



## **Proactive Release**

The following document has been proactively released by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), on behalf of the Minister of Health, Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall:

### **Unite Against the COVID-19 Infodemic – September 2022 Kantar Public**

Research report into COVID-19 information environment and misinformation environment in New Zealand.

#### **The report**

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet commissioned a survey report to provide insights and sentiments into the COVID-19 information and misinformation environment in New Zealand.

The report will help inform how we respond to the ever-changing global information environment – to ensure the safety, security and well-being of all New Zealanders.

The report follows on from the Classification Office Te Mana Whakaatu 2021 ‘the Edge of the Infodemic’ report, which looked at the general misinformation landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand.

#### **Defining misinformation**

We have used the term ‘misinformation’ when referring to any information that is false and misleading, including misinformation (false information not intended to hurt others), disinformation (false information intended to hurt others), and mal-information (true information used to intentionally to mislead others).

#### **Demographics**

The survey found that views on various issues were broadly similar irrespective of characteristics like age, gender, ethnicity, religion etc. There were some significant differences, but the commonalities tended to be stronger.

The report did not specifically analyse misinformation in languages other than English. We recognise that different ethnic groups may be exposed to misinformation in different languages.

For groups in New Zealand with lived experience of systemic inequality, neglect, or discrimination, including racism, for example within New Zealand’s Māori and Pasifika communities, distrust of government and media can become intergenerational. These are factors that can enable disinformation narratives to gain traction, including by being directly targeted by bad actors to drive polarisation between different groups in society.

## **Our environment**

Misinformation is not new in New Zealand, however, the growth of the internet and emergence of online platforms has led to domestic influencers becoming adept at picking up conspiracy theories from overseas and repackaging them for domestic consumption.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided the perfect storm of 21st century technological reach and people spending more time online than ever before, sometimes while isolated from their usual support networks. This online shift has allowed for rapid dissemination of information, aiding the spread of useful information while also enabling the amplification of harmful or false information.

## **The findings**

Misinformation has undoubtedly impacted the public health response to COVID-19. We heard that 34% of respondents identified impacts that COVID-19 misinformation has had on them or their community. For some, this has included real and perceived rejection from friends, whānau, and wider communities for their beliefs and choices.

72% of respondents feel the spread of misinformation on social, economic and justice issues (not just COVID-19) are a serious threat to our democracy. Misinformation could contribute to levels of mistrust of government, law enforcement, and community institutions.

Disturbingly, this survey identified that 8% believe that threatening to hurt someone is an acceptable way to achieve change. The potential of propensity to violence as a justified response to public policy is an obvious area of concern.

The survey presented a combination of false and true statements such as 'In 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon' and 'Climate change is real'. At least 81% of respondents held at least one belief related to misinformation.

54% of respondents who strongly believe in misinformation have avoided or stopped watching or reading mainstream media.

## **What can be done?**

It is important to avoid viewing the situation as irredeemable. This research shows that where believers of misinformation diverge from mainstream society there is a tendency to trivialise their beliefs as being 'gullible' or 'vulnerable', which can further isolate people.

The feeling of social inclusion and belonging is key to overcoming these beliefs. Despite various beliefs, making an effort to socially include each other, especially those who are isolated is paramount to rebuilding our social trust in each other and restoring a sense of belonging.

We are all responsible for taking steps to critically analyse the information we take in, identify the source and any bias.

### **Six ways to help spot misinformation**

1. Use multiple sources of information to help spot fake news
2. Read past the headline and check credentials such as the date and author
3. Question numbers and figures – check the reference
4. Check tone and language and identify author biases
5. Understand your own biases and any negative perceptions that might be clouding your judgement
6. Understand images and emotive wording that are designed to manipulate. This can include false use of government branding, emotionally manipulative language, and mismatched images and text

### **How to report misinformation**

Report any online misinformation to Netsafe <https://report.netsafe.org.nz>

[© Crown Copyright, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\)](#)

# Unite against the COVID-19 infodemic

---

Research report | September 2022

**KANTAR PUBLIC**

# Contents

---

**KANTAR PUBLIC**

- 1** Background Pg 3
- 2** Summary Pg 10
- 3** Exposure to misinformation Pg 14
- 4** Belief in misinformation Pg 28
- 5** Motivation for belief in misinformation Pg 39
- 6** Impact of belief in misinformation Pg 41
- 7** Information sources Pg 47
- 8** Appendix Pg 54

# Background

---

KANTAR PUBLIC

# Objectives

This study aims to provide insight into the state of...

## New Zealand's COVID-19 information environment



Key sources of information



Trusted sources of information



Sentiment towards the information environment

## Misinformation in New Zealand



Prevalence of misinformation



Belief in misinformation



Motivation for belief



Impact of belief

# Terminology

## Defining misinformation

For consistency, this report uses the term 'misinformation' when referring to any information that is false or misleading, regardless of the intention behind it.

### 'Misinformation' in this report includes...

#### Misinformation

False information not intended to hurt others

#### Disinformation

False information intended to hurt others

#### Mal-information

True information used to intentionally hurt others\*

The intention behind misinformation is not always clear and misinformation is subjective. For example, some will accurately identify false or misleading information, while others consider factual information from official sources to be misinformation. The survey referred to 'false or misleading information' and each individual was asked about their perceived exposure to what they considered to be misinformation.

**Pink** has been used throughout this report to identify beliefs associated with misinformation as defined above. This has not been used when results are neutral or could apply both to those who do or do not believe misinformation.





# Terminology

## Mainstream and alternative information/sources

As with misinformation, the lines between mainstream and alternative information or sources can be blurred, often driven by an individual's perceptions of which sources they feel are credible and who they believe to be a legitimate 'expert'. For consistency, the report uses the following terms:

### Mainstream information is typically...

- From traditional news sources
- From well-established, dominant media
- Follows the 'official narrative'
- Follows COVID advice led by government agencies and recognised scientists/ experts

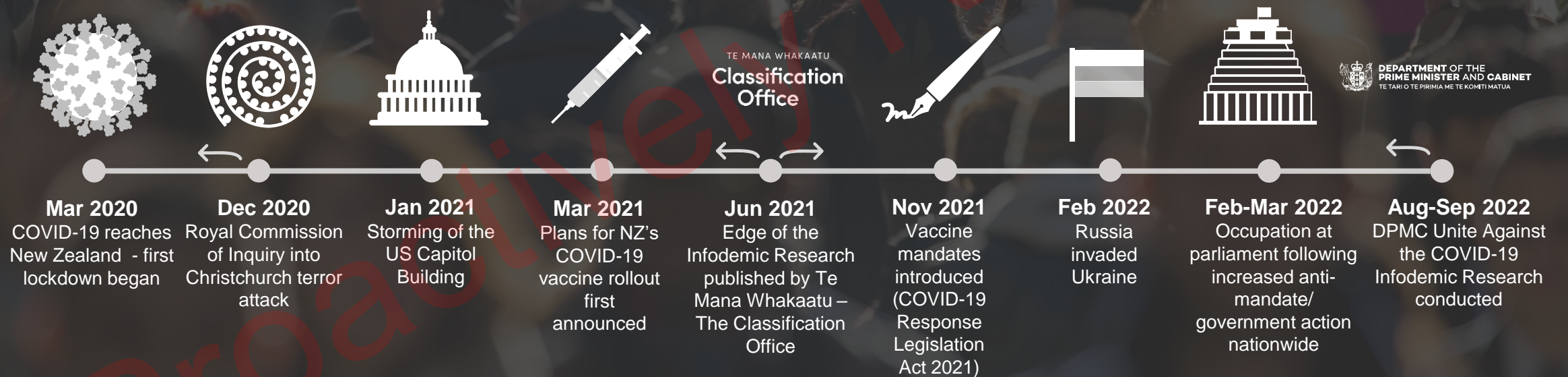
### Alternative information is typically...

- From newer, often online-only
- Self-defined as 'anti-mainstream' or 'non-mainstream'\*
- In opposition to the 'official narrative'/advice provided by government agencies and recognised scientists/experts
- Led by individual commentators/personalities, rather than larger media companies

# Key events in the lead-up to this study

This study was conducted in August 2022 and the results must be considered within the context of global events that were top-of-mind for respondents at the time. COVID-19 played a continued role in daily life, with increased infection rates and deaths starting in early 2022, coupled with fading public interest and news coverage, with relaxed restrictions and enforcement of mandates.

Misinformation is ever-evolving and often driven by current events, especially surrounding COVID-19 which can be impacted by news about current strains, mandates, reported infections or death rates etc. While not an exhaustive list, the events below are all examples of significant events surrounded by misinformation that took place in the lead-up to this study, whether misinformation played a role in causing the event, at the actual event, in the aftermath, or a combination of all three.



# Method

---

KANTAR PUBLIC

# Method



## The survey

A representative nationwide online survey of 2,001 New Zealanders.



## Fieldwork

3<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> August 2022



## Margin of error

The maximum margin of error on the total sample (at the 95% confidence level) is +/- 2.2%.



## Percentages

Percentages may not always add to 100% because:

**Multiple responses** were allowed for some questions (i.e. one respondent can select more than one answer to a question).

**All percentages are rounded** to the nearest whole number. When manually adding together percentages shown on the charts, the total may not always add exactly to 100%.



## Weighting

Weighting was applied to the final sample to ensure it was nationally representative by age, gender, ethnicity and household size/income.

# Summary

---

KANTAR PUBLIC

# Summary

---



**Almost half (48%) of New Zealanders say that they have been exposed to misinformation about COVID-19** since January 2022, most often saying they have seen or heard vaccine and virus-related misinformation, with a smaller group also mentioning misinformation about the hidden motives of the Government.



In evaluating misinformation, **New Zealanders rely strongly on their instincts** and while some research and fact-check suspected misinformation, it is most common to make trust or gut-based decisions based on what feels legitimate or makes sense, including those who implicitly trust or distrust mainstream news and information.



**New Zealanders are concerned about the impact of COVID-related misinformation**, with four out of five feeling it is a threat to New Zealand generally, a threat to society and a threat to democracy. While concern about misinformation is apparent, it is a lower priority top-of-mind when compared with other COVID-related worries such as health or economic impacts, the changes to day-to-day life and general uncertainty going forward.



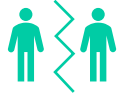
Misinformation has divided New Zealanders into three key groups, including **non-believers, strong believers and those with some beliefs in misinformation**. Non-believers follow the official COVID narrative and believe no misinformation, strong believers are positioned against the official narrative and hold strong beliefs in misinformation, and the remainder hold some beliefs relating to misinformation but are not strong believers.



**There is a lack of agreement around what constitutes misinformation**. Followers of the official narrative reference misinformation they have heard about the severity and source of the virus, or the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, while those with strong misinformation beliefs feel that official health advice (e.g. promoting vaccine safety) is in fact false or misleading.

# Summary

---



**Perceptions of sources of misinformation are also divided.** Strong believers in misinformation are more concrete in their thinking, pointing to specific organisations like the Government, media or hidden organisations as the source. However, followers of the official narrative are less sure, either not knowing where misinformation comes from, or often pointing to non-specific confused, misled or easily convinced individuals.



While division is apparent, those for and against the official COVID narrative share some similarities, particularly in their assessment of information. Both groups are more invested in curating the information ecosystem around them, often drawing from multiple news sources and actively researching or fact-checking what they see as misinformation. Although using similar means, their efforts have led them to opposing opinions.



**The survey findings indicate that believers of misinformation are misunderstood to some extent.** There is a tendency among those who follow the official narrative towards 'othering' believers, either trivialising them as 'gullible' or 'vulnerable', or dismissing them as 'crazy'. A reductive attitude here serves in part to paint believers of misinformation as a lost cause, suggesting that believers may be moving away from the mainstream, but are also being pushed.



**There is an increased separation from mainstream society among strong believers of misinformation.** Unsurprisingly, believers have diverged away from mainstream media and medical advice, but they have also become more isolated. This includes a move towards home schooling, as well as experiencing job losses and damaged relationships with partners, friends or family, all of which has a greater impact on their mental wellbeing.



As seen earlier in 2022, **belief in misinformation has the potential to result in direct action.** This group is more accepting of speech and action that may result in offence, violence or harm, particularly as a means to achieve change.

# Summary

---



**New Zealanders place the most trust in official COVID experts** (scientists/ researchers/academics) when seeking information about COVID-19. Information about COVID is mostly disseminated through mainstream channels or word of mouth. However, almost a quarter (23%) have explored alternative news sources and 13% exclusively rely on alternative information sources.



**Strong belief in misinformation is most common in younger New Zealanders** (under 40 but particularly in their 30s), especially those with young families. This group tend to get their news about COVID from a wider range of sources, mainly online, which has exposed them to alternative information, partly due to less content moderation online and more reliance on the opinions of individuals. This compares with older New Zealanders (especially 65+) who mainly consume mainstream, traditional media and hold fewer beliefs in misinformation.




**There are varying levels of distrust in the establishment**, including the New Zealand Government, mainstream media, companies and other organisations (two out of five have some level of distrust). Distrust in the Government is apparent across the population, stemming from a perceived ineptitude (e.g. inability to accurately track case/death numbers), a sense that the Government keeps some secrets, or the mal-intent of the Government (e.g. intentionally harming the population). Beyond the Government, there is also a belief among some New Zealanders that secret groups or a 'deep state' actually controls what the Government does and says (23% feel this is true to some extent, including 6% who feel this is *definitely* true).



**Belief in COVID misinformation is often set within a wider context of other misinformation.** The majority who believe some COVID misinformation (and all who hold strong beliefs) also hold beliefs in misinformation outside of COVID. With the relaxing restrictions, COVID will likely have a less pressing impact on New Zealanders' lives over time, but this wider misinformation-based worldview means that misinformation is unlikely to completely go away with COVID.





# Exposure to COVID-19 misinformation

---

KANTAR PUBLIC

Almost half of New Zealanders have seen or heard COVID misinformation, although there is disagreement on what constitutes misinformation and where it comes from. Both non-believers and strong believers in misinformation are more likely than average to say they have seen misinformation. However, by definition the former think it comes from official sources, whereas the latter think it comes from alternative sources. Those in the middle, who believe some misinformation but not strongly, passively consume and accept misinformation as true, without a strong awareness or investment in the surrounding discourse.

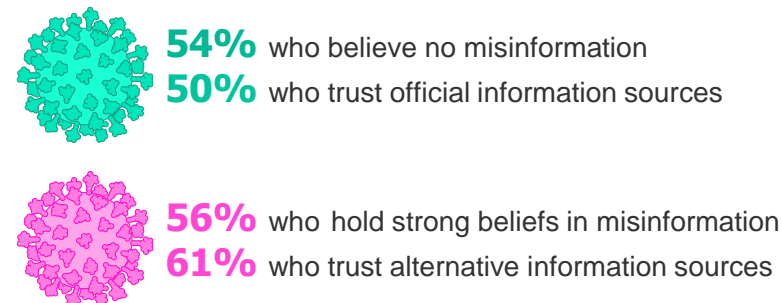
## Exposure to COVID-19 misinformation in 2022



**48%**  
Say they have seen misinformation about COVID-19

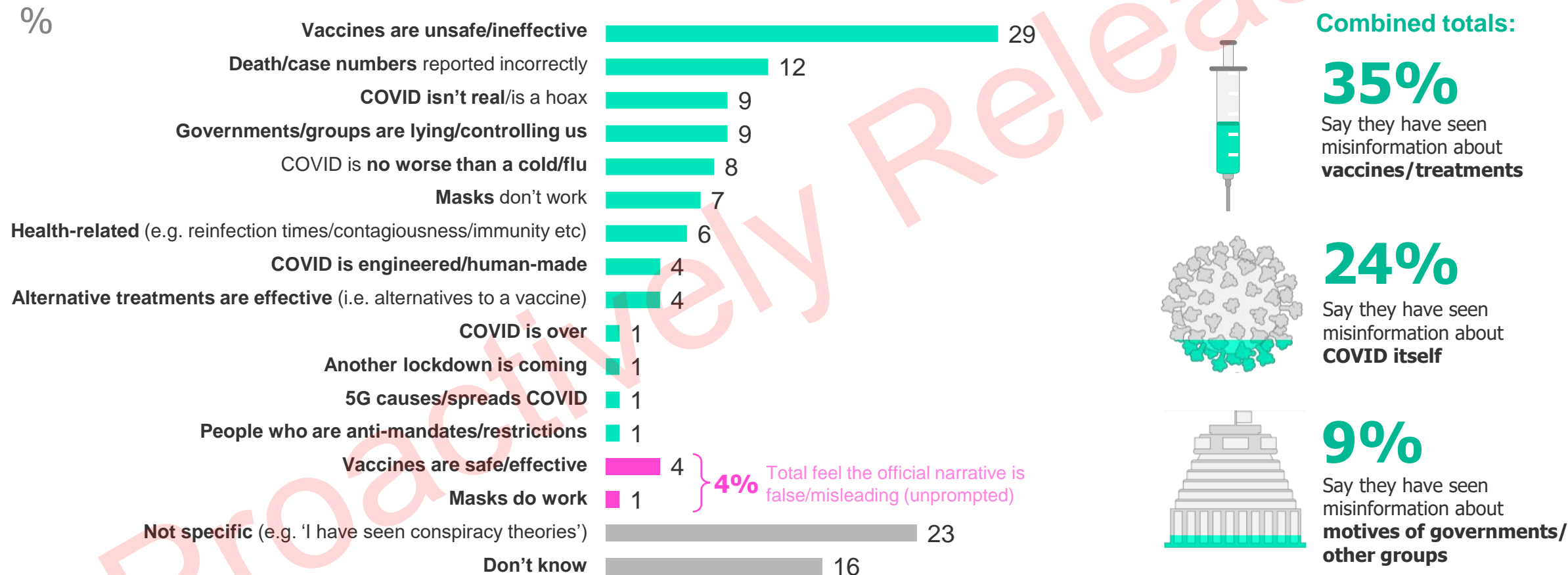


The following groups are more likely than average to report seeing/hearing misinformation:



Misinformation relating to the vaccine and virus itself has the widest reach and recall. Unprompted, understanding is often surface-level, with two-fifths having seen misinformation but are unable to articulate or recall specifics. Mostly, New Zealanders are divided on where they feel misinformation comes from. However, distrust in death or case numbers has wider-reaching resonance, as some feel this is intentional (disinformation) and others feel media or government are inept or unable to report accurately (misinformation).

## New Zealanders have come across COVID-19 misinformation about... (unprompted\*)



New Zealanders were asked to describe misinformation about COVID-19 in their own words. Those who follow the official COVID narrative tend to either cite broad ideas like ‘the vaccine is unsafe’ and ‘COVID isn’t real’, or cite specific, fringe beliefs like ‘vaccination makes people magnetic’ or ‘drinking bleach cures COVID’. In part, fringe beliefs are more memorable, but they also serve to diminish and dismiss beliefs of others as ‘crazy’. Those who do believe misinformation rarely mention these beliefs, suggesting they and their beliefs are misrepresented.

## New Zealanders describe misinformation in their own words as...

Note, the following are ideas that New Zealanders recall hearing and have identified as misinformation. They may or may not believe this personally.

*“The vaccine is made of rat poison”*  
30-39 Asian Male

*“That it is just a Government beat-up and COVID is not really a problem. That the numbers of deaths from COVID are wildly exaggerated. That the COVID vaccine has a 5G chip in it. That our Prime Minister is part of a world-wide conspiracy to become a communist country.”*  
70+ NZ European Female

*“NZ is leading the world in low number of COVID infections and related deaths”*  
50-54 NZ European Male

*“COVID was developed in labs and is spread via 5G mobile networks”*  
50-54 Māori Male

*“The government representatives saying this is a pandemic of the unvaccinated... TV ads constantly saying the vaccines are ‘safe and effective’, both of which are untrue due to the huge amount of vaccine injuries...”*  
60-64 NZ European Female

*“It’s only the common cold. Bleach is a cure”*  
50-54 NZ European Female

*“It’s a hoax. Anything right wing Republicans in the US say, influencers trying to sell medication, Alex Jones etc.”*  
55-59 ‘other’ ethnicity Male

*“That it is a biological weapon from China [sent to] the west. That the COVID vaccine hasn’t been tested enough.”*  
18-24 Māori/ NZ European Male

*“Claims that the vaccine contains a chip so the public can be monitored. COVID is the rich’s plan to control the world”*  
70+ Pasifika Female

*“Most of the stuff the NZ Government says is false or misleading... They should report on the very serious side effects after people have the vaccine...”*  
25-29 NZ European Male

*“Potential cures – Facebook and news media”*  
50-54 NZ European Female

*“Jacinda was arrested a few months ago what you see today is a body double. A new world order is starting. 5G, Bill Gates, Hillary Clinton and a cabal of global leaders are working in concert to generate this crisis to cleanse the world of laggards with a virus... so that they can focus on paedophilia.”*  
30-39 NZ European Male

*“That having the vax protects you. Everything about COVID is hard to believe”*  
35-39 Māori Female

*“I have a friend that... sometimes forwards me links. One a few weeks ago was apparently from a WINZ worker and was talking about a ‘military lockdown’ happening at the end of July”*  
45-49 NZ European Female

Source: Q9 Please give us some examples of false or misleading information or news about COVID-19 that you’ve come across

Trust is a key component in helping New Zealanders identify misinformation. Many default to trusting official sources (three in ten), whereas others distrust official sources (one in ten), or rely on instincts and common sense (three in ten). Two in ten actively research and fact-check misinformation they come across. This is more common among strong believers and non-believers of misinformation, suggesting that while these groups are more critical of information, their individual versions of research and fact-checking have led to opposing viewpoints.

## How misinformation is identified (unprompted\*)

%



### Combined totals:

32%



#### Trust the official narrative/sources

Government  
Mainstream media  
Scientists

29%



#### Rely on instincts

'Common sense'  
'It makes sense'  
'I'm not stupid'  
'It's obvious'  
'What I think'  
'It's logical'

22%



#### Actively research

'I check the sources'  
'I fact check with websites e.g. Snopes'  
'I use trustworthy sources e.g. Johns Hopkins'

11%



#### Distrust official sources

Government  
Official narrative  
Media  
Science/medicine

## New Zealanders describe their misinformation identification ...

*"It's not hard to figure out it's all about money and control. I've had worse hangovers than COVID-19."*  
50-59 Male NZ European

*"Because I trust governmental death numbers and clearly Kiwis are dying at an alarming rate now COVID is spreading. Also logic says if Trump could've suppressed deaths, he would've but we all saw how devastating this virus is with our own eyes."*  
30-39 Male Pasifika/NZ European

*"I do not know [if] the misinformation is false or not. I do know though that for people who claim big things like conspiracies, they always are just some nutcase in the comment section..."*  
20-29 Male NZ European

*"I know it is not factual or scientifically based"*  
60-69 Female NZ European

*"I'm not stupid and gullible"*  
18-29 Female NZ European

*"I'm smart and not easily manipulated"*  
18-29 Female NZ European

*"I work as a Technical Services Librarian at an academic institute, sorting the wheat from the chaff is part of the role."*  
40-49 Female Māori

*"[Misinformation] directly contradicted published research in the journal of medical sciences and peer reviewed research from places like Johns Hopkins... I actually read the research for 'fun' because I want to see for myself what the doctors are saying in double blind, large sample, long-term peer-reviewed data"*  
30-39 Female 'other' ethnicity

*"[I look at] alternate views. [There is] suppression of information being released (Pfizer looked for 75 years to keep the studies on COVID secret) and impact on the community and vaccine injury of my own mother."*  
40-49 Male Māori/NZ European

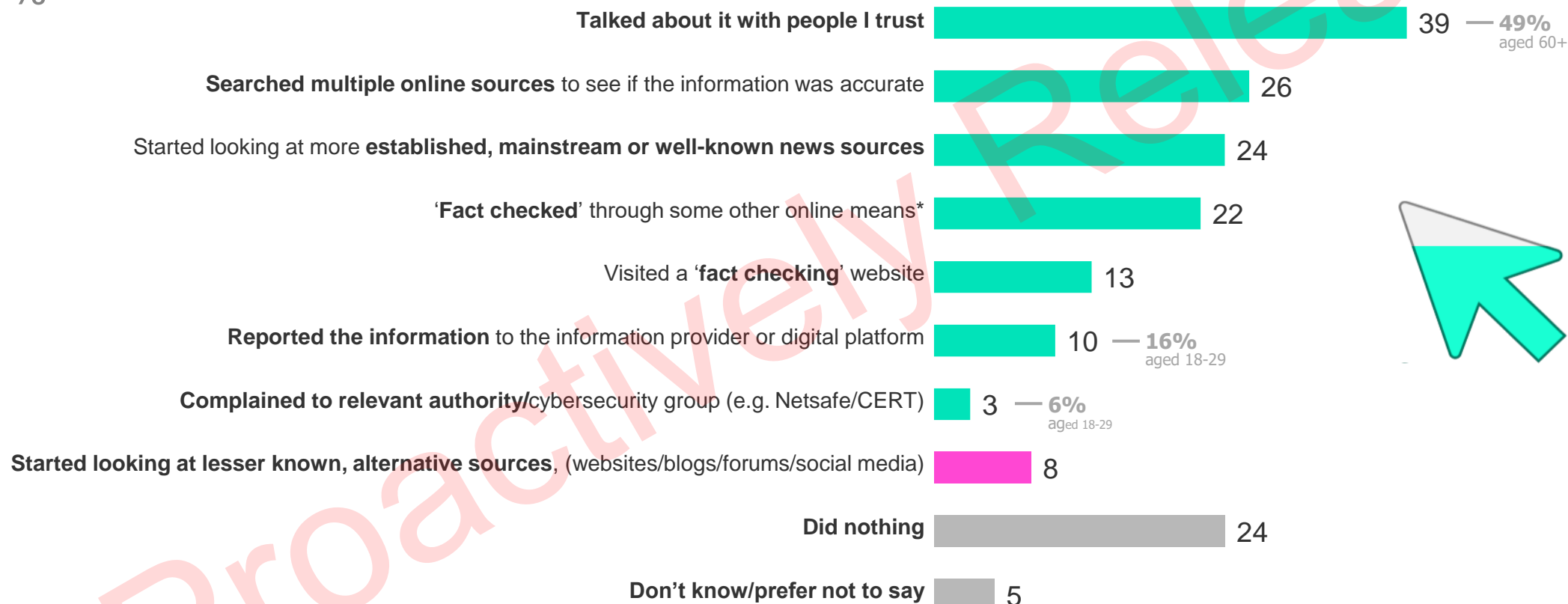
*"All media saying the same thing, very biased, any different opinion would not be tolerated"*  
30-39 Male Pasifika

*"All the people getting sick and re-catching COVID and having long-term effects are the jabbed."*  
30-39 Female Māori/NZ European

Almost three quarters of New Zealanders have taken action upon identifying misinformation. Strong believers in misinformation are more actively involved in curating their information environment and assessing the information they consume, whether fact-checking, searching multiple sources, or seeking out alternative information. Action also varies notably by age, with older New Zealanders relying more on friends or family they trust, and younger New Zealanders reporting misinformation online directly to a platform or provider.

## Action taken after identifying misinformation (prompted)

%



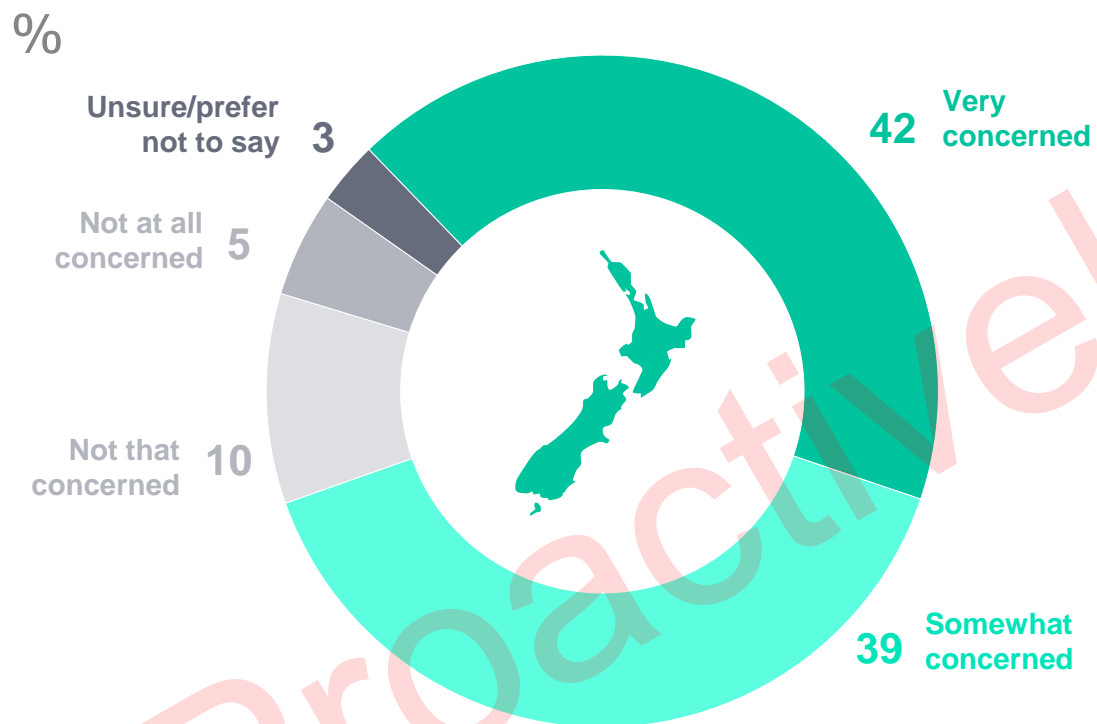
**72%**

**Took action after identifying misinformation**

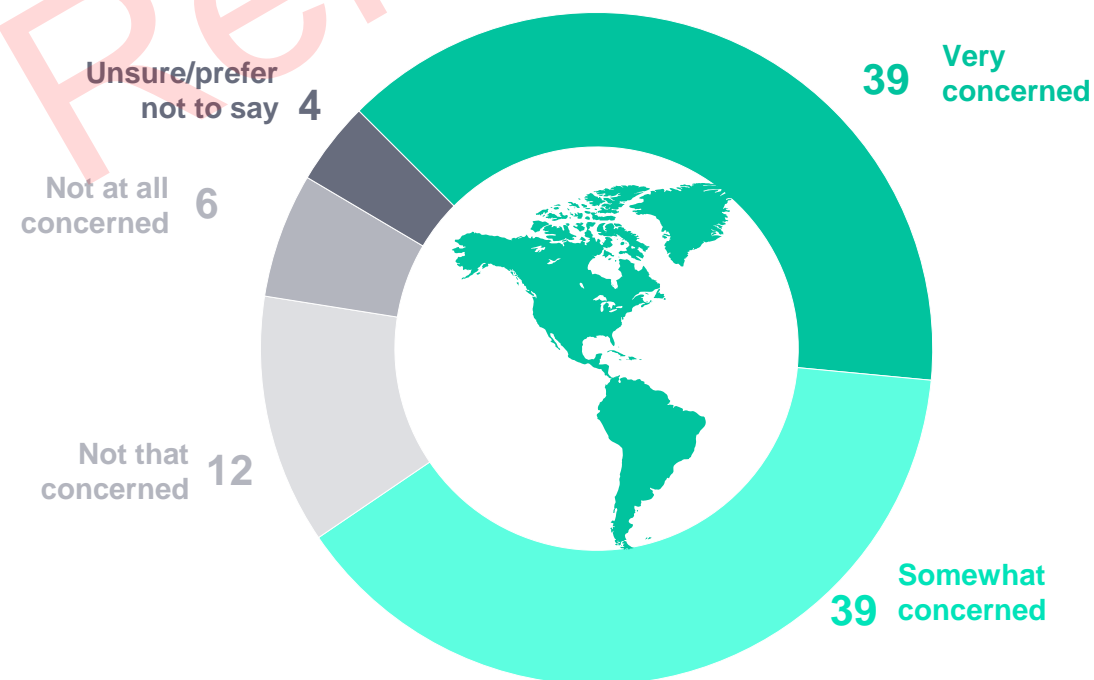
Four fifths of New Zealanders are concerned about the impact of COVID misinformation. New Zealanders who follow the official COVID narrative are most concerned, whereas concern decreases as misinformation belief increases. This may point to strong belief in misinformation providing a sense of security, or a sense that their version of the 'truth' is spreading.

## Level of concern about misinformation relating to COVID-19

**81%** Are concerned about the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 in New Zealand



**78%** Are concerned about the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 overseas/internationally

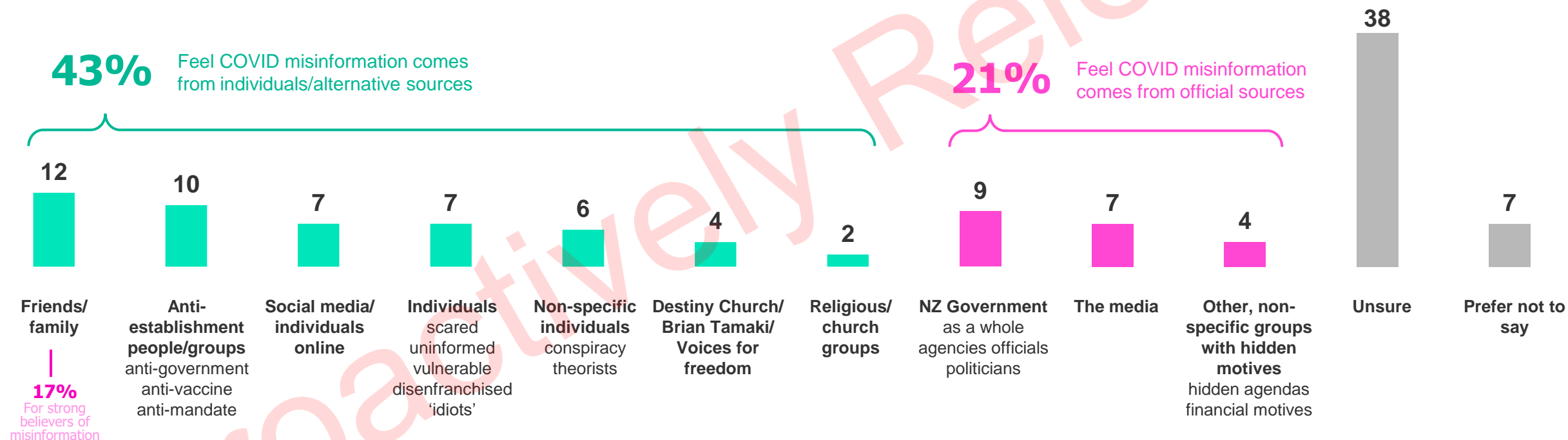




Two fifths of New Zealanders who think COVID misinformation is being spread intentionally are uncertain about the source. Followers of the official COVID narrative often say misinformation comes from misled or confused individuals (scared/vulnerable/anti-establishment individuals), whereas strong believers in misinformation ascribe more intentionality to specific hidden groups, the media, or government. Believers also mention friends and family as a source of misinformation, which can lead to breakdowns in their relationships and potentially greater isolation.

## Who is seen as spreading COVID-19 misinformation (unprompted\*)

%



## New Zealanders describe groups responsible for spreading misinformation about COVID as...

*"People who have been disenfranchised and become bitter, have gone down the anti-Government, fascist rabbit hole, latching on to their fears and spreading utter lies that are not based on science. The alt right links to these ideas are powerful and the average hapless Kiwi, with limited ability to think critically, is an easy target."*

30-39 Female 'other' ethnicity

*"People who have an agenda to bring down the governments, for them to get more control."*

40-49 Male Māori

*"The poorly educated, low IQ population who have unrealistic concerns because they are disenfranchised and want somebody to blame, like [a]deep state"*

60-69 Male Māori/'other' ethnicity

*"A lot of Americans via social media and media outlets like FOX but also social media in NZ (Facebook among the worst)."*

50-59 Female NZ European

*"Every news outlet that uses abridged or selective statistics or information for dramatic or clickbait headlines."*

30-39 Male NZ European

*"Idiot bloggers and religious people and those crystal loving hippies."*

18-29 Female NZ European

*"Lobby groups or activists with hidden/alternative agenda. People who think the governments are using COVID as an excuse to control the population."*

60-69 Male NZ European/'other' ethnicity

*"The Government and in turn, the media who were paid off to say anything the Government wanted us to hear."*

40-49 Male Pasifika/NZ European

*"The government and all other governments around the world, along with the elite..."*

30-39 Female Māori/NZ European

*"Media outlets. I find the information is usually in relation to the severity of COVID. It feels completely over the top and gets quite "brain washy" in its repetitiveness."*

30-39 Male NZ European

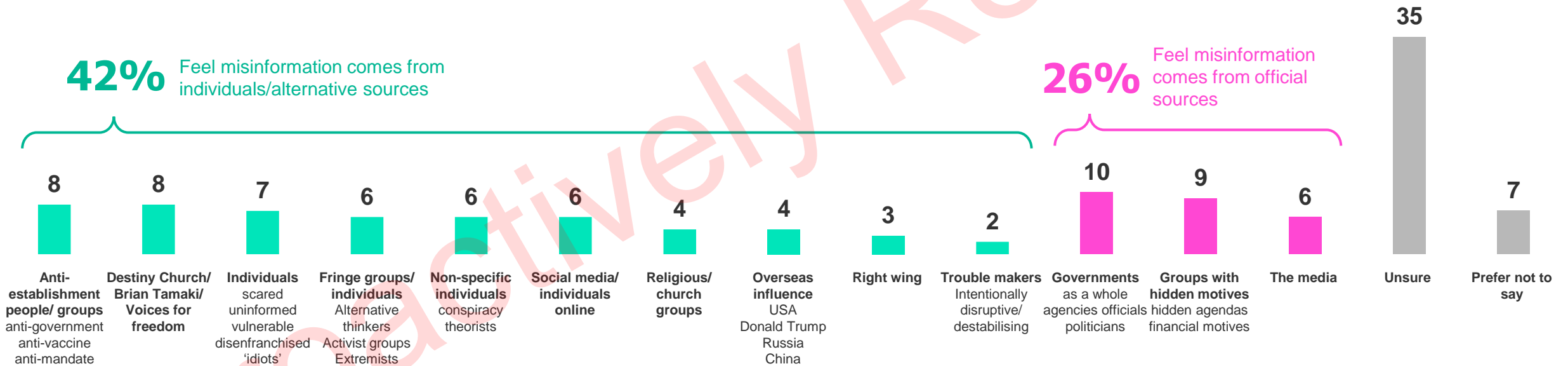
*"Government to take votes."*

30-39 Male Asian

New Zealanders who think COVID misinformation is being intentionally spread are also uncertain about the sources of misinformation for other leading issues. However, there is a sense that broader misinformation is coming from governments, the media or other groups with hidden motives, as opposed to individuals. Believers of misinformation also tend to be more specific, detailed and confident when pointing to those responsible for spreading misinformation, often naming individuals or organisations.

## Who is seen as spreading misinformation about social, economic, health and justice issues (unprompted\*)

%



# New Zealanders describe groups responsible for spreading misinformation about social/ economic/ health/ justice issues ...

*"Anyone who can gain from it [like] opposition politicians, hate activists, extreme right wing communities, misogynists."*

60-69 Male Pasifika/NZ European

*"...Those on the margins are particularly vulnerable to any antivaxxer who casts enough doubt or smothers them with alternative science that the poor, confused soul doesn't have the skills or capability to refute. There's a large sector happy to peddle anti-government views and are looking for recruits and views/likes/follows to boost their ego, power and agenda."*

30-39 Female 'other' ethnicity

*"Churches, groups of disaffected people, people aligned with Trump, people with little education and possibly those who are educated but use education to achieve their messages."*

70+ Female NZ European

*"Uneducated Idiots that are angry with their lot in life until they find a sense of belonging and purpose with each other and the social media algorithms help them find each other."*

30-39 Male NZ European

*"Alt right groups who manifest in the innocuous front of mummy bloggers, natural health nuts and 'free thinkers'"*

30-39 Female 'Other' ethnicity

*"Strong minded, independent, anti-establishment thinkers."*

70+ Male Māori

*"Conspiracy theorists."*

50-59 Male Māori/NZ European

*"Dumb people! Very, very dumb people."*

18-29 Female NZ European

*"The Government and in turn, the media who were paid off to say anything the Government wanted us to hear."*

40-49 Male Pasifika/NZ European

*"MSM, Labour Government and elected members of current Government, PM..."*

50-59 Female NZ European

*"CCP/Blackrock/Vanguard/W.H.O. any government that is part of Agenda 2030."*

40-49 Male NZ European

*"[The] government is not telling the whole truth or listening to anyone trying to speak up."*

30-39 Female NZ European

Suspicion about the motives of New Zealand's government and the UN is apparent among some New Zealanders, especially those with strong beliefs in misinformation and who put their trust in alternative news sources. However, a larger proportion (three out of five) feel misinformation is being intentionally spread by other groups or organisations, pointing to a wider-reaching sense that unknown groups with mal-intent are responsible.

## Sentiment towards government and international organisations

%



Source: Q17a Next we have some statements about governments and international organisations. Do you think these statements are true or false? We're just interested in what you personally think.

Base: All respondents (n=2,001).

Note: Both true and false responses can indicate distrust in organisations. Those who are 'unsure' have not been counted towards the total who lack trust, but are shown alongside them as uncertainty can be a step towards mistrust (i.e. uncertainty around whether an organisation can be trusted).

Excludes statement "The spread of false or misleading information is a risk to our democracy"

New Zealanders are most concerned about the threat that COVID misinformation poses to democracy and society as a whole in New Zealand. There are higher levels of concern among New Zealanders who trust the official COVID narrative. While stronger belief in misinformation is often linked to a sense that misinformation comes from the Government, this group is not any more concerned about democracy in New Zealand.

## Perceived threat of misinformation to New Zealand

%



# Belief in misinformation

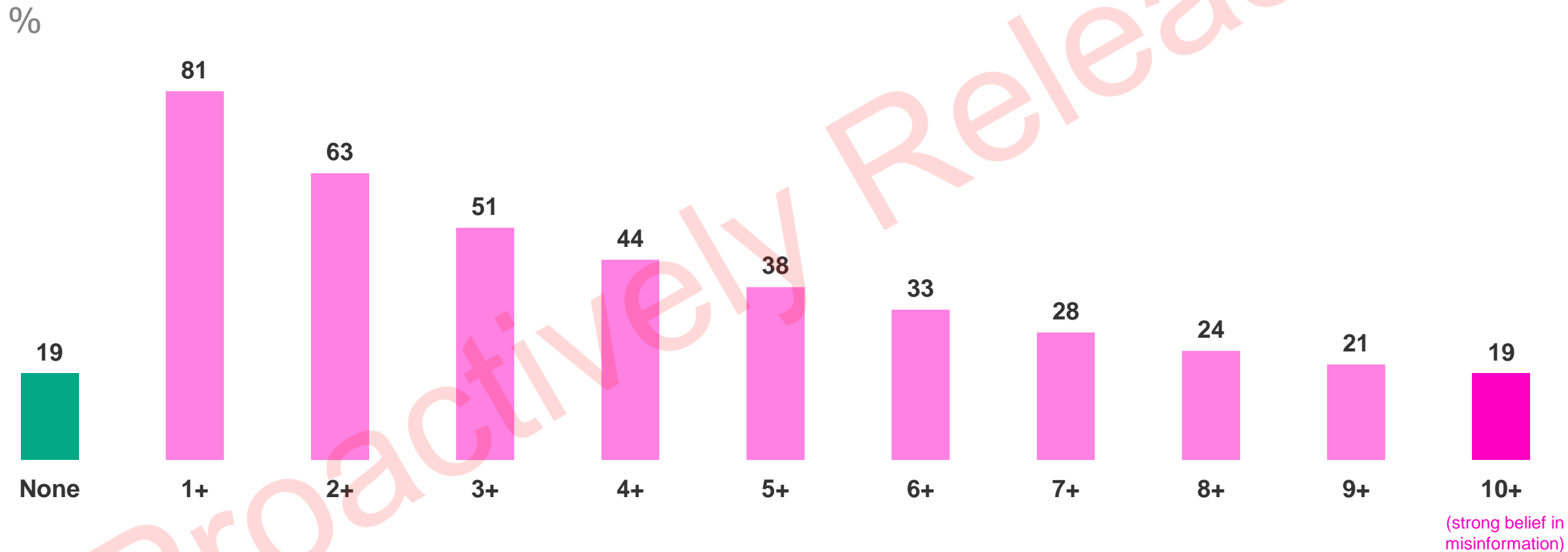
---

KANTAR PUBLIC



New Zealanders' beliefs in misinformation were assessed through a wide range of true or false statements about COVID and broader societal misinformation. Overall, belief in misinformation is fairly common, with four in five New Zealanders believing at least one statement of misinformation (out of 28), suggesting that belief in some misinformation, or at least doubt in the official narrative is common-place. One in five New Zealanders are strong believers, believing ten or more statements of misinformation.

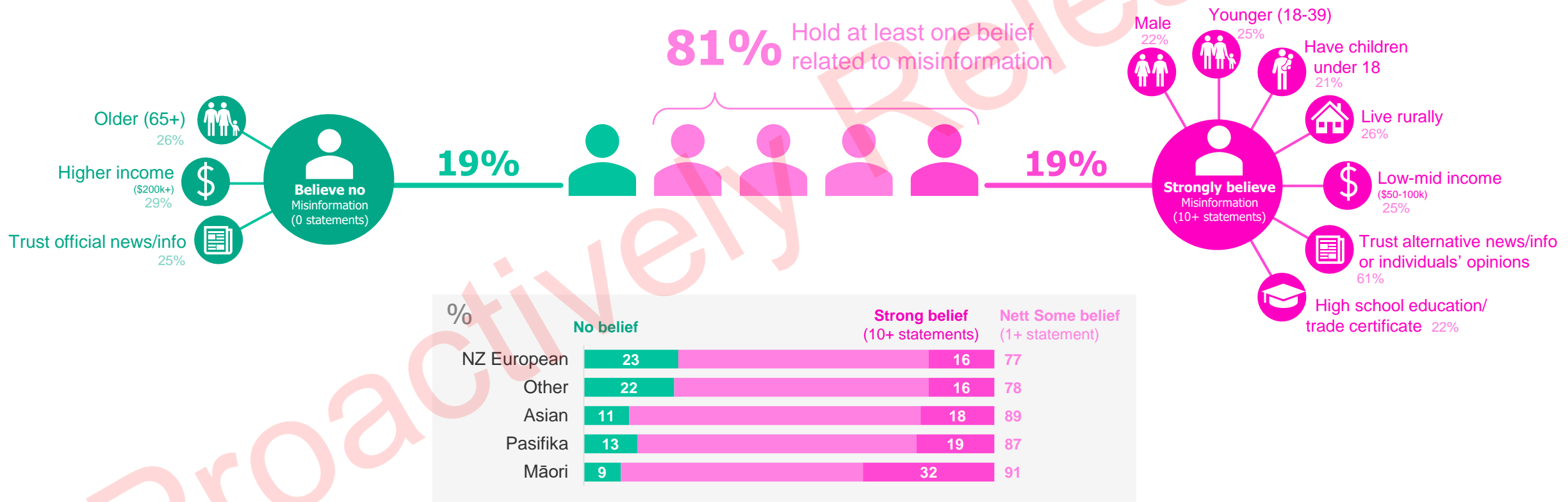
### Belief in misinformation (cumulative number of beliefs associated with misinformation\*)





New Zealanders are split fairly evenly, with one in five holding no beliefs in misinformation and one in five holding strong beliefs (10+ statements). This split is especially evident along demographic and socio-economic lines, with strong belief more common among people under 40, with children living at home, men, and those with lower levels of income or education. Unsurprisingly, there is a link between trusting alternative news sources and belief in misinformation.

## Belief in misinformation



Two thirds of New Zealanders hold at least one misinformation-related belief about COVID-19. The most common beliefs relate to the virus itself, such as the source and severity (over half believe misinformation about the virus). This is followed by vaccine and treatment related misinformation, and then misinformation about public health measures taken in response to COVID.

## Belief in misinformation about COVID-19

66% Hold at least one belief in misinformation relating to COVID-19



66%

Hold at least one belief related to misinformation **outside of COVID-19**  
39% hold 2+ beliefs  
23% hold 3+ beliefs



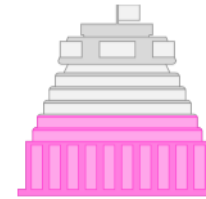
53%

Hold at least one belief related to misinformation about the **COVID-19 virus**  
33% hold 2+ beliefs  
21% hold 3+ beliefs



44%

Hold at least one belief related to misinformation about **COVID-19 vaccines/ treatments**  
28% hold 2+ beliefs  
19% hold 3+ beliefs



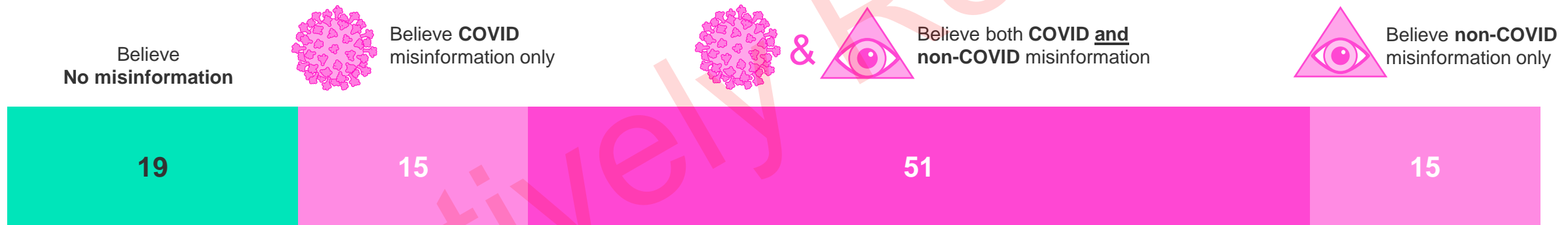
42%

Hold at least one belief related to misinformation about **COVID-19 measures**  
41% hold 2+ beliefs  
11% hold 3+ beliefs

Belief in COVID misinformation is often linked to belief in non-COVID misinformation, with half of New Zealanders holding beliefs both about COVID and non-COVID related topics. With easing restrictions, COVID will likely become a less pressing issue over time, however this wider misinformation-based world-view suggests that belief in misinformation is unlikely to go away with COVID. This is especially the case for those with strong beliefs in COVID misinformation, all of whom hold at least one other non-COVID related belief.

## How belief in misinformation outside of COVID translates to belief in COVID misinformation

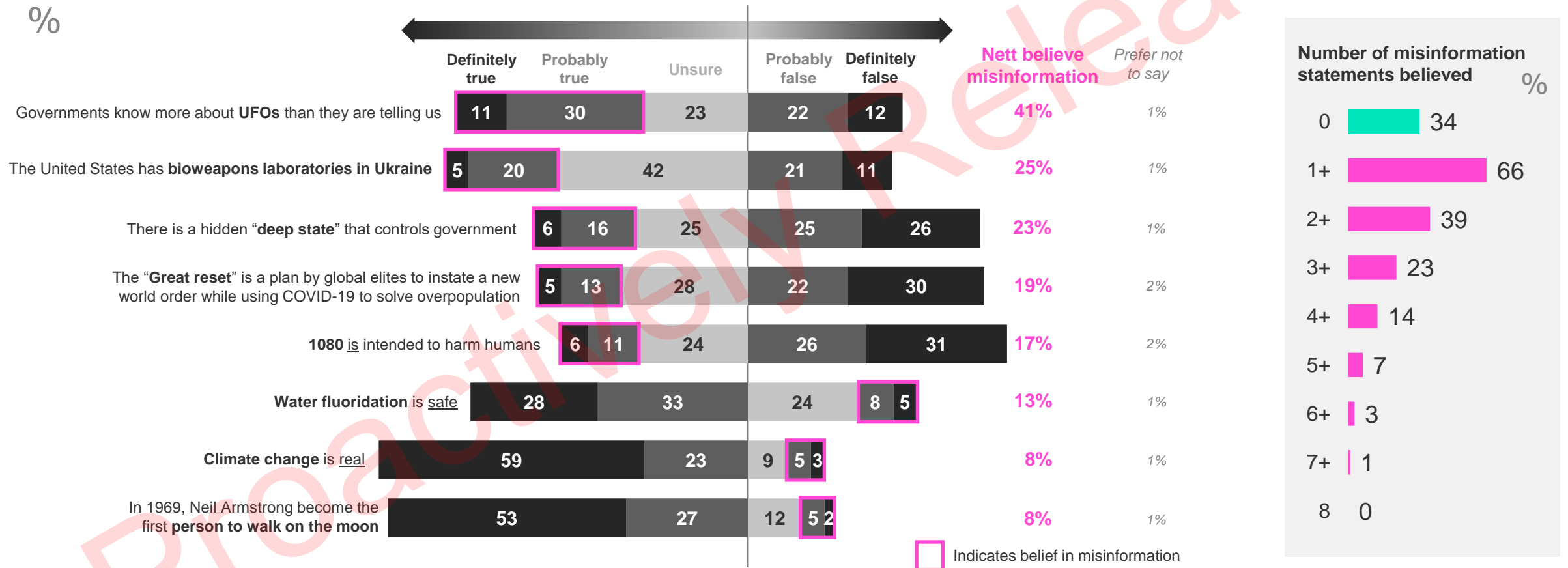
%



All of those with strong misinformation beliefs (10+ statements) believe both COVID and non-COVID misinformation

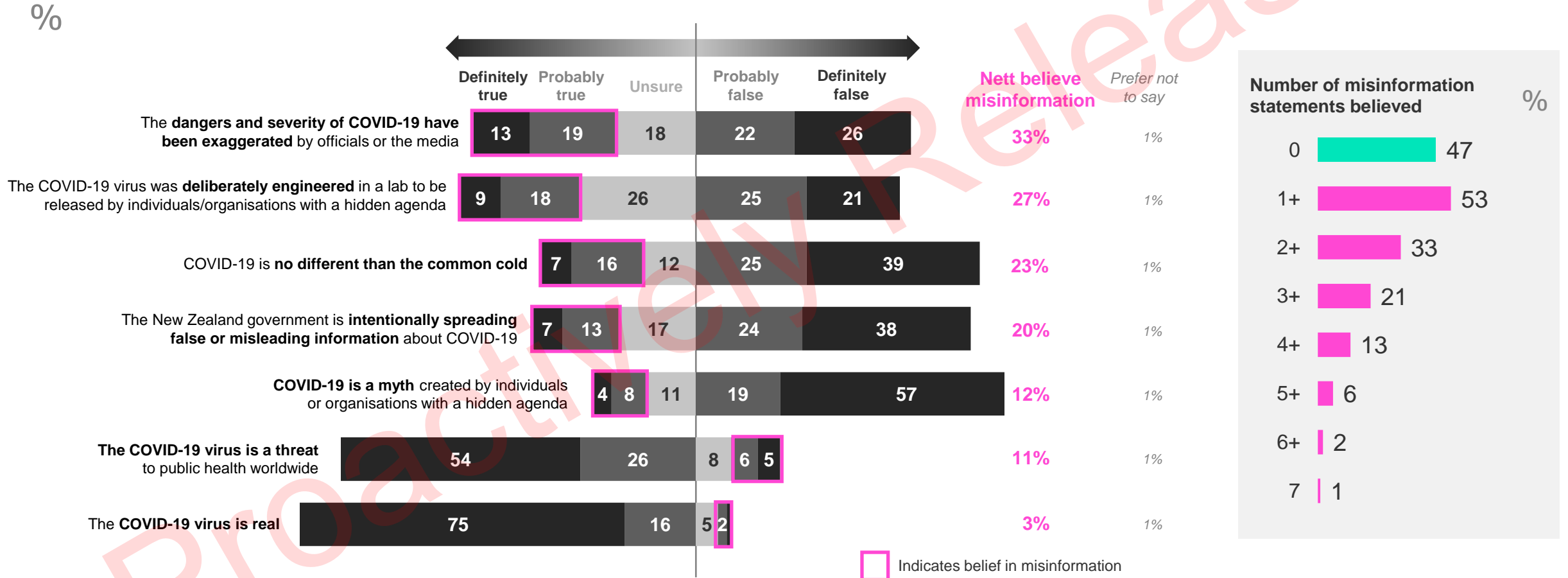
Outside of COVID, the most commonly held belief is that the Government knows more about UFOs than they tell the public, which hints at the idea of government deception and has broad appeal both among those who believe no other misinformation and those with a wider set of beliefs in misinformation. Belief in more insidious plans by the Government or similar groups are less common, but have still resonated with some New Zealanders, particularly the idea of a deep state (23%) and the great reset (19%).

## Belief in misinformation outside of COVID-19



The majority of New Zealanders agree that the COVID-19 virus is real and is a threat to public health worldwide. Disagreement centres around the severity and source of COVID, especially a belief that the severity has been exaggerated by officials or the media. Some also point to the mal-intent of governments and groups with a hidden agenda who are seen as deliberately engineering and releasing COVID-19, or intentionally spreading misinformation about COVID.

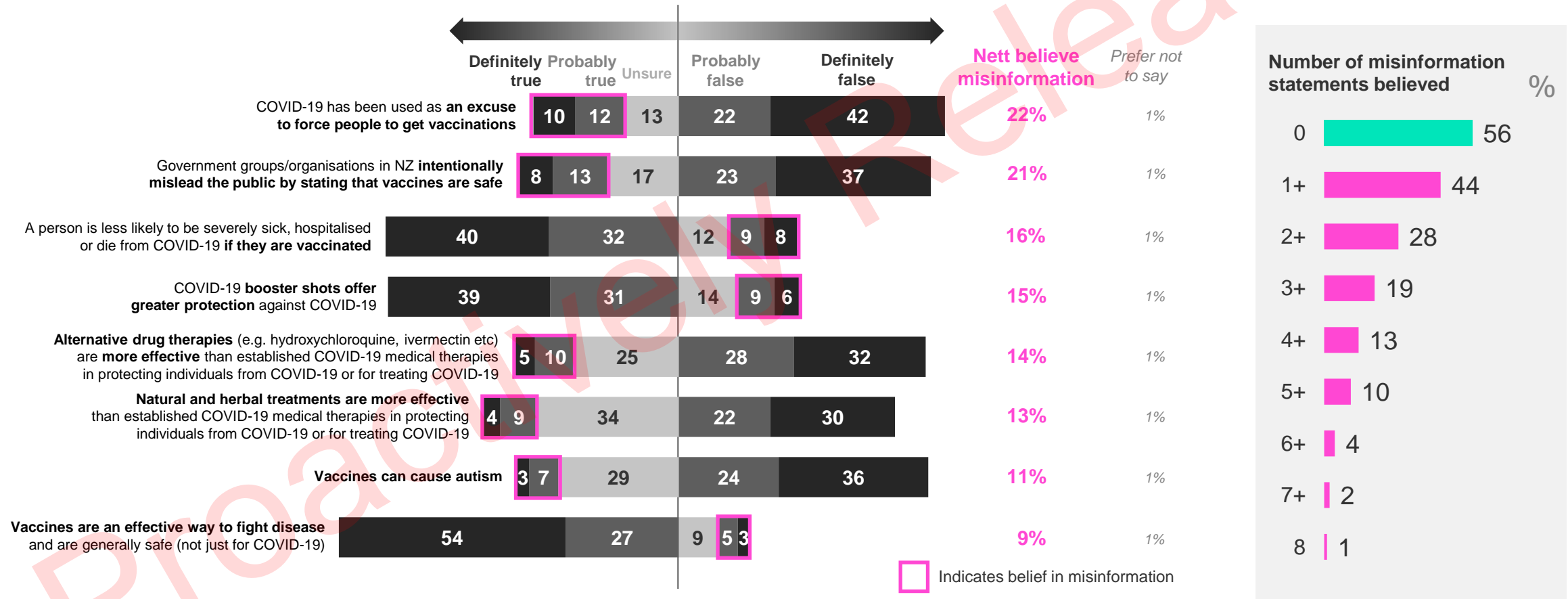
## Belief in misinformation about the COVID-19 virus



There is a level of concern about the efficacy and safety of COVID vaccinations, with one in five feeling that vaccines have been forced upon the public and are not as safe as the Government and organisations say they are. Some believe that natural or alternative treatments are more effective than established medical treatments, but this has less resonance than a general sense that vaccines are not entirely effective or safe.

## Belief in misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and treatments

%



Source: Q16b Next we have some statements about the COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. Do you think this statement is true or false? We're just interested in what you personally think.

Base: All respondents (n=2,001).

Note: Both true and false responses can indicate a belief in misinformation. Those who are 'unsure' have not been counted towards the total who believe misinformation, but are shown alongside them as uncertainty can be a step towards believing misinformation (i.e. uncertainty around the official narrative).  
Not all totals add to 100% due to rounding.

The majority of doubt around COVID-19 public health measures relates to the efficacy and importance of the measures, with some doubts around the need for lockdowns, masks or physical distancing. However, the most commonly believed statement relates to a level of suspicion around Government motives and belief in a push for increased control over the public.

## Belief in misinformation about COVID-19 measures

%



Source: Q16c Next we have some statements about the COVID-19 measures. Do you think this statement is true or false? We're just interested in what you personally think.

Base: All respondents (n=2,001).

Note: Both true and false responses can indicate a belief in misinformation. Those who are 'unsure' have not been counted towards the total who believe misinformation, but are shown alongside them as uncertainty can be a step toward believing misinformation (i.e. uncertainty around the official narrative).

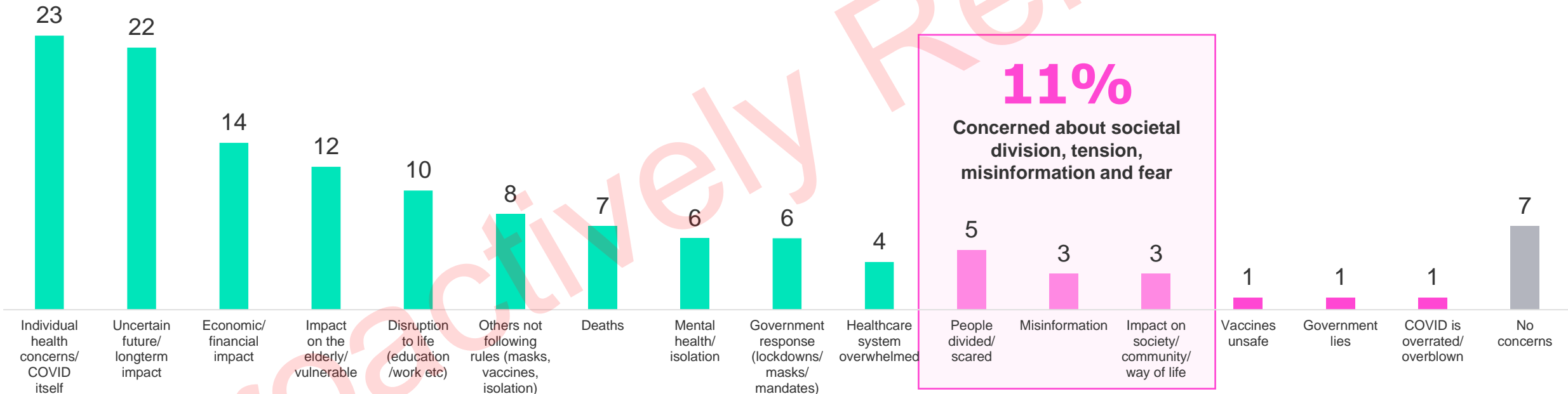
Excludes statement "False information about COVID-19 is a serious threat to NZ society". Not all totals add to 100% due to rounding

Unprompted, New Zealanders are most concerned about the impact COVID may have on their health and a sense of uncertainty around what the future will look like. Top of mind, one in ten are either concerned about misinformation (3%) or the run-on effects of misinformation such as societal division. When prompted, 81% say COVID misinformation is a concern for them, however, this is not their top concern relating to COVID.

## Concerns about COVID-19 (unprompted\*)

\*This was the first question in the survey and was asked before the concept of misinformation was introduced by the survey. Mentions of misinformation here are top-of-mind and unprompted

%





## New Zealanders describe their concerns about COVID-19 as...

*"I have no concerns for me. I do worry though for our vulnerable and elderly. And I do worry about all the mis-information and the tension it has caused."*

50-59 Female NZ European

*"I don't want to catch it and I don't know how I'd cope. It's readily transmissible and too many people don't accept masking as a precaution."*

70+ Male NZ European

*"The new attitude of society whereby everybody is now an internet expert and no longer needs to follow professional guidelines from people that have dedicated their lives to being experts in their field anymore."*

30-39 Male Māori/NZ European

*"The segregation and mandates."*

18-29 Female NZ European

*"Loss of income, the economy going down [and] prices rises."*

50-59 Male Pasifika

*"The fact that we are still not aware as to how to treat it effectively and reduce death."*

30-39 Female Asian

*"Vaccine injury."*

60-69 Male NZ European

*"My biggest concern lays with how the media scare-monger us. I've had the illness myself, along with other family and I didn't find it to be as intense or life-threatening as the media made it out to be. Fear lowers immunity, making us more prone to sickness. Fear keeps us from having social interaction from fear of getting sick, which leads to lack of socialising which isn't good for our health."*

18-29 Female Māori

*"That vaccinations do not stop you getting the illness... Before COVID approx. 500 people each year would die from flu in NZ and the over-reaction made when COVID hit did nothing but destroy the global economy and supply chains, thus causing financial hardship, housing crisis and cost of living blow outs... it's idiocy which is what this Labour Government is all about."*

50-59 Male Māori/NZ European

*"Small businesses who aren't able to operate when they're short staffed or if they had to close down due to constant lockdowns in the past year."*

18-29 Female Asian

A photograph of two people sitting together. The person on the right is wearing a tan turtleneck sweater and is pointing their right index finger towards a smartphone held by the person on the left. The person on the left is wearing a blue sweater. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting. A large, semi-transparent red watermark reading 'Proactively Released' is overlaid diagonally across the image.

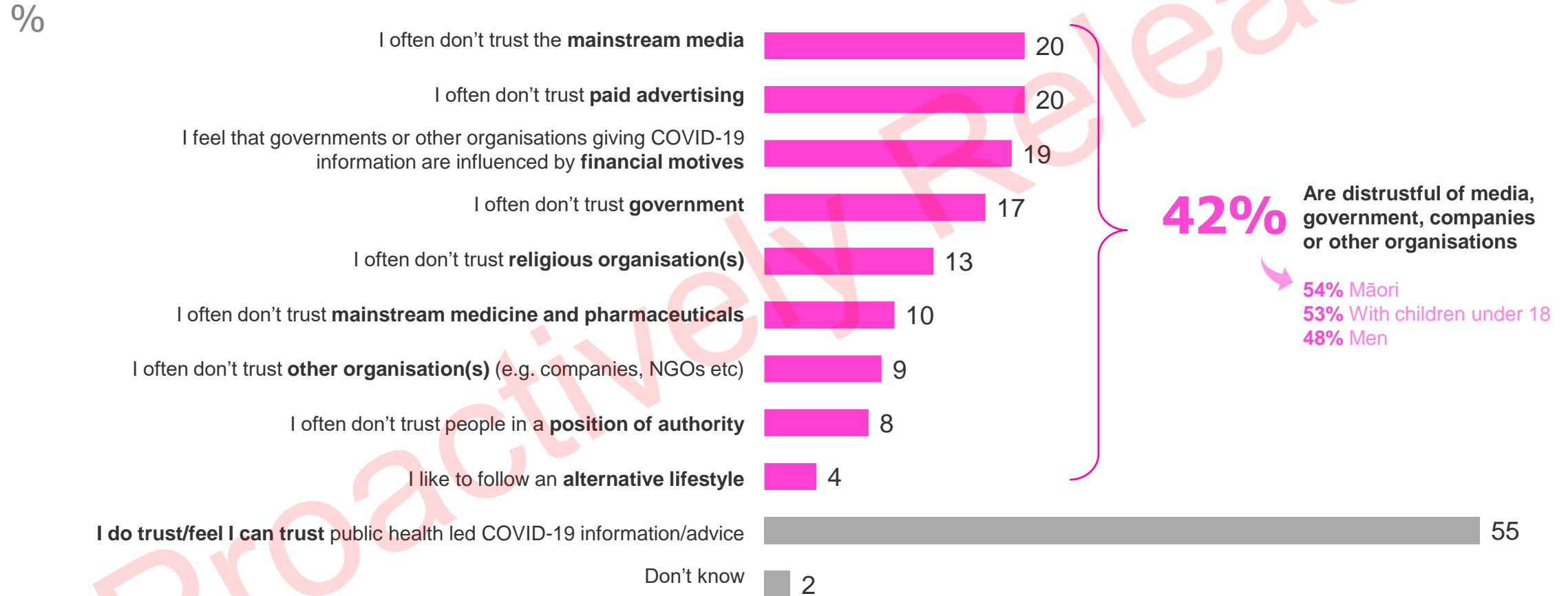
# Motivation for belief in misinformation

---

KANTAR PUBLIC

Two fifths of New Zealanders have some level of distrust in organisations such as the media, government or companies that has led to their distrust in the official COVID narrative. Distrust is more common among Māori, men and people with children or teenagers. Note that while both Māori and NZ Europeans tend to distrust the government, Māori are more likely to feel that the government has hidden motives, whereas NZ Europeans are more likely to attribute their distrust to incompetence.

## Reasons for distrust of public health led COVID-19 information or advice



A photograph of a person from behind, holding a large, blank cardboard sign high above their head with both hands. They are wearing a dark green jacket and have their hair in a ponytail. The background is a large, out-of-focus crowd of people at what appears to be a protest or public demonstration. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting it is daytime.

# Impact of belief in misinformation

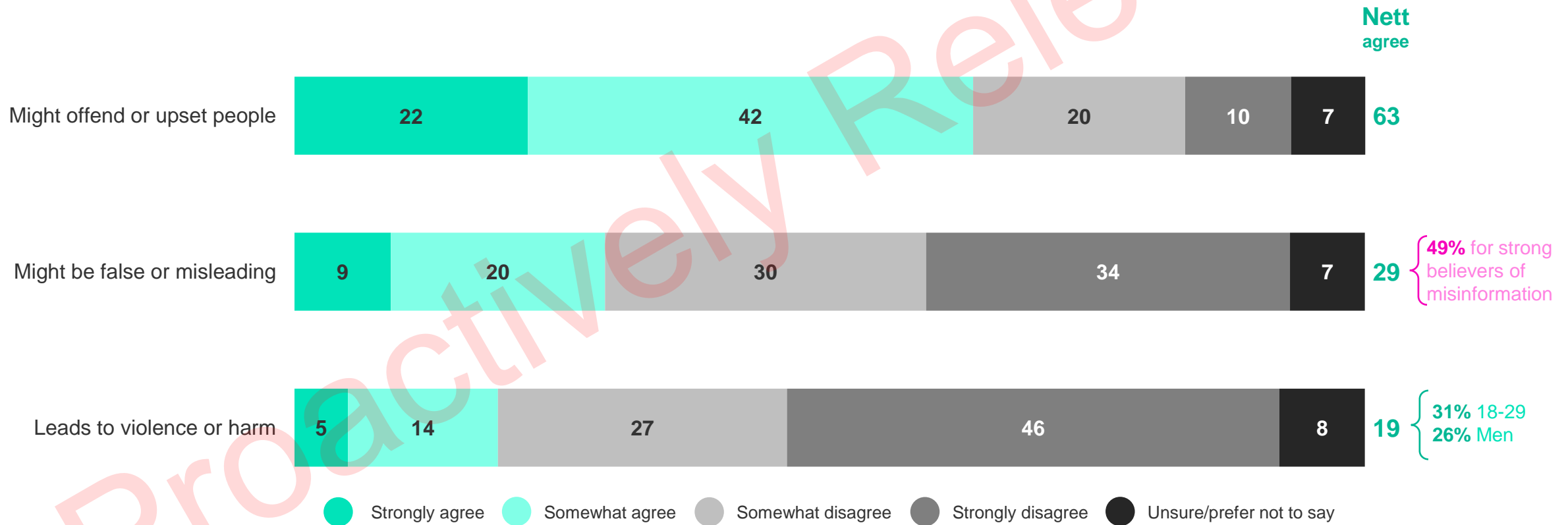
---

KANTAR PUBLIC

Three fifths of New Zealanders feel that others should have the right to say things that may cause offence. Speech that may cause harm or violence is less commonly accepted, although one in five still agree this is OK, with greater acceptance amongst younger people, and men. Interestingly, acceptance of false or misleading speech increases as misinformation belief strengthens, suggesting that while this group feels that governments and media spread misinformation, they also accept their right to do so.

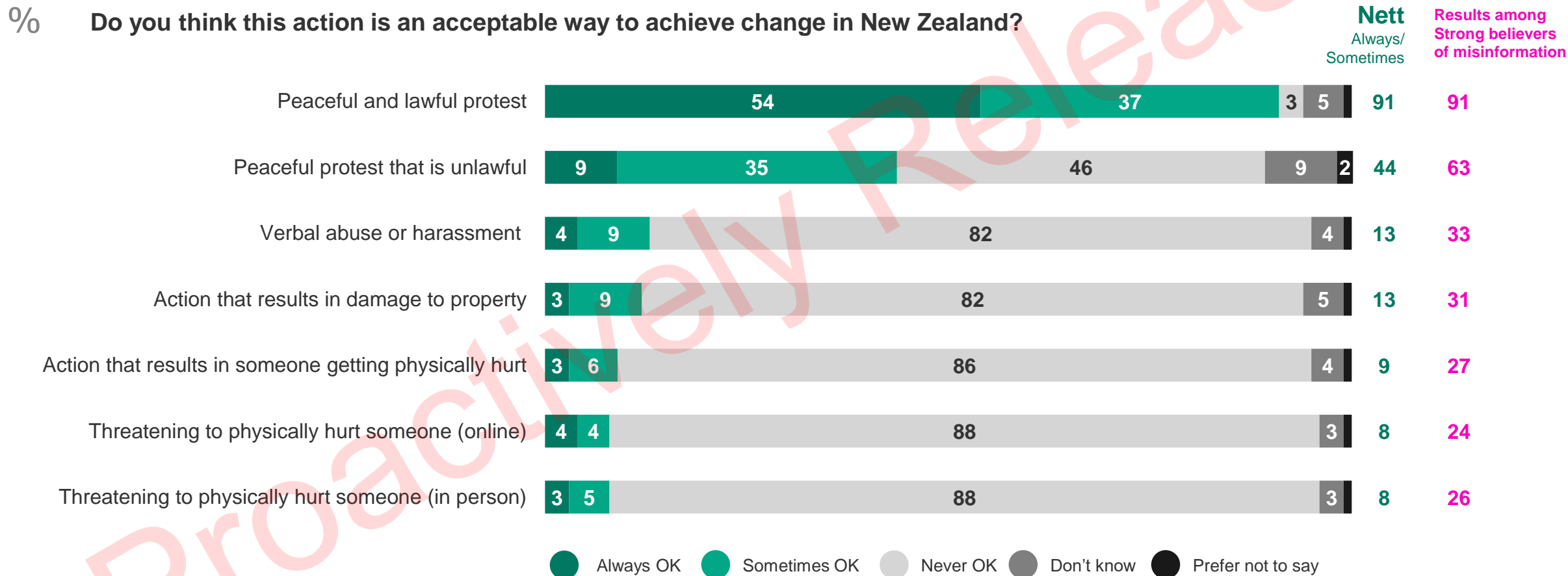
## Views on freedom of expression

% People or organisations should be able to say what they want even if it...



New Zealanders are mostly accepting of peaceful, lawful protest, but are more polarised on unlawful protest. More extreme action like threats, damage, abuse or physical harm is generally seen as unacceptable by New Zealanders. However, those with stronger belief in misinformation are more accepting with extreme action. Note that while some are more accepting of extreme action, this is not necessarily an indication that they will personally act on these views.

## Views on freedom of expression



A third of New Zealanders say they have been impacted by COVID misinformation, particularly impacting their personal relationships with friends or family, and more generally in terms of a sense of societal division and differing opinions. The impact has been felt the most by those who follow the official COVID narrative and have experienced misinformation, as well as women, NZ Europeans and those aged 50-69.

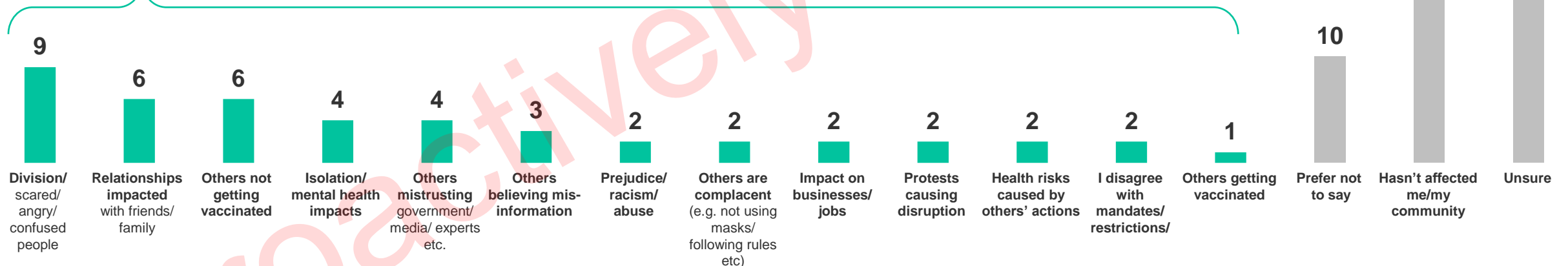
## Impact of COVID-19 misinformation on individuals and their community (unprompted\*)

%



**34%** Identified impacts that misinformation about COVID-19 has had on them or their community

- 49% who say they have seen misinformation
- 38% aged 50+
- 40% who believe no misinformation
- 39% women
- 37% NZ European



## New Zealanders describe the impact of COVID-19 misinformation as...

---

*"I have had to cut contact with an old friend who was sending me awful misinformation."*

70+ Female NZ European

*"A lot of people now don't know what to believe and there's a lot of people against what the Government does. It's spreading more since COVID and the vaccines."*

18-29 Male NZ European

*"It has had a serious impact on my mental wellbeing. With such a virile, sometimes violent spread of misinformation from people unwilling to listen to reason, I don't feel as safe in this country as I once did."*

30-39 Male Māori/Asian/NZ European

*"[People thinking] COVID-19 is Chinese people's creation and fault. Being Asian, my family and I were afraid and constantly on guard, up to now, of racial abuse... I was called a Chinaman during the first COVID Lockdown while getting groceries. I was told to go home to China."*

50-59 Male Asian

*"It has affected how I view main-stream media and made me question if I trust it or not."*

18-29 Male NZ European

*"It depends on what you regard as false or misleading news and information, because I have read from experts in the science and medical fields that have completely contradicted the so called 'experts' our Government chooses... Any scientist or anyone that has had a differing opinion than that of our Government's 'experts' has been ignored and shut down... this has affected mostly our younger generation and... has affected their ability to think for themselves."*

50-59 Female Māori/NZ European

*"A close relative lost friendships because he was not vaccinated. Those friends thought he would give them COVID. He was not invited to a close friend's wedding for that reason."*

50-59 Female NZ European

*"Being forced to get the vaccine for my job, being told COVID-19 is like a cold and the vaccine can reduce it."*

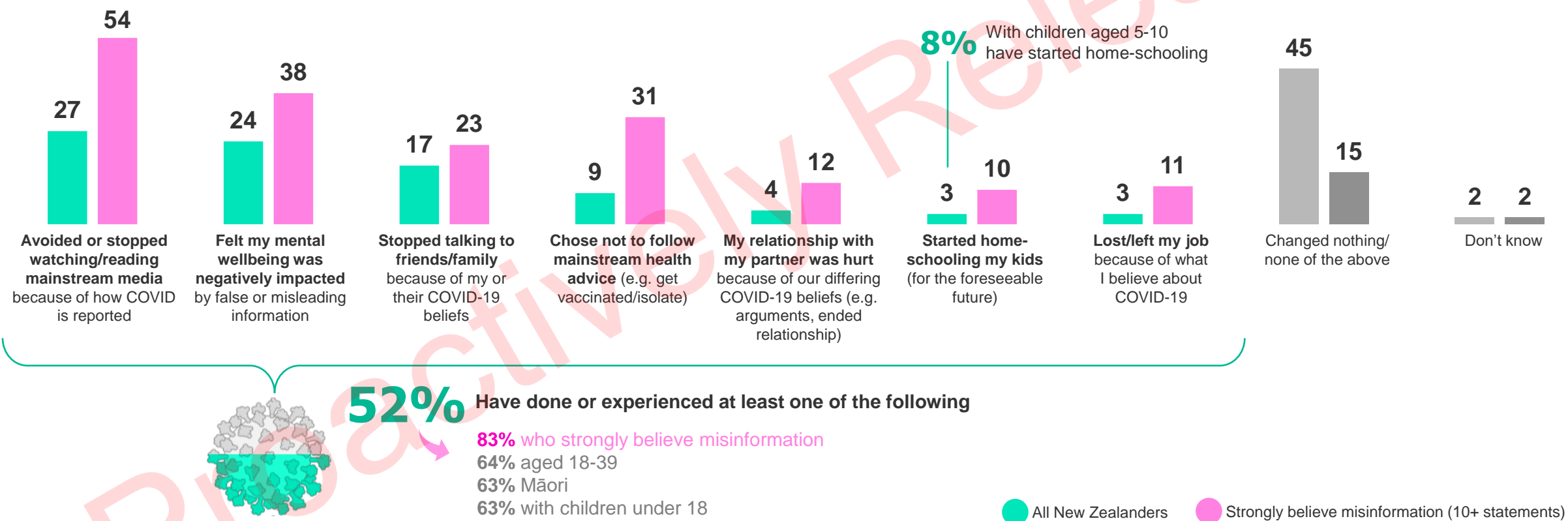
18-29 Female Asian



COVID has been a catalyst for action, especially for those with strong beliefs in misinformation who have been driven away from mainstream media or medical advice. More of those with strong misinformation beliefs have also lost or left their jobs, or begun home-schooling. Outside of direct action, strong believers in misinformation also feel there has been more of an impact on their mental wellbeing and relationships. Impacts overall have been felt the most by Māori and younger New Zealanders with children and teenagers.

## How does belief translate to real-world action or experience?

% Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, I have done or experienced...



# Information sources

---

KANTAR PUBLIC

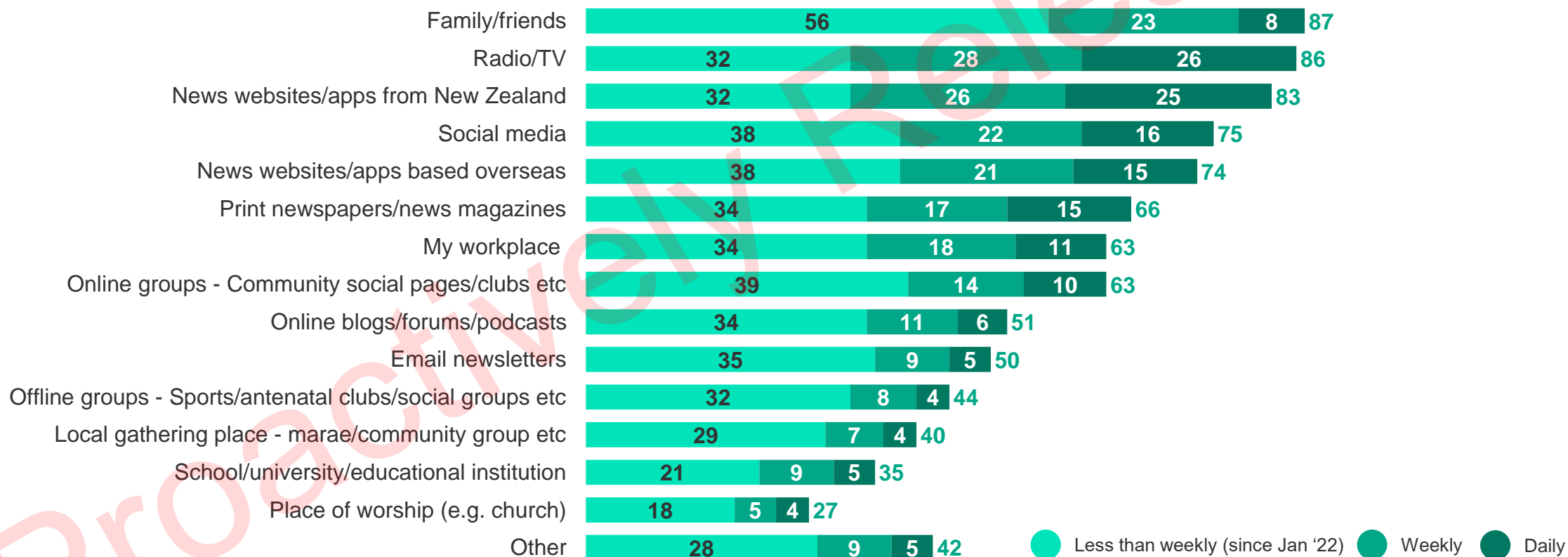


Mainstream television, print, radio and online news (i.e. 'official' news sources) are the most common sources of information about COVID-19, alongside word of mouth among friends and family and social media. Additional analysis (not shown on the chart) shows older New Zealanders tend to use more traditional media, while younger New Zealanders get their information from a more diverse set of sources.

## Where New Zealanders see or hear news and information about COVID-19

%

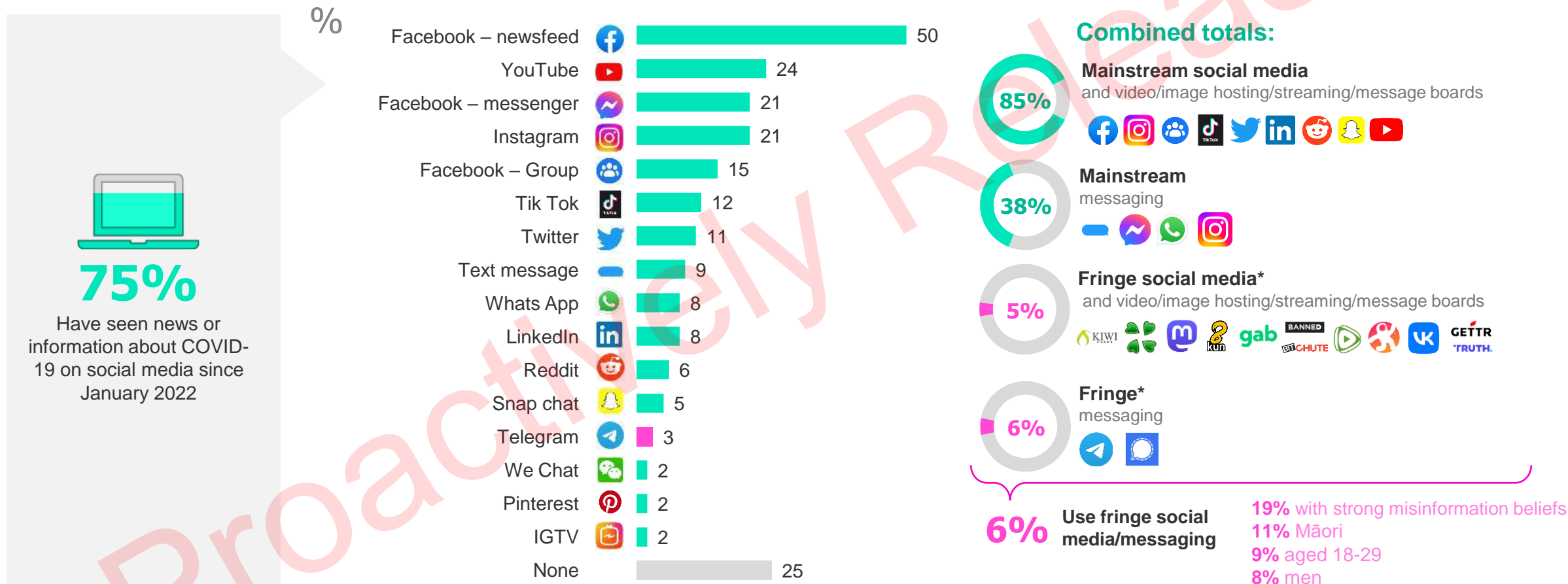
Nett used this source since Jan '22



Source: Q13a This year (since 1st January 2022), how often did you see or hear news or information about COVID-19 from...?  
 Base: All respondents (n=2,001)  
 Note: Multiple responses allowed, so totals may not add to 100%  
 'Other' sources include group chats with strangers, strangers and signs in public, neighbours etc.

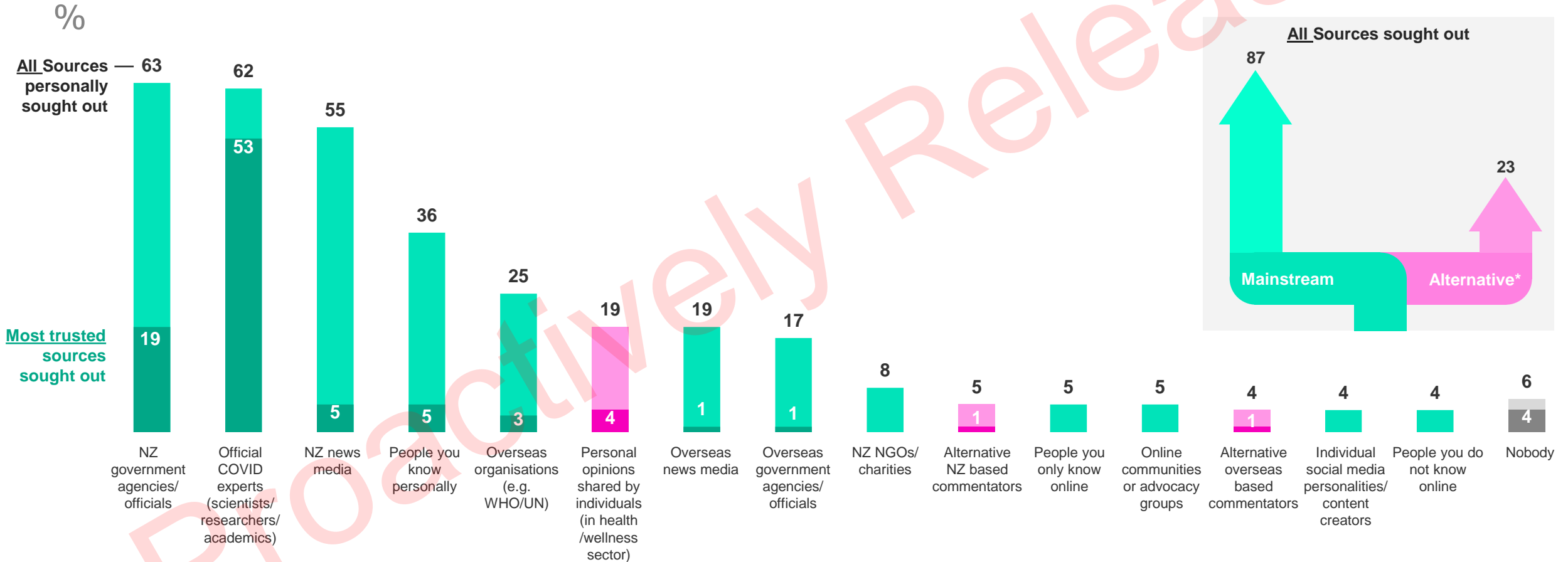
Three quarters of New Zealanders have seen information on social media about COVID, mostly on mainstream platforms, particularly Facebook which has the widest reach. Fringe\* social media or messaging services are used by a small group of New Zealanders (6% total). That said, they are used by one in five New Zealanders who hold strong misinformation beliefs and are more commonly used by men, Māori and New Zealanders in their 20s.

## Exposure to information about COVID-19 on social media

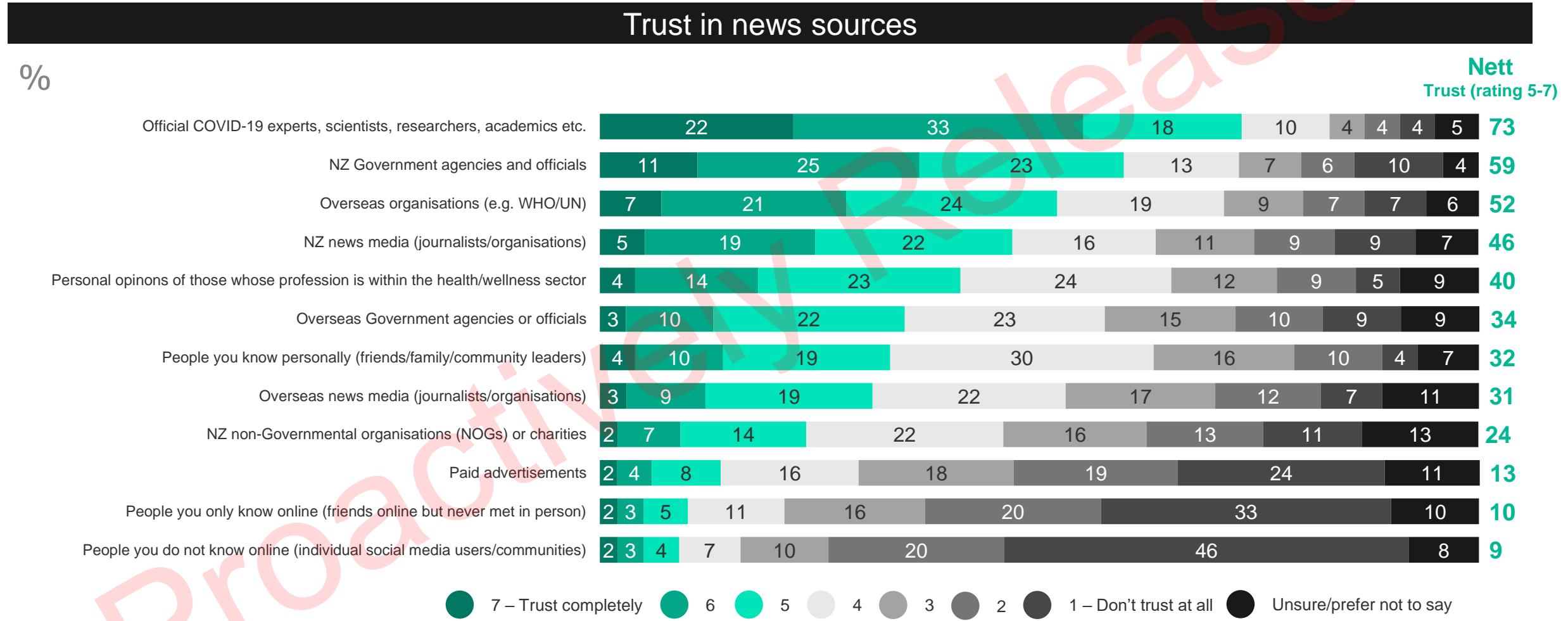


New Zealanders actively source most of their COVID information from official sources such as the government, COVID experts or the media, and place the most trust in official experts such as scientists, researchers or academics. Note, almost a quarter of New Zealanders also seek out alternative information sources and 6% say alternative sources are their most trusted source. Unsurprisingly, this is most common among believers of misinformation.

## Sources of information or opinions sought out about COVID-19



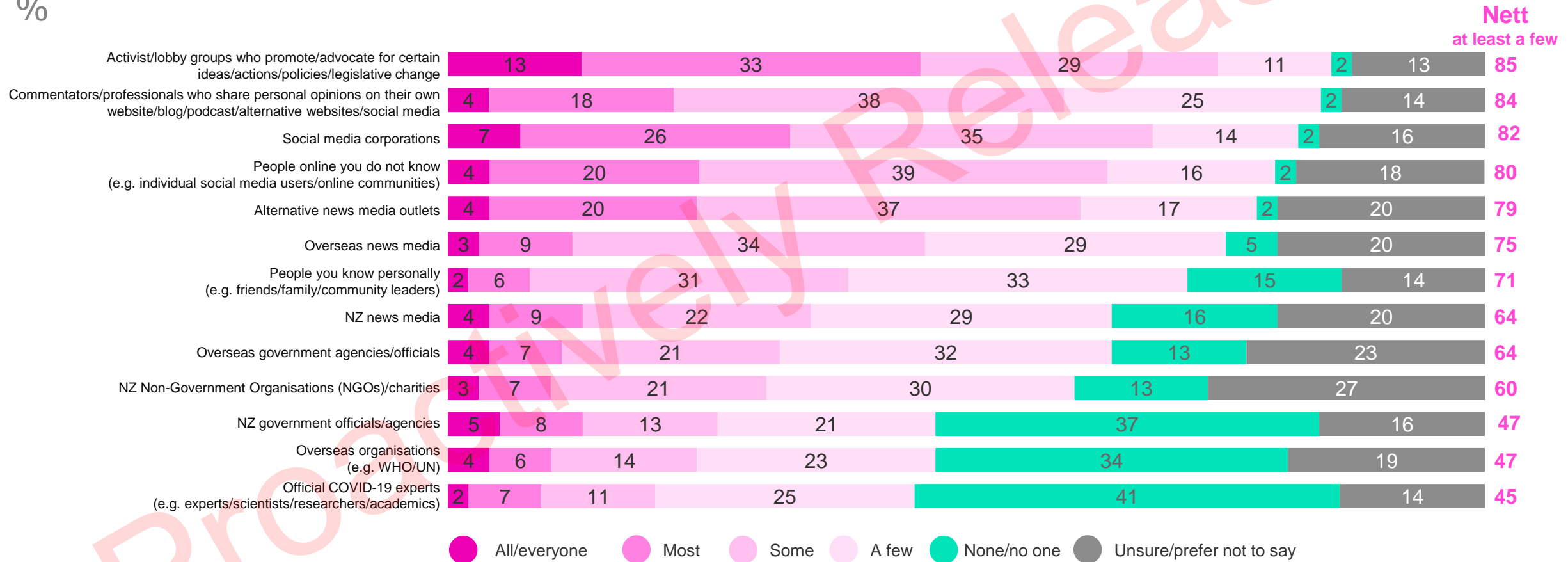
While New Zealanders place the most trust in official news and information sources, some doubt is also apparent, with a quarter either neutral, unsure or distrustful towards official COVID experts. On the other hand, there are low levels of trust across the board in online commentary and paid advertisements.



New Zealanders feel that individual commentators, activists and people online bear the most responsibility for the spread of COVID misinformation. While New Zealanders mostly place their trust in official sources, especially official COVID experts, there is still a level of scepticism and uncertainty towards all sources.

## Which organisations and individuals are seen as responsible for spreading COVID-19 misinformation

%



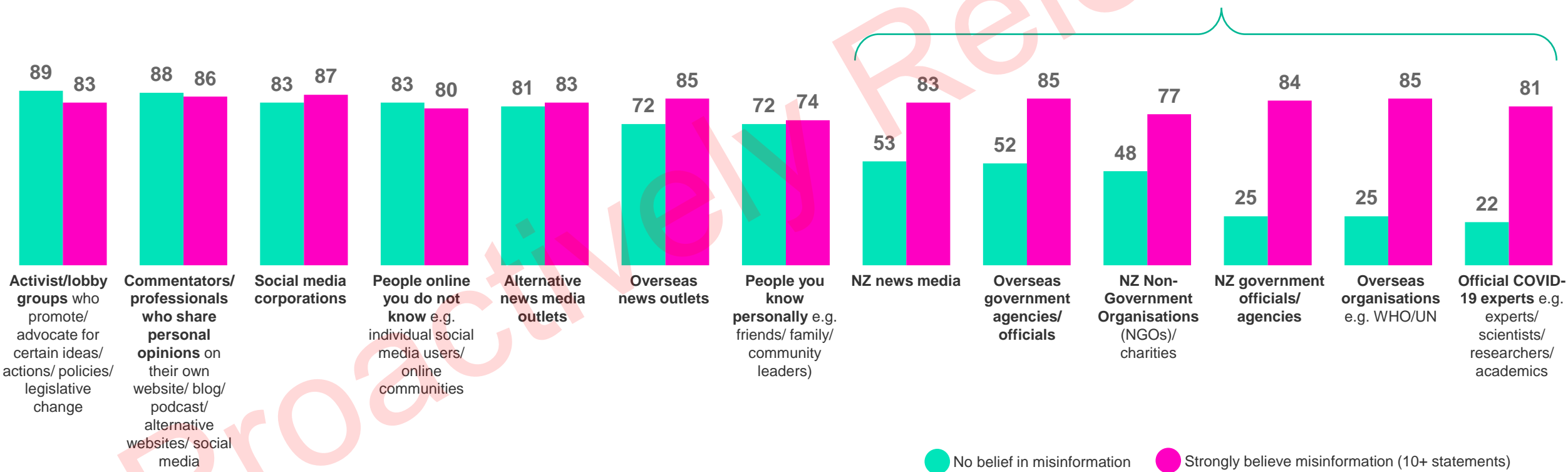
Strong believers of misinformation have a base-level of distrust across all information sources, seeing both alternative and official information sources as responsible for spreading COVID misinformation. While strong believers do seek out alternative news sources, they are still distrustful of this information. This points to a fragmentation within the alternative information space and a feeling that 'if I can't trust the official narrative, what can I trust?'

## Which organisations and individuals are seen as responsible for spreading COVID-19 misinformation

### Nett at least a few

(all/most/some/a few)

There is a wider divide in trust of the official narrative







# Appendix: Sample profile

---

KANTAR PUBLIC

# Sample profile



Age	%
18-29	22
30-39	17
40-49	17
50-59	17
60-69	14
70+	13

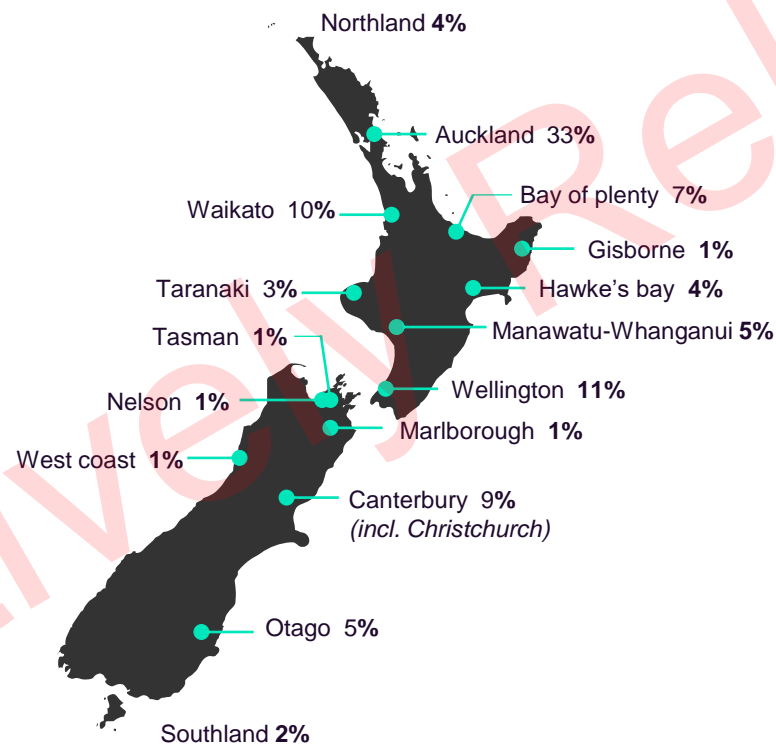


Ethnic group(s)*	%
Māori	14
NZ European	70
Pasifika	7
Asian	14
Other	6



Gender	%
Female	51
Male	49
Another gender	<1%

The survey was conducted with 2,001 New Zealanders in total



Religion*	%
None	49
Christian	38
Buddhist	2
Hindu	4
Muslim	2
Jewish	1
Sikh	1
Other	1



Language(s)*	%
English	97
Te reo Māori	5
Hindi	3
Chinese/Mandarin	2
Other	2
Samoan	1
Punjabi	1
Tagalog	1
German	1
Spanish	1



	%
Large city	51
Small/medium town	36
Rural area	12

Note: \*Multiple responses allowed, so totals may not add to 100%.

# Sample profile (2)



Education	%
None	5
School certificate/ NCEA 1	6
Sixth form certificate/ NCEA 2	7
Bursary/scholarship/Uni entrance/ NCEA 3	10
Trade qualification	7
Certificate/diploma	17
Polytech degree	5
University degree	26
Postgrad degree (e.g. Honours/masters etc)	13
Doctorate/PHD	2



Employment	%
Work – full time	50
Work – part time	11
Self employed	8
Studying	3
Unemployed – looking for work	2
Unemployed – not looking for work	2
Stay at home parent	4
Retired	17
Volunteering	1



Children*	%
No children	39
Expecting a child	19
Aged 0-4	18
Aged 5-10	14
Aged 11-17	1
Aged 18+	26