posts/860575247937011/>



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/236541467943658/posts/282579316673206/>



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/236541467943658/posts/247784196819385/>



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/236541467943658/posts/269588371305634/>



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/236541467943658/user/100004023045368/>



### OBSERVATIONS & OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

#### INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS: OBSERVATIONS

During the course of analysis, the OSINT Team identified:

- A large percentage of inauthentic accounts appeared to 'reside' overseas (62%), with a majority linked to the USA. It is unclear why this is, but it is possible that US-based inauthentic accounts are scrutinized less by Facebook, or that they are more valuable to on-sell to spam or marketing networks, or that other factors are at play.
- Possible inauthentic accounts appear to post mis/disinformation website links in comments in the anti-vaccination groups analysed. The motivations for posting this material are unclear. It is also unclear why these accounts post links in comments rather than submit their own posts. It is possible the inauthentic accounts post comments to avoid closer scrutiny of the accounts and the content by other users or by Facebook's own systems.
- A number (47%) of inauthentic accounts were found to be members of multiple anti-vaccination groups. This may indicate inauthentic accounts seek out groups with the same agenda, or that the inauthentic accounts are swept up in the aggressive recruitment efforts.
- We have seen accounts operate in ways that imply automated coordination. For example, friending an inauthentic account will often result in dozens of friend requests from other accounts that are likely bots.
- Why inauthentic accounts are present in the groups is unclear. No obvious commercial or influence activity was discovered, but further research may uncover subtle operations inauthentic accounts undertake.
- Some inauthentic accounts are clearly repurposed, stolen accounts. For example, an account might post in Indonesian until 2015, and list its location as Jakarta, but switch location to the US and write entirely in English from 2020. We suspect stolen accounts are being reused, but for unclear purposes.

#### OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

Below are outstanding questions raised during this task. Further research on these questions may prove valuable:

- Is it unusual to have many inauthentic accounts within anti-vaccination groups compared to other issue motivated groups?
- Are inauthentic accounts actively seeking out anti-vaccination groups or are they simply looking to build account legitimacy by joining as many groups as they can and finding more success with anti-vaccination groups than others?
- Why are inauthentic accounts not posing as New Zealand citizens? Is this due to the accounts initially targeting the U.S, then being repurposed for a New Zealand audience, or are these accounts seeking to join anti-vaccination groups from around the globe?
- What are the reasons inauthentic accounts are appearing in multiple anti-vaccination groups?
- Are inauthentic accounts the leading sharers of the misinformation URLs being shared? That is, could some of the inauthentic accounts be part of commercially-operated networks designed to boost traffic to certain sites?
- Likewise, are inauthentic accounts attempting to push sites that lead to alternative health products? The OSINT Team did not see strong indicators of this behaviour, however, we assess that it could be a motivation for the presence of some of the inauthentic accounts in the network.



### RESEARCH LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Due to time constraints the research supporting this collection summary is necessarily limited.

In particular, some identified limitations include:

- A person with little experience on social media could use their social media account in unusual ways, leading to the incorrect assessment that the account is inauthentic.
- A perceived inauthentic account could be a secondary account created by a real person who does not wish to be easily identifiable to their personal or professional social circle.
- An account assessed as likely inauthentic due to their behaviours and overseas location and connections could belong to a real person with ties to New Zealand that are not obvious.
- A different sampling methodology could result in a different count of inauthentic accounts.
- As the inauthentic account rating matrix is untested the scores generated could be misleading.

#### RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

If further research is conducted on the topic of inauthentic accounts in Facebook groups, we would recommend that researchers:

- Conduct wider collections – in particular, analyse a larger pool of accounts within groups of interest, and contrast the results generated with a larger pool of control groups.
- Identify specific interactions caused by assessed inauthentic accounts, for example; what posts or comments were liked or if there are any indications of inauthentic accounts attempting to bolster support for a particular individual or agenda.
- Investigate whether assessed inauthentic accounts may encourage or promote rule-breaking and protest action within groups.
- Characterise the legitimate members of a group compared to the inauthentic accounts in order to identify differences in behaviour that may support the discovery of further indicators of account inauthenticity.
- Assess the accuracy of the inauthentic account rating system through further research comparing the rating scores to more detailed observations of account behaviours.



# HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

NIC-OS-20210919 – Inauthentic account presence in anti-vaccination Facebook groups

~~IN CONFIDENCE~~  
s.9(2)(a) OIA

OPEN SOURCE INTELLIGENCE TEAM

Utilising web intelligence to detect and prevent harm to our communities

## THIS DOCUMENT IS CLASSIFIED IN CONFIDENCE

Only staff cleared by the department to access IN CONFIDENCE level or above is authorised to handle the information. This includes all staff involved with transmission, storage and disposal.

METHOD	RULES
Electronic transmission	All IN CONFIDENCE information may be transmitted across public networks but the level of information contained should be assessed before using clear text. Username/Password access control and/or encryption may be advisable (with the aim of maintaining public confidence in public agencies).
Manual transmission	May be carried by ordinary postal service or commercial courier firm as well as mail delivery staff in a single closed envelope. The envelope must clearly show a return address in case delivery is unsuccessful. In some cases involving privacy concerns, identifying the originating department may be inappropriate and a return PO Box alone should be used.
Storage and disposal	IN CONFIDENCE information can be secured using the normal building security and door-swipe card systems that aim simply to keep the public out of administrative areas of government departments. Must be disposed of by departmental arrangements.

### DISCLAIMER

The interpretations and conclusions drawn in this report are made on the balance of probability on information available at the time of preparation. The information contained herein is not evidence and is intended to provide a basis for further investigation only.

	Originator	Reviewed By	Released By
Name	s.9(2)(a) OIA		
Role			
Extn			
Date			
Originator Email			