

## ***UNSW Law & Justice Research Series***

### **The Impact of Pseudolaw on Local Government**

**Stephen Young and Harry Hobbs**

[2025] *UNSWLRS* 16  
(2025) 36(4) *Public Law Review*  
(forthcoming)

UNSW Law & Justice  
UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia

E: [LAW-Research@unsw.edu.au](mailto:LAW-Research@unsw.edu.au)

W: <http://www.law.unsw.edu.au/research/faculty-publications>

AustLII: <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLRS/>

SSRN: <http://www.ssrn.com/link/UNSW-LEG.html>

## The Impact of Pseudolaw on Local Government

Stephen Young\* and Harry Hobbs\*\*

### *Abstract*

*The COVID-19 pandemic saw a significant rise in the number of people making pseudolegal arguments in an effort to avoid public health measures. Legal scholarship exploring this phenomenon has largely focused on its impact on the administration of justice. However, as the level of government closest to the community, local governments have also faced a growing strain from pseudolegal adherents and conspiracy theorists. In this article, we explore their (misuse) of law and its impact on local government in Australia and New Zealand. We find three main impacts. Pseudolegal adherents have: attempted to construct parallel governance institutions as a means to exert power and control; intimidated and harassed local government authorities by issuing threats and disrupting public meetings; and, imposed a substantial administrative burden on staff by inundating offices with baseless correspondence. While pseudolaw may seem like obscure or picayune legal quirkiness, its impact on local government is anything but minor—it constitutes a growing threat to governance, public safety, and the rule of law.*

### I. Introduction

In May 2024, Lance Vervoort, Chief Executive Officer of the Hamilton City Council, received a letter submitted as part of a *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) ('LGOIMA') request.<sup>1</sup> The letter contained excerpts from the *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990* (NZ), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ('ICCPR'), and the 1947 Nuremberg Code.<sup>2</sup> The excerpts were liberally annotated with explanations such as, 'New Zealand became a member of the ICCPR 1978 and being INTERNATIONAL LAW, it supersedes all Legislation'.<sup>3</sup> The letter explained further that these 'are VERYYY [sic] IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS which all peoples should be aware of, but most people aren't'.<sup>4</sup> The author of the letter asserted that Hamilton City Council is breaching international law because it is illegally conducting medical experiments on the people of Hamilton by fluoridating drinking water. The author declared that the obligation to follow the law is based on consent freely given. As he had not consented to fluoridation, the Council is operating criminally.

---

\* Associate Professor, University of Otago, Faculty of Law: [stephen.young@otago.ac.nz](mailto:stephen.young@otago.ac.nz). The authors would like to thank Edward Willis, Andrew Geddis and Donald Netolitzky for their comments on an earlier draft. We also thank the anonymous reviewer for their considered and helpful feedback.

\*\* Associate Professor, University of New South Wales, Faculty of Law and Justice: [h.hobbs@unsw.edu.au](mailto:h.hobbs@unsw.edu.au).

<sup>1</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ).

<sup>2</sup> The Nuremberg Code is a set of principles for ethical research in human experimentation that comes from *United States v Brandt*, Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 21 November 1946 – 20 August 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from a Resident of Hamilton (redacted) to Lance Vervoort (15 May 2024) (on file with author).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Almost every legal claim in the letter is wrong. In New Zealand (and Australia), international law does not automatically supersede domestic legislation; the relationship between the state and its citizens is not based on contract; and a duly enacted law applies regardless of whether a person consents to its operation. The veracity of the factual claims is no better. Fluoride is a naturally occurring compound that is found in almost all fresh water. Fluoridation is the addition of fluoride to drinking water to protect against tooth decay, a well-established public health measure with decades of evidence demonstrating that it effectively improves oral health.<sup>5</sup> The legal basis for fluoridation in New Zealand is also sound. Prior to 2021, the judiciary consistently found that local governments possessed the legal authority to fluoridate water.<sup>6</sup> Since 2021, amendments to the *Public Health Act 1956* (NZ) have made the position even clearer.<sup>7</sup> Under s 116E of the Act, the Director-General may direct a local authority to add fluoride to its drinking water.<sup>8</sup> Even if Mr Vervoort agreed with the author of the letter, he has no power to counteract a direction and remove fluoride.<sup>9</sup> In any event, as this example demonstrates, concerns around fluoridation are often mixed with conspiracy theory and pseudolaw,<sup>10</sup> such as the claim that it ‘removes freedom of choice by consumers’.<sup>11</sup> The result is that any potentially meritorious legal questions are buried among voluminous and incoherent claims.

The letter did not clearly ask a question of the council. Nonetheless, because it was filed as a LGOIMA request, the Hamilton City Council was required by law to respond.<sup>12</sup> While the Council’s response was short, merely explaining that it was following the laws and regulations of New Zealand,<sup>13</sup> it necessitated time, attention and resources that might have been better placed elsewhere. One strange letter is not a problem. However, this is just one of many conspiracy and pseudolaw-inflected LGOIMAs that the Council has responded to in the last few years. Hamilton is not alone.<sup>14</sup> Local governments across New Zealand and Australia

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Marian S McDonagh et al, ‘Systematic Review of Water Fluoridation’ (2000) 321 *British Medical Journal* 855.

<sup>6</sup> *New Health New Zealand Inc v South Taranaki District Council* [2018] 1 NZLR 948 (SC); *New Health New Zealand Inc v South Taranaki District Council* [2018] 1 NZLR 1041 (SC).

<sup>7</sup> *Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Act 2021* (NZ) s 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Public Health Act 1956* (NZ) s 116E.

<sup>9</sup> See *New Health New Zealand Ltd v Wellington Water Limited* [2022] NZHC 2389, *New Health New Zealand Inc v Director-General of Health* [2023] NZHC 3183, *New Health New Zealand Inc v Director-General of Health* [2024] NZHC 196, *Fluoride Action Network (NZ) Inc v Hastings District Council* [2024] 2 NZLR 779 (HC) and *Whangarei District Council v Director-General of Health* [2025] NZHC 616.

<sup>10</sup> See, generally, R. Allan Freeze and Jay H. Lehr, *The Fluoride Wars: How a Modest Public Health Measure Became America’s Longest-Running Political Melodrama* (Wiley, 2009); for information on pseudolaw and conspiracy theory, see Donald J. Netolitzky, ‘But My Ghosts Are So Hard to Hear: Pseudolaw and Conspiracy Culture’ (2025) 8 *International Journal of Coercion, Abuse, and Manipulation* 11; Kate Leader, ‘Conspiracy! Or, when bad things happen to good litigants in person’ (2024) 44 *Legal Studies* 498; Tarik Kochi, ‘Law and Conspiracy Theory: Sovereign Citizens Freeman on the Land, and Pseudolaw’ (2025) *Journal of Law and Society* (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> *New Health New Zealand Inc v South Taranaki District Council* [2018] 1 NZLR 948 (SC), [2].

<sup>12</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) ss 5, 11, 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Act 2021* (NZ) and Water Services (Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand) Regulations 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Tasman District Council, ‘LGOIMAs and Information of Public Interest’ (2 December 2024) <<https://www.tasman.govt.nz/my-council/meetings/lgoimas-and-information-of-public-interest>>; David Hill, ‘“Ludicrous Conspiracy Theories” Threatening Democracy – Mayor’, *Stuff* (25 July 2024) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/350354815/ludicrous-conspiracy-theories-threatening-democracy-mayor?s=09>>; Michael Kellady, ‘The Year of the “Sovereign Citizen”—Guidance for Finance and Rating Staff’ (12 October 2023) <<https://kelladyjones.com.au/the-year-of-the-sovereign-citizen-guidance-to-finance-and-rating-staff/>>.

increasingly face administrative burdens derived from pseudolegal conspiracies. In some cases, they also face intimidation, threats and a real risk of physical harm.

This is not new to those working in local government. The growing legal literature on pseudolaw and sovereign citizens, however, largely focuses on the origins, spread and manifestation of pseudolegal beliefs worldwide and their impact on law and the administration of justice rather than on the burdens it imposes on local government authorities.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, while scholars in other disciplines examine pseudolaw through the lens of conspiracy theorising,<sup>16</sup> extremism,<sup>17</sup> criminal justice,<sup>18</sup> and linguistics,<sup>19</sup> there remains a dearth of study of pseudolegal adherents' impact on local government. This is especially concerning now that pseudolaw has a 'global reach', having 'migrated across the common law world and appear[ing] also in arrange of civil law countries'.<sup>20</sup> We address this lacuna in this article. We focus specifically on its impact on local governments in Australia and New Zealand. Our study allows us to identify that pseudolaw is affecting local government in several significant ways. Furthermore, it reveals that although the impact is felt similarly across jurisdictions, the conduct of adherents manifests itself in diverse styles as pseudolaw evolves and adapts as it migrates.<sup>21</sup> Pseudolaw in Australia and New Zealand has latched onto local legal, political and moral issues and arguments, including those based on the rights of Indigenous peoples.<sup>22</sup>

Our article is divided into two substantive parts. Recognising that pseudolaw remains an understudied phenomenon, in Part II, we contextualise our subject. We explain what pseudolaw is, orient our article in the wider legal literature, and provide background to understand what is

---

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025); Donald J. Netolitzky, 'Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Arguments as Magic and Ceremony' (2018) 55(4) *Alberta Law Review* 1045; Donald J Netolitzky, 'A Rebellion of Furious Paper: Pseudolaw as a Revolutionary System' (Conference Paper, Sovereign Citizens in Canada Symposium, Centre d'expertise et de formation sur les intégrismes religieux et la radicalisation, 3 May 2018); Francis X. Sullivan, 'The "Usurping Octopus of Jurisdiction/Authority": The Legal Theories of the Sovereign Citizen Movement' (1999) *Wisconsin Law Review* 785; Stephen Kent, 'Freemen, Sovereign Citizens, and the Challenge to Public Order in British Heritage Countries' (2015) 6 *International Journal of Cultic Studies* 1; Caesar Kalinowski, 'A Legal Response to the Sovereign Citizen Movement' (2019) 80 *Montana Law Review* 153.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Kochi (n **Error! Bookmark not defined.**); Netolitzky (n **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Daniel Baldino and Mark Balnaves, 'Sticky Ideologies and Non-Violent Heterodox Politics' in Elisa Orofino and William Allchorn (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Non-Violent Extremism* (Routledge, 2023) 15; Josh Roose, Shahram Akbarzadeh and Vivian Gerrand, *New Directions in Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Literature Review* (Report prepared for Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2024) [156]-[165].

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Christine Sarteschi, *Sovereign Citizens: A Psychological and Criminological Analysis* (Springer, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> David Griffin, "'I Hereby and Herein Claim Liberties": Identity and Power in Sovereign Citizen Pseudolegal Courtroom Filings' (2023) 6 *International Journal of Coercion, Abuse and Manipulation* doi: 10.54208/1000/0006/007.

<sup>20</sup> Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre, 'Understanding Pseudolaw' in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 7.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Netolitzky, 'A Pathogen Astride the Minds of Men: The Epidemiological History of Pseudolaw' (Paper delivered to the Centre d'expertise et de formation sur les intégrismes religieux et la radicalisation symposium, 'Sovereign Citizens in Canada', Montreal, 3 May 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Colin McRoberts, 'The "First Nation Medical Board": A Case Study of Pseudolegal Parasitisation of Legitimate Indigenous Sovereignty' in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 269; Fleur Te Aho and Julia Tolmie 'Māori Rejections of the State's Criminal Jurisdiction over Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand's Courts' (2023) 30(3) *NZULR* 409; Stephen Young and Harry Hobbs, 'The Concerning Intersections of Sovereign Citizen and Indigenous Sovereignty Claims' (2025) 48(3) *UNSW Law Journal* (forthcoming). This concerning development not only insults the dignity and reputation of Indigenous communities but inhibits efforts to better recognise their legal rights.

occurring in New Zealand and Australia. In Part III, we explore the three primary impacts pseudolaw and sovereign citizens have on local government in Australia and New Zealand. First, adherents are establishing alternative and parallel governance institutions, including ‘Common Law Courts’ to enforce their vision of society. Second, members of these groups threaten and intimidate elected councillors and council staff by serving warrants and judgments issued from their fake courts and disrupting public meetings. Third, members waste the time and resources of local government by abusing local government obligations and by refusing to pay for services. Ultimately, the costs of responding to pseudolegal claims are more than financial—they represent a broader erosion of public institutions and a challenge to democratic governance.

## II. Brief Background on Sovereign Citizens and Pseudolaw

The term ‘sovereign citizen’ emerged in the United States in the early 1990s. Today, the descriptor is an ‘umbrella term’ that describes a heterogeneous group of people ‘united by a core hostility to government and the belief that laws do not apply to them without their consent or contractual agreement’.<sup>23</sup> These individuals practice and engage in ‘pseudolaw’, a radical re-interpretation of laws based on their own alternative narratives. Adherents invoke law and believe they use it properly, but they (mis)interpret it to bolster their anti-state and anti-government purposes. It is this quality that leads Donald Netolitzky to define pseudolaw as ‘a collection of legal-sounding but false rules that purport to be laws’.<sup>24</sup> As explored here, sovereign citizen pseudolaw proliferates in times of crisis as it evolves and adapts to novel events and scenarios.

### A. Sovereign Citizen Origins

Sovereign citizens represent the intersection of several overlapping political and religious extremist groups.<sup>25</sup> The most significant progenitor is the Posse Comitatus, a right-wing religiously inspired militia organisation that first emerged in the late 1960s. Literally ‘the power of the county’, the Posse Comitatus believed local authorities were the highest legitimate form of government. This view meant (fortuitously for its members) that state and federal laws, including on income taxation, were unconstitutional. Influenced by the extremist Christian Identity religious sect, the Posse combined antisemitic religious theology with its radical legal interpretations.<sup>26</sup> When a financial crisis struck farmers throughout middle America in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Posse provided a convenient explanation to those facing foreclosure; a shadowy cabal of Jewish bankers had replaced the law with credit systems ‘designed to suck people dry’.<sup>27</sup> These corrupting influences infiltrated the state and replaced the common law with commercial, maritime or admiralty law.

---

<sup>23</sup> Marilyn McMahon, ‘Asserting Sovereignty: An Empirical Analysis of Sovereign Citizen Litigation in Australian Courts’ in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 178.

<sup>24</sup> Netolitzky, ‘A Rebellion of Furious Paper’ (n 15) 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Stephen Young, Harry Hobbs, and Rachel Goldwasser, ‘The Rise of Sovereign Citizen Pseudolaw in the United States of America’ in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 95.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 69.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Pitcavage, ‘Common Law and Uncommon Courts: An Overview of the Common Law Court Movement’ *Militia Watchdog* (25 July 1997) 5.

The ideas of the Posse Comitatus spread through the 1980s. In each new population, the ideas were adapted, transformed and influenced by the views and objectives of other extremist organisations. Paramilitary groups seeking to avoid state and federal legislation regulating gun ownership appointed their own constitutional sheriffs,<sup>28</sup> occasionally set up their own ‘townships’, asserted control over territory independent from the state, or purported to establish entirely new states.<sup>29</sup> Others built on the legal theories underlying the Posse’s claims. The Common Law Movement also believed a shadowy cabal had corrupted state law. They sought to re-establish their version of a common law system, a version that privileged consent, natural law, and God’s law. Some groups established their own ‘Common law’ courts,<sup>30</sup> which allowed them to disclaim their subjection to the United States and become ‘sovereign citizens’ or ‘freemen’.

Francis Sullivan notes that while some of these courts appear to be ‘sincere attempts by members to implement their beliefs by freeing themselves from state tyranny and holding public officials accountable to the people’, others were ‘instruments of harassment’.<sup>31</sup> During the farm crisis, the Posse had popularised the idea of fighting foreclosure by filing liens against their own properties.<sup>32</sup> The Common Law Movement adopted more aggressive tactics. Members began creating ‘citizen’s grand juries’ to indict public figures. Others filed many volumes of documents with the aim to ‘clog up the legal and financial systems and to intimidate, harass and coerce the agents of those systems’, while others filed fraudulent liens against any person that they considered enemies.<sup>33</sup>

The most unique motif of contemporary pseudolaw emerged around the new millennium.<sup>34</sup> The strawman argument maintains that the government went bankrupt after it abandoned the gold standard. To maintain liquidity, the government set up secret bank accounts associated with every citizen’s social security number so that citizens would act as collateral. The bank accounts were in the ‘corporate’ name of the citizen, called the ‘strawman’, which is distinct from the real, living individual.<sup>35</sup> Pseudolaw adherents distinguish their living body from their legal or corporate fiction by refusing to use state identification documents and writing their names in non-standard ways.<sup>36</sup> In the Queensland case of *Van den Hoorn v Ellis*,<sup>37</sup> for example, the appellant explained that his physical body was the ‘Sovereign Freeman JOHAN’, and that he is distinct from the ‘fictions known as JOHAN HENDRICK VAN DEN HOORN and JOHN HENRY VAN DEN HOORN, being created fictions fraudulently owned and controlled by legal fictions’.<sup>38</sup> Another pseudolaw advocate, David Wynn Miller, used what he called ‘quantum grammar’ as a type of legal magic that could distinguish his sovereign self,

---

<sup>28</sup> See also Wilson Huhn, ‘Political Alienation in America and the Legal Premises of the Patriot Movement’ (1999) 34(3) *Gonzaga Law Review* 417.

<sup>29</sup> Pitcavage (n 27) 11; Young, Hobbs, and Goldwasser (n 25) 111-12. One example is the short-lived Republic of Texas.

<sup>30</sup> Susan P. Koniak, ‘When Law Risks Madness’ (1996) 8 *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 65.

<sup>31</sup> Sullivan (n 15) 792.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Pitcavage, ‘Paper Terrorism’s Forgotten Victims: The Use of Bogus Liens against Private Individuals and Businesses’ *The Militia Watchdog* (29 June 1998), referencing *Federal Land Bank of Omaha v Boese*, 373 NW 2d 118 (Iowa 1985).

<sup>33</sup> Koniak (n 30) 77.

<sup>34</sup> Young, Hobbs, Goldwasser (n 25) 108-09; see further Netolitzky, ‘A Rebellion of Furious Paper’ (n 15) 4; Joe McIntyre, Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young, ‘The Strawman Trap: Non-Appearance and the Pitfalls of Pseudolaw’ (2025) *Australian Law Journal* (forthcoming).

<sup>35</sup> Netolitzky ‘Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Arguments as Magic and Ceremony’ (n 15) 1072.

<sup>36</sup> Young, Hobbs, Goldwasser (n 25) 114-5; *Meads v Meads* [2012] ABQB 571 [417].

<sup>37</sup> *Van den Hoorn v Ellis* [2010] QDC 451 (22 November 2010).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* [2].

‘PLENIPOTENTIARY JUDGE David-Wynn: Miller’ from his fictive, legal personality.<sup>39</sup> Once they have successfully distinguished their physical body from the fictive legal personality, they maintain that state law does not apply to them, but only to their strawman. As we will see below, contemporary adherents are also enthralled with the idea that the common law is a jurisdiction that is severable from the state.

### *B. Contemporary Sovereign Citizen Pseudolaw*

Sovereign citizen pseudolaw has spread internationally. Scholars have identified its presence in at least 31 countries.<sup>40</sup> The Global Financial Crisis in 2007-8 appears to have popularised the phenomenon in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>41</sup> In 2010, several pseudolaw gurus – proponents who spread pseudolaw through websites and instructional seminars – travelled to Australia.<sup>42</sup> David Wynn Miller even sought to act for one client in a case brought by Wollongong City Council.<sup>43</sup> Not long after, ‘pseudolaw’ was also identified across the Tasman.<sup>44</sup> Similar experiences are playing out in the United Kingdom, where this variant of pseudolaw also emerged in the wake of the GFC.<sup>45</sup> In one particularly alarming encounter in 2011, hundreds of members of the British Constitution Group stormed Birkenhead County Court to attempt a citizen’s arrest on a judge in a man challenging his council tax bill.<sup>46</sup>

Public health measures implemented to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the growth of pseudolaw. Many individuals anxious about lockdowns, mask and vaccine mandates, or the ‘traffic light’ system in New Zealand<sup>47</sup> began to explore ways to avoid regulation. Pseudolegal narratives offered convenient answers to these pressing social problems. Legal scholars and practitioners examining the rise of pseudolaw have largely focused their attention on its impact on the administration of justice. While much of this commentary is anecdotal,<sup>48</sup> a recent empirical study from South Australia confirmed that COVID-19 inspired significant pseudolegal litigation.<sup>49</sup> It found that the increase in pseudolegal litigation has had deleterious impacts because adherents file volumes of irrelevant documents that increase workloads and place significant strain on the judicial system. Cases involving pseudolaw command more time

---

<sup>39</sup> Meads (n 36) [143]; Donald Netolitzky, ‘The History of the Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Argument Phenomenon in Canada’ (2016) 53(3) *Alberta Law Review* 609, 630.

<sup>40</sup> Christine M Sarteschi, ‘American State Nationals: The Next Iteration of the Sovereign Citizen Movement’ in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 227, 227. This includes Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, England, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Ireland, Russia, Scotland, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Wales.

<sup>41</sup> Netolitzky (n 39) 609.

<sup>42</sup> Kent (n 15) 2-5; Natasha Wallace, “‘Messiah-Like Figure’ is Doing own Harvesting”, *Sydney Morning Herald* (15 January 2011) <<https://www.smh.com.au/world/messiahlike-figure-is-doing-own-harvesting-20110114-19r9v.html>> 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Wollongong City Council v Dr Masood Falamaki* [2010] NSWLEC 66.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Bloy, ‘Pseudolaw and Debt Enforcement’ (2013) *New Zealand Law Journal* 47, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Yisroel Greenberg, ‘How to Approach Sovereign Citizens and a Freeman-on-the-Land’, *Local Government Lawyer* (12 May 2023).

<sup>46</sup> ‘Hundreds of Council Tax Protestors Storm Courtroom in Attempt to Make Citizens’ Arrest of Judge’ *Daily Mail* (9 March 2011).

<sup>47</sup> COVID-19 Public Health Response (Protection Framework) Order 2021 (NZ).

<sup>48</sup> Sophie Kesteven and Damien Carrick, ‘Magistrates witness a “sharp rise” in sovereign citizen cases brought before the local courts’ *ABC News* (8 May 2023) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-08/nsw-magistrates-report-sharp-rise-in-sovereign-citizen-cases/102285772>>.

<sup>49</sup> Joe McIntyre et al, *The Rise of Pseudolaw in South Australia: An Empirical Analysis of the Emergence and Impact of Pseudolaw on South Australia’s Courts* (Final Report, University of South Australia, September 2024).



and attention. As the example from Birkenhead County Court demonstrates, adherents can also act intimidatingly, including by bringing supporters to the court, threatening to sue the magistrate or judge, and following court staff out of the building.<sup>50</sup>

There is also growing attention on how the phenomenon adapts and manifests itself. In Australia and New Zealand, sovereign citizen pseudolaw has inspired new advocates and been adopted by pre-existing anti-state movements, including those advocating for Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>51</sup> In November 2021, for instance, a long-running anti-vaccine mandate protest outside of the Parliament in Wellington began appropriating Māori customs and advocacy.<sup>52</sup> The following month, a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians advancing pseudolaw and identifying as the ‘Original Sovereigns’ set up a protest camp outside Old Parliament House in Canberra.<sup>53</sup> As we will see, some non-Indigenous pseudolaw adherents also ground their claims against local government regulation in the language of Indigenous rights and status. More common, however, is the adoption of ‘salad bar’ extremism.<sup>54</sup> As the pandemic has receded in attention, pseudolaw adherents and proponents have continued to adapt, adopting a multitude of seemingly disparate ideas and fusing it with law or process.<sup>55</sup> Issues such as fluoridation, the 15-minute city and 5G towers have become new issues for pseudolaw adherents. As we demonstrate below, local government is often on the front line.

### III. Impact on the Administration of Governance

There are three main ways that adherents use pseudolaw to impact the administration of governance in Australia and New Zealand. First, some adherents have sought to replace existing governance structures by creating parallel institutions or purportedly superior governments that replace or displace conventional government. Second, members of these groups often harass and intimidate government authorities and ordinary citizens by (fake) court proceedings and more unconventional means. Finally, and most commonly, pseudolegal adherents waste the time and resources of local government by issuing frivolous challenges and notices to routine governance functions. In this part, we outline each example in turn.

---

<sup>50</sup> Kesteven and Carrick (n 48).

<sup>51</sup> Madi Day and Bronwyn Carlson, ‘So-Called Sovereign Settlers: Settler Conspirituality and Nativism in the Australian Anti-Vax Movement’ (2023) 12(5) *Humanities* 112 doi.org/10.3390/h12050112; Pascale Taplin, Claire Holland and Lorelei Billing, ‘The Sovereign Citizen Superconspiracy: Contemporary Issues in Native Title Anthropology’ (2023) 34(2) *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 110. Young and Hobbs (n 22).

<sup>52</sup> Toby Manhire, ‘The Protest That Revealed a New, Ugly, Dangerous Side to Our Country’, *The Spinoff* (10 November 2021) <<https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/10-11-2021/protest-covid-vaccine-wellington>>; see Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young, and Joe McIntyre, ‘The Internationalisation of Pseudolaw: the Growth of Sovereign Citizen Arguments in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand’ (2024) *University of New South Wales Law Journal* 309, 321-22.

<sup>53</sup> Jack Latimore and Rachael Dexter, ‘Protestors Condemned by First Nations Elders as Police Confront Parliament House Rally’, *The Age* (13 January 2022) <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/act/protesters-condemned-by-first-nations-elders-as-police-confront-parliament-house-rally-20220113-p59nuk.html>>; and Toni Hassan, ‘Who Are the ‘Original Sovereigns’ Who Were Camped Out at Old Parliament House and What Are Their Aims?’, *The Conversation* (online, 17 January 2022) <<https://theconversation.com/who-are-the-original-sovereigns-who-were-camped-out-at-old-parliament-house-and-what-are-their-aims-174694>>.

<sup>54</sup> Sarteschi (n 40) 228.

<sup>55</sup> It is not always clear whether these were individuals who were already interested in pseudolaw and who adapted it to fit COVID-19, or whether they were individuals interested in counter-cultural or alternative beliefs who found and adapted pseudolaw.



*A. Creating Parallel Governments*

We noted that in the 1980s, forerunner groups to the sovereign citizen movement in the United States began to establish their own alternative, parallel courts, townships and institutions of government.<sup>56</sup> These institutions were small-scale and primarily focused on protecting the rights and interests of community members (as they understood them) against what they perceived as the unjustified interference and imposition of the State. It involved the formation of Common Law Courts, peacekeepers or constitutional sheriffs, rudimentary governance structures, and occasionally purportedly separate state jurisdictions.<sup>57</sup> In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, similar pseudolegal authorities and governments have proliferated across New Zealand and Australia. Some, like My Place, have networks spanning Australia. Others are driven by a single committed person or a few individuals.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, as we explore in this section, they have the potential to cause significant frustration and interfere with the effective administration of governance. They also bear a latent potential for violence.

Many pseudolaw movements that have sought to form parallel governments predate the pandemic,<sup>59</sup> but the measures accompanying the public health emergency drew new members to their organisations. One group that benefited from the pandemic was the Wakaminenga Māori Government (WMG), a small pseudolegal organisation that asserts the 1835 He Whakaputanga (Declaration of Independence) originally signed by 34 Māori chiefs<sup>60</sup> established an independent nation distinct from the New Zealand government. The WMG has some longevity. In 2005, several members formed a ‘security and protection force’, dressed in uniforms labelled ‘Maori [sic] police’ and approached motels in Gisborne demanding rent.<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that although this event bears a resemblance to ‘pay the rent’ campaigns in Australia,<sup>62</sup> this is not an Indigenous sovereignty movement. The WMG does not discriminate. It invites both Pākehā (non-Māori) and Māori individuals to join its nation governed under its own pseudolegal version of Tikanga (the right way of behaving).<sup>63</sup> In this way, the WMG exemplifies another trend mentioned above: that non-Indigenous sovereign citizens and conspiracists are drawing on Indigenous rights and advocacy to bolster their claims to legitimacy.<sup>64</sup> In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WMG established health and education councils and its own criminal tribunal to prosecute members of the New Zealand government responsible for public health measures.

---

<sup>56</sup> Koniak (n 30).

<sup>57</sup> Young, Hobbs, Goldwasser (n 25) 111-12.

<sup>58</sup> See Royal Crown Courts of Equity <<https://www.royalcrowncourtsofequity.org/proclamations/>>.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, the many micronations that emerged in Australia from the 1970s onwards: Harry Hobbs and George Williams, *Micronations and the Search for Sovereignty* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>60</sup> For an overview of the Declaration, see Vincent O'Malley, *He Whakaputanga 1835* (Bridget Williams Books, 2023).

<sup>61</sup> Juliet Rowan, ‘Self-Proclaimed “Maori Govt” Asks Motel Owners for Rent’, *The New Zealand Herald* (4 July 2005) <<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/kahu/self-proclaimed-maori-govt-asks-motel-owners-for-rent/XRRXMOPH GJ3G5GXF4AAQWHDOPM/>>.

<sup>62</sup> Pay the Rent, ‘Saying Sorry Isn’t Enough: Pay the Rent’ <<https://paytherent.net.au/>>. See further Keryn Donnelly, ‘What is “Paying the Rent” and How Does it Actually Support First Nations People?’, *Refinery29* (18 October 2023) <<https://www.refinery29.com/en-au/pay-the-rent-mutual-aid>>.

<sup>63</sup> Charlie Mitchell, ‘Nuremberg 2.0’s Strange Path to New Zealand’ *Stuff* (3 July 2023) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300917125/nuremberg-20s-strange-path-to-new-zealand>>.

<sup>64</sup> Day and Carlson (n 51); Colin McRoberts, ‘The “First Nation Medical Board”: A Case Study of Pseudolegal Parasitisation of Legitimate Indigenous Sovereignty’ in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 269.

The WMG is not unique. Another pseudolaw court, the New Zealand Common Law Court of Justice is supposedly located in Warkworth, a small town north of Auckland. Its online registry lists three cases littered with sovereign citizen and pseudolegal language. The first case, C22-0001, was brought by ‘Alexander: of the family Knox’, a style characteristic of the strawman theory. Knox’s claim is on behalf of the ‘people of New Zealand’, alleging that Prime Minister Jacinda Arden and her Cabinet and Advisers:

did knowingly commit crimes against the Living Man by the imposition or coercion of the people of the Land of New Zealand to receive an experimental medical procedure known as the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccination.<sup>65</sup>

The complainant’s evidence amounts to an open letter to the New Zealand Police Commissioner by the three-person conspiracy-minded organisation New Zealand Lawyers Speaking Out With Science.<sup>66</sup> The letter’s authors, Kirsten Murfitt and Sue Grey – both registered solicitors in New Zealand – have been involved in various pseudolegal activities. Murfitt is presently advocating for a referendum to get New Zealand to leave the World Health Organization. At the same time, Grey has testified before the pseudolegal International Tribunal for Natural Justice on the ‘weaponisation of the biosphere’.<sup>67</sup>

There are two other cases listed on the registry. Both accuse the Parliament of New Zealand of establishing a ‘Corporate legal system’ that is ‘fatally corrupted’, and unable to serve the people and protect their freedoms.<sup>68</sup> The complaints seek an unusual remedy. Drawing on the 1835 He Whakaputanga (Māori Declaration of Independence), as well as new Declarations of Sovereignty issued by individuals from the city of Timaru and Mahurangi peninsula, they call upon the New Zealand Common Law Court of Justice to create new district governments for their localities ‘by the people and for the people under the jurisdiction of Common Law and Natural Law’. Additional remedies include creating a ‘School of Common Law’ to educate people on their rights. The public is invited to attest to these and other Declarations covering portions of New Zealand to demonstrate their support. In February 2022, the Court of Justice determined one of these cases. The complainant, Alexander Knox, read the indictment out loud before 12 residents in attendance. Knox received ‘unanimous agreement to the facts by the

---

<sup>65</sup> *We, the People of New Zealand vs Prime Minister Jacinda Arden, her Cabinet and Advisors*, New Zealand Common Law Court of Justice, Case No C22-0001 <<https://nzcommonlawcourt.org/cases/#C22-0001>>.

<sup>66</sup> Open Letter from Kirsten Murfitt and Sue Grey (New Zealand Lawyers Speaking Out with Science) to Andrew Coster, New Zealand Police Commissioner, 16 March 2022 <<https://nzdsos.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/220317-Letter-to-Police-Commissioner.pdf>>. New Zealand Lawyers Speaking Out with Science is associated with New Zealand Doctors Speaking Out With Science <<https://nzdsos.com/>>. See further Charlie Mitchell, ‘Covid-19 NZ: Why a Small Group of Doctors Opposes Vaccination’ *Stuff* (2 November 2021) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/300439357/covid19-nz-why-a-small-group-of-doctors-opposes-vaccination>>.

<sup>67</sup> Sue Grey, ‘Testimony on New Zealand’s Ecocide with the Use of 1080 Poison’, *International Tribunal for Natural Justice* (5 September 2019) <<https://itnj.org/blog/2019/09/05/sue-grey-testimony-on-new-zealands-ecocide-with-the-use-of-1080-poison/>>. The International Tribunal for Natural Justice was created by Sacha Stone, a conspiracy theorist and new age influencer.

<sup>68</sup> *We, the People of Mahurangi District vs The New Zealand Government and Party Political System*, New Zealand Common Law Court of Justice, Case No C22-0002 <<https://nzcommonlawcourt.org/cases/#C22-0002>>; *We, the People of Timaru District vs the New Zealand Government and Party Political System*, New Zealand Common Law Court of Justice, Case No C22-0003 <<https://nzcommonlawcourt.org/cases/#C22-0003>>.

residents’, who also ‘unanimously affirmed’ the remedies sought. Knox was thus appointed Interim Governor of the new Mahurangi District.<sup>69</sup>

There are similar groups throughout Australia. The Sovereign Peoples Assembly of Western Australia was formed in September 2021 to ‘restor[e] Common Law and Rule of Lore/Law’.<sup>70</sup> It now consists of assemblies in Perth and Albany, has deputised 24 sheriffs and established its own Common Law Court.<sup>71</sup> The group has been active throughout Western Australia seeking to assist its members and supporters and generally frustrate government authority. In 2023, for instance, former Australian Senator Rod Culleton was flanked by several Common Law Sheriffs in a confrontation with police.<sup>72</sup> Culleton sought to reclaim his foreclosed farm through the ‘Common Law’, while the Sheriffs explained to Western Australia Police that their superior court had already affirmed that the farm belonged to Culleton. The following year, Sheriffs attempted to notify the Parliament of Western Australia that it is not ‘a Constitutional parliament but a dictatorship operating as a corporation or company’.<sup>73</sup> The Sovereign Peoples Assembly of Western Australia does not appear to have caused or threatened violence, but, as we will see in the following section, sovereign citizen and pseudolaw-inspired courts have been established across the country as a means to intimidate and threaten.

A more prominent Australian pseudolaw community pursuing the establishment of an alternative government is the Victorian group, My Place. Founded by Darren Bergwerf in Frankston during the COVID-19 lockdowns, the group has spread through each Australian state and territory. My Space now has over 180 active local groups on Facebook.<sup>74</sup> Described as ‘putting UNITY back into community’,<sup>75</sup> the group appears ‘to offer an inclusive and collaborative space for community members’ as a ‘salve for the often atomised, digital media-centric society that we have become’.<sup>76</sup> They encourage members to commit to a ‘positive culture agreement’.<sup>77</sup> According to Josh Roose,

---

<sup>69</sup> *We, the People of Mahurangi District* (n 68) (19 February 2022) Court Record <<https://nzcommonlawcourt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/C22-0002-Court-Record.pdf>>. This causal relationship is intriguing, as the pseudolegal court creates the political entity, rather than the other way round: we thank Donald Netolitzky for this comment.

<sup>70</sup> Sovereign Peoples Assembly of Western Australia, ‘About Our Assembly’ <<https://wacommonlaw.au/home/about-us/>>.

<sup>71</sup> Sovereign Peoples Assembly of Western Australia, ‘Guardians of the Law’ <<https://wacommonlaw.au/sheriffs/>>.

<sup>72</sup> Jack Evans, “‘28 Days to Vacate’: Former One Nation Senator Attempts to Use “Common Law” to Take Back Farm”, *News.com.au* (13 October 2023) <<https://www.news.com.au/finance/business/banking/28-days-to-vacate-former-one-nation-senator-attempts-to-use-common-law-to-take-back-farm/news-story/7ec8443678c6738dfc417edf495b3a15>>.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Culleton & Common Law Sheriffs Back Knocking on Door of Unconstitutional WA Parliament’, *Cairns News* (15 February 2024) <<https://cairnsnews.org/2024/02/15/culleton-common-law-sheriffs-back-knocking-on-door-of-unconstitutional-wa-parliament/>>.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, My Place Australia, ‘Victoria’ <<https://web.myplaceaustralia.org/vic/>>. See further, Eden Gillespie, ‘My Place Groups Worry about 5G and Chemtrails. Some are also Taking an Interest in Queensland’s Council Elections’, *Guardian Australia* (11 April 2024) <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/11/my-place-groups-5g-chemtrails-fluoride-queensland-council-elections-ntwnfb>>.

<sup>75</sup> My Place Australia, ‘Home’ <<https://web.myplaceaustralia.org/>>.

<sup>76</sup> Josh Roose, ‘The Paradox of Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizen Ideology: Vulnerability, Malevolence and Disengagement’ in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young, and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 322.

<sup>77</sup> My Place Australia, ‘Positive Culture Agreement’ <<https://web.myplaceaustralia.org/positive-culture-agreement/>>

[t]he tactics employed by the My Place movement are often referred to by those countering violent extremism as ‘breadcrumbing’ (derived from the folk tale *Hansel and Gretel*). That is, moderate and even socially inclusive material might be deployed before gradual increases in exposure to more hardline and extremist material that reveals the true ideological disposition of the movement.<sup>78</sup>

Local My Place Facebook pages include lists for town hall meetings, community markets, organic food pickups, and wine and cheese tasting nights, interspersed with ‘conspiratorial materials about “smart cities”, “5G” information and a “Timeline to Treason”’.<sup>79</sup> As Roose explains, the message of belonging and inclusion hides the conspiratorial sovereign citizen narrative that ‘government is fundamentally corrupt, and that the people are being exploited by a global agenda’.<sup>80</sup> My Place websites adapt sovereign citizen pseudolegal teachings, explaining that secret changes were made to the Australian Constitution in 1973.<sup>81</sup>

Many other groups engage in breadcrumbing. Consider the North Canterbury Ratepayers and Renters Association. The Association appears to be a Facebook group that discusses rate increases. It also disseminates pseudolaw and a range of adjacent conspiracies. Members share information about allodial title, memes about climate change hoaxes and UN Agenda 21, claims that ‘managed retreat’ (moving to higher ground to avoid climate change-related flooding) involves the ‘herding of kiwis’, concerns over fluoride in the water, and efforts to overthrow commercial law (the corrupted state law) and return to ‘constitutional law’.<sup>82</sup> A representative from Waimakariri District Council has explained that the North Canterbury Ratepayers and Renters Association is ‘looking to draw people under the guise of concerned residents. These groups seem to be preying on vulnerable people’.<sup>83</sup>

Given that adherents believe the existing government is despotic and corrupt, there is little alternative but to establish a new government. Bergwerf and his supporters clearly aim to establish an independent, ‘parallel society’.<sup>84</sup> However, Bergwerf first attempted to obtain power within legitimate structures. In 2022, Bergwerf was unsuccessful in his attempt to secure election in the federal seat of Dunkley and the state electorate of Frankston.<sup>85</sup> Undeterred, Bergwerf established a parallel council in Frankston called the Frankston Peoples Council and saw himself elected mayor.<sup>86</sup> The shadow council has adopted its own constitution, accuses the Commonwealth of subverting Australia’s Constitution, and rallies against smart cities, 5G towers and other conspiracy targets.<sup>87</sup> Bergwerf has also released a manifesto, ‘articulating

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid 323.

<sup>81</sup> My Place Australia, ‘Links to Information Regarding Law/Lore/Constitution and More’ <<https://web.mylpaceaustralia.org/law-lore/>>.

<sup>82</sup> North Canterbury Ratepayers and Renters Association, Facebook, <<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100095078156203>>.

<sup>83</sup> Email communication with Simon Hart, 26 June 2025 (on file with author).

<sup>84</sup> Emily Baker, ‘Anti-Vax Group My Place is Pushing to Take “Control of Council Decisions”’, *ABC 7.30* (4 April 2023) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-04-04/anti-vax-group-my-place-plan-to-influence-your-local-council/102166182>>.

<sup>85</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, ‘Frankston District Preference Distribution, 2022 State Election’ <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/results/state-election-results/2022-state-election-results/results-by-district/frankston-district-results/frankston-results-distribution>>; Australian Electoral Commission, ‘Tally Room: Dunkley, VIC’ (13 June 2022) <<https://results.aec.gov.au/27966/Website/HouseDivisionPage-27966-210.htm>>.

<sup>86</sup> Frankston Peoples Council, ‘Info, for We the People’ <<https://www.frankstonpeoplescouncil.org/for-the-people-info>>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

[his] three-stage plan for revolution, which will ultimately require violence'.<sup>88</sup> This is an 'alternative vision whereby "Lore" (pseudolaw) will replace "law", and the spiritual war "between GOOD and Satan" will be won'.<sup>89</sup>

State authorities have not ignored the attempted establishment of parallel governance institutions. Reports by New Zealand intelligence agencies released under the *Official Information Act 1982* (NZ) (OIA) reveal that some groups within the country are focused on 'proactive[ly] pursui[ng] a new form of government based on common law pseudo-legal theories'.<sup>90</sup> In 2022, one report suggested that 'there are as many as a dozen common law assemblies operating in New Zealand', meeting in 'at least seven towns and cities, with some meeting weekly'.<sup>91</sup> It concluded there was 'a realistic possibility' of 'Common Law-motivated violence' 'with little or no intelligence forewarning'.<sup>92</sup> Similar warnings have been issued by the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The AFP has reported that while sovereign citizens in Australia historically operated in isolation and 'were mostly harmless',<sup>93</sup> COVID-19 and international influences have given rise to 'clear organisation, recruitment and evangelising, as well as formal and informal leadership structures' that overlap 'with other Issues Motivated Groups, finding common ground with anti-vax groups, conspiracy groups and far-right extremists'.<sup>94</sup> As we will see, pseudolaw adherents throughout Australia and New Zealand are threatening and harassing politicians and members of local government.

### *B. Threats and Intimidation*

Pseudolegal groups and institutions have impacted the administration of governance by issuing violent threats and intimidating ordinary citizens and public authorities. In many cases, adherents use the fake courts and tribunals they have established to 'legally' issue warrants that harass and threaten individuals. In other cases, members have presented threatening letters of demand littered with pseudolegal iconography and legal theories to council staff. At other times, pseudolegal adherents have disrupted public events. In this section, we provide examples of each form of vigilante activity. In each case, adherents believe they have legally justified bases for their actions.

Our focus on New Zealand and Australia should not suggest that the experiences in the Antipodes are unique. The global nature of the pandemic fuelled the growth of sovereign citizen pseudolaw across the world, while social media and the Internet facilitated networks and relationships between different pseudolegal individuals. For example, during the pandemic, a German lawyer named Reiner Fuellmich founded the 'Corona committee', which sought to investigate government and corporate crimes against humanity.<sup>95</sup> Attracting support

---

<sup>88</sup> Roose (n 76) 330.

<sup>89</sup> Josh Roose, Shahram Akbarzede and Vivian Gerrard, *New Directions in Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Literature Review* (Report prepared for Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, Deakin University, 2024) [162].

<sup>90</sup> Marc Daalder, 'Spies: Extremist Citizen's Arrest Could End In Violence' *Newsroom* (4 September 2022) <<https://newsroom.co.nz/2022/09/04/spies-extremist-citizens-arrests-could-end-in-violence/>>.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Stephen Dametto, 'The Sovereign Citizen Movement in Australia' *Australian Federal Police* (2023) 9 <[www.afp.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/123-2023.pdf](http://www.afp.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/123-2023.pdf)>.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>95</sup> See Reiner Fuellmich, 'Summary of Findings of the Corona Committee' *Subsplash* <[https://subsplash.com/+cmsb/embed/mi/+62pwbzd?video&audio&info&embeddable&shareable&logo\\_watermark](https://subsplash.com/+cmsb/embed/mi/+62pwbzd?video&audio&info&embeddable&shareable&logo_watermark)>.



from pseudolaw adherents, Fuellmich sought to create an international criminal tribunal – Nuremberg 2.0 – to hold political leaders liable for these alleged crimes.<sup>96</sup> One member of the WMG offered their court as a site for the hearing,<sup>97</sup> which subsequently served as the host for ‘The Grand Jury of the World Criminal Court’.<sup>98</sup> Through its investigation, the Grand Jury found the pandemic was a planned hoax aimed at creating panic and imposing new controls over humanity.<sup>99</sup> Inspired by the Grand Jury, the WMG’s court, Te Kooti Wakanga Court of Justice, subsequently convicted four New Zealand Government officials, Prime Minister Christopher Hipkins, Minister for the Public Service Andrew Little, Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield, and Medsafe Group Manager Christopher James ‘for their part in actions that...led to serious Covid 19 crimes’.<sup>100</sup>

Similar events have taken place in Australia. The Sovereign Peoples Assembly of Western Australia has been particularly active. Its Common Law Court has issued verdicts against numerous public figures, such as Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Commonwealth Chief Health Officer Paul Kelly, and Premiers Daniel Andrews, Mark McGowan, Gladys Berejiklian, and Anastacia Palaszczuk, among others, on charges of fraud, violating the Nuremberg Code, human trafficking and genocide.<sup>101</sup> The Court sentenced each defendant to 120 years’ imprisonment. Even if these groups do not attempt to enforce their judgments, these orders constitute serious threats against public officials. At least one person has been convicted for making death threats.<sup>102</sup>

More concerning are attempts to target lower-level public authorities and ordinary citizens who do not enjoy similar levels of police protection. In New Zealand, journalists report that local government officials and staff ‘have been on the receiving end of intimidation tactics, letters and emails, “often nasty with unreasonable demands”’.<sup>103</sup> In 2023, the ‘Peoples Full High Court’, another pseudolegal ‘Common Law’ court in New Zealand, sent a ‘threatening letter’ to Council chief executives,<sup>104</sup> ‘warning that if councils failed to meet their demands, the chief executives would be “subject to arrest, imprisonment, [and] trial before the ‘Peoples Full High Court’”’.<sup>105</sup> Interim chief executive of Taituarā (which acts on behalf of council executives), Miriam Taris, noted that the letter was a ‘none-too-subtle attempt to intimidate chief executives

---

<sup>96</sup> Jessica Bateman, “‘Nuremberg 2.0’: Why COVID Conspiracy Theorists See This Lawyer As Their Saviour” *Vice* (19 October 2021) <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/reiner-fuellmich-nuremberg-2-why-covid-conspiracy-theorists-see-this-lawyer-as-their-saviour/>>.

<sup>97</sup> Mitchell (n 63).

<sup>98</sup> News Paradigm, ‘Reiner Fuellmich – Grand Jury Day One (Full Session) *Odysee* (7 February 2022) <[<sup>99</sup> Ibid.](https://odysee.com/@NewsParadigm:f/Reiner-Fuellmich---Grand-Jury-Day-One-(Full)b:f>.”</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

<sup>100</sup> ‘Te Kooti Wakanga Update’ *Wakaminenga Maori Government* (19 November 2023) <<https://govt.maori.nz/sentencing-and-prosecutions-24-september-2023/>>.

<sup>101</sup> *Decision of the Court, The Claim, Verdict and Remedy, In the matter of Claim Number 28689025*, Sovereign Peoples Assembly of Western Australia Common Law Court of Superior Jurisdiction (26 November 2022) 2 <<https://wacommonlaw.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Court-Verdict-Claim-Number-28689025-SPAWA-001.pdf>>.

<sup>102</sup> Sandra Conchi, ‘Richard Sivell Convicted for Making Death Threats Against Jacinda Ardern’ *NZ Herald* (3 October 2024) <<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/richard-sivell-convicted-for-making-death-threats-against-jacinda-ardern/HXYZILAHBRDIPGB6NRZAZMCP0I/>>.

<sup>103</sup> Hill (n 14) citing Waimakariri Mayor Dan Gordon.

<sup>104</sup> A Council CEO is appointed and has various responsibilities, including for hiring, training and developing staff. See *Local Government Act 2002* (NZ) s 42.

<sup>105</sup> Catherine Hubbard, ‘Arrest, Imprisonment, Trial Before the “Peoples Full High Court” Threat Sent to Councils’ *Stuff* (31 October 2023) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/133184059/arrest-imprisonment-trial-before-the-peoples-full-high-court-threat-sent-to-councils>>.

from performing their lawful duties to collect rates set in accordance with law'.<sup>106</sup> Threats became so numerous that the Tasman District Council hired a planning specialist to create special lockdown procedures after noting an increase in 'death threats to staff, signs threatening trespassers, threatening to picket staff members' homes, and refusing to pay for services such as rates or dog registration'.<sup>107</sup> There have also been more direct confrontations. A man suffering a psychotic episode and 'spouting' 'crazy Magna Carta speak, and something about missing children' broke into the Nelson City Mayor Rachel Reese's home, terrifying her.<sup>108</sup> In an earlier encounter, a sovereign citizen repeatedly made threats at his local council and eventually punched a senior council leader.<sup>109</sup>

In Australia, one sovereign citizen-inspired group called Nmdaka Dalai Australis (NDA) appears to have been formed for the sole purpose of justifying child kidnapping. NDA created its own court, which issued warrants for the arrest of a member's ex-partner and demanded that he surrender his two sons to 'court sheriffs'.<sup>110</sup> After establishing these 'institutions', an ABC Investigations report found that NDA sheriffs began operating far more broadly. They:

deployed the threat of NDA's bogus court as a weapon in family law disputes around Australia, harassing and intimidating judges, lawyers, officials and parents and children involved in custody battles.<sup>111</sup>

NDA demonstrates several concerning developments. The first is the latent potential for violence inherent within pseudolegal and sovereign citizen-inspired groups. It also, again, exemplifies how these groups have sought to clothe themselves in Indigenous claims in an effort to bolster their legitimacy. They claim to represent 'the original Suveran [sic] bloodline descendants of' Australia,<sup>112</sup> and draw a distinction between 'corporate indigenous people' 'who are interested in gaining financial compensation' and 'original people' who 'see themselves as custodians of the land, and walking with the people of ALL the land, no matter the colour of the skin'.<sup>113</sup> The NDA is not an Indigenous group.

Members of the NDA have also sought to intimidate local government. In February 2024, several NDA members entered the Canterbury-Bankstown Council building in Sydney, seeking to establish a demilitarised zone. In a video uploaded to TikTok, Rocco Varty served a series of documents to a council worker, asserting that a Proclamation issued by

The custodial law court, senior law elders and council in circle together with the first law chief and the provost marshal ... it's basically that you guys are

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Catherine Hubbard, 'SovCit Threat Prompts Council Building Lockdown Plans' *Stuff* (2 October 2023) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/133018110/sovcit-threat-prompts-council-building-lockdown-plans>>.

<sup>108</sup> Tracy Neal, 'Former Nelson Mayor Rachel Resse Confronted by Terrifying Intruder who "Claimed" her House' *RNZ* (29 June 2024) <<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/520838/former-nelson-mayor-rachel-reese-confronted-by-terrifying-intruder-who-claimed-her-house>>.

<sup>109</sup> Charlie Mitchell, 'The Barefoot, Small-Town "Sheriff" who Allegedly Attacked a Council Boss', *Stuff* (15 May 2023) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300872706/the-barefoot-smalltown-sheriff-who-allegedly-attacked-a-council-boss>>.

<sup>110</sup> Kevin Nguyen and Michael Workman, 'A Sovereign Citizen Group is Using a Fake Court to Justify Child Kidnapping and Extortion', *ABC Investigations* (17 July 2024) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-17/sovereign-citizen-fake-court-alleged-child-kidnapping/104085748>>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Nmdaka Dalai Australis, 'About Us: A Land of Free Living Souls' <<https://nmdakadalaiaustralis.com/about-us-nmdaka-dalai-australis/>>.

<sup>113</sup> Nmdaka Dalai Australis 'FAQ: What Will Happen To My Land?' <<https://nmdakadalaiaustralis.com/faq/>>.



operating and aiding and abetting a military force. Whereas the First Nations ... the tribe of the Nmdaka Dalai, they are declaring that you must cease and desist in your operations of pushing a foreign military force and crimes against humanity.<sup>114</sup>

Another group member explained that ‘the Commonwealth of Australia is a private corporation registered at the US Securities Exchange’.<sup>115</sup> The worker accepted the documents, and the NDA members eventually departed. In March 2024, members of the NDA were ‘locked out’ of the Gympie Town Hall in Queensland, following an attempt to serve documents enforcing a demilitarised zone.<sup>116</sup>

Other pseudolaw groups do more than merely serve ‘legal’ documents to local government. In 2023, 15 councils across Victoria reported that members of the My Place network disrupted their meetings and activities.<sup>117</sup> Yarra Ranges Council was forced to close meetings to the public after ‘a number of outbursts’ from attendees during a discussion on 20-minute neighbourhoods. Mayor Jim Child explained, ‘Police were called to assist with the crowd of 100-plus agitators, who didn’t follow the rules we set down for council meetings’.<sup>118</sup> The Municipal Association of Victoria explained that anti-government groups like My Place targeted councils because ‘You can turn up to a council meeting. You can’t turn up to state parliament [and ask a question]’.<sup>119</sup> Other council meetings have been disrupted by protestors against climate change policies, with adherents ‘calling for citizens arrests and railing against CCTV programs and 15-minute cities’.<sup>120</sup> Sometimes threats move beyond local government; in 2023, reports revealed that members of these groups had threatened and harassed drag queens scheduled to read books at cafés.<sup>121</sup>

Similar events have occurred in South Australia. In January 2023, a City of Onkaparinga council meeting was adjourned, and police were called after several protestors wearing ‘body cameras and GoPros’ to film their interactions ‘charg[ed] towards the council chambers.’<sup>122</sup> Later that month, around 70 No Smart Cities Action Group members protested at the City of

---

<sup>114</sup> Frank Chung, ‘Sovereign Citizens Issue “Demilitarised Zone” Proclamation to Sydney Councils’, *News.com.au* (3 June 2024) <<https://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/courts-law/sovereign-citizens-issue-demilitarised-zone-proclamation-to-sydney-councils/news-story/24b7e6526fdd5327afc3ee3993ab91da>>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Town Hall Locks Out Protestors’, *Gympie Today* (27 March 2024) <<https://gympietoday.com.au/featured/2024/03/27/town-hall-locks-out-protestors/>>.

<sup>117</sup> Rachael Dexter and Benjamin Preiss, ‘Victorian Councils Targeted by Conspiracy Theorists’ Campaign of Disruption and Influence’, *The Age* (22 April 2023) <<https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/victorian-councils-targeted-by-conspiracy-theorists-campaign-of-disruption-and-influence-20230404-p5cxzj.html>>.

<sup>118</sup> Cara Waters, ‘What are 15-minute Cities and How Did they Ignite a Conspiracy Theory?’, *The Age* (19 February 2023) <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/what-are-15-minute-cities-and-how-did-they-ignite-a-conspiracy-theory-20230214-p5ckj7.html>>.

<sup>119</sup> Dexter and Preiss (n 117).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Rachel Dexter, ‘Drag Queen Targeted by Threats Calls for Tougher Response from Authorities’ *The Age* (13 April 2023) <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/the-worst-of-american-politics-premier-backs-drag-performers-after-cafe-threats-20230413-p5d03x.html>>.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Climate Change Plan Leads to Chaos at City of Onkaparinga Council Meeting, Police Called’, *ABC News* (18 January 2023) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-18/police-called-to-city-of-onkaparinga-council-meeting/101866018>>.

Salisbury council chambers, forcing police to expend significant resources to protect the safety of councillors.<sup>123</sup>

Councils in New Zealand have also faced hostility. In June 2023, the Hamilton Residents and Ratepayers Association hosted a public meeting to discuss the urban planning concept of the 20-minute city.<sup>124</sup> Deputy Mayor Angela O’Leary and Councillor Mark Donovan explained the concept, including how it sought to promote healthy and sustainable living by ensuring that everything an individual could need would be accessible on foot or bike within 20 minutes. The public audience included interested members of the public as well as members of the misinformation outlet Counterspin media who believe the 20-minute city concept is a means of effecting the ‘Great Reset’, through which the World Economic Forum will ‘destroy capitalism and enact a one world government’.<sup>125</sup> Jonah Franke-Bowell reports that ‘[a]fter 10 minutes, [the presenters] were booed off the stage to chants of “cowards!”’<sup>126</sup> One man from the hostile crowd approached the councillors to issue ‘what he called a “writ” declaring a citizen’s arrest’.<sup>127</sup> The Deputy Mayor and councillor exited safely.

While adherents believe they are appropriately employing law and process, State authorities in Australia and New Zealand are increasingly focused on the risk of intimidation and physical harm associated with pseudolegal organisations. New Zealand Security Intelligence Service’s Combined Threat Assessment Group and New Zealand Police’s Security Intelligence and Threat Groups generate reports on sovereign citizens and violent extremism in New Zealand.<sup>128</sup> These reports reveal that ‘Police regularly encounter anti-authority or sovereign citizen type individuals, who believe that the rule of law does not apply to them’.<sup>129</sup> While officials have noted that the movement is not ‘inherently violent’, one report indicated that ‘there is a realistic possibility that a threat actor inspired by SovCit rhetoric will commit a spontaneous act of extremist violence’.<sup>130</sup> In 2015, a leaked NSW Counter Terrorism and Special Tactics command assessment indicated that ‘sovereign citizens’ have ‘the motivation and capability to act against government interests and should be considered a potential terrorist threat’.<sup>131</sup> More recently, the AFP has reported sovereign citizens retain the ‘the potential for violence, fixation and harassment’.<sup>132</sup> This is extreme and potentially dangerous behaviour.

<sup>123</sup> ‘SA Police Critical of Protesters at Council Meetings Diverting Officers from Fighting Crime’, *ABC News* (31 January 2023) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-31/sa-salisbury-council-smart-cities-cctv-decision/101913810>>.

<sup>124</sup> The Hamilton Citizens and Ratepayers Association is similar to the North Canterbury Ratepayers and Renters Association, but probably not as extreme. Hamilton Residents and Ratepayers Association Incorporated, Facebook, <<https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonRatepayers/>>.

<sup>125</sup> Ciarán O’Connor, ‘The Spread of the Great Reset Conspiracy in the Netherlands’, *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (23 February 2021) <[https://www.isdglobal.org/digital\\_dispatches/the-spread-of-the-great-reset-conspiracy-in-the-netherlands/](https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-spread-of-the-great-reset-conspiracy-in-the-netherlands/)>. See further, Jonah Franke, ‘Conspiracy Theorists’ Strange New Target—Hamilton’, *Stuff* (21 February 2023) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300811577/conspiracy-theorists-strange-new-target--hamilton>>.

<sup>126</sup> Jonah Franke, ‘City Leaders Flee Conspiracy Mob’ *Waikato Times* (10 June 2023) <<https://www.waikatotimes.co.nz/nz-news/350019375/ive-never-seen-it-extent-city-leaders-flee-conspiracy-mob>>.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Benn Bathgate, ‘Threats and Abuse at Elected Officials on the Rise as Police “Seek to Understand the Scale and Scope” of NZ Extremism’, *Waikato Times* (5 October 2024) <<https://www.waikatotimes.co.nz/nz-news/350432687/threats-and-abuse-elected-officials-rise-police-seek-understand-scale-and-scope>>.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Marc Daalder, ‘Spies: Possible Violence During Routine Law Enforcement’, *Newsroom* (27 October 2022) <<https://newsroom.co.nz/2022/10/27/spies-possible-violence-during-routine-law-enforcement/>>.

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/290950/sovereign-citizens-listed-as-terrorism-threat-in-australia>

<sup>132</sup> Dametto (n 93) 8.

### C. Wasting Time and Resources

The threat of intimidation and physical harm from these organisations is real. Thankfully, however, intelligence agencies report that it is only a ‘small number’ of adherents that adopt ‘a violent interpretation of the[ir] foundational ideologies’ and seriously desire to ‘overthrow...the Government and execut[e]...those guilty of ‘crimes’ against their pseudo-legal beliefs’.<sup>133</sup> Far more common are prosaic and quotidian efforts to frustrate the effective administration of governance. As we explore in this section, members of pseudolaw groups frustrate local governance in two key ways. They abuse legal obligations that local governments have such as statutory requirements to provide information, and they refuse to follow their own legal obligations, like paying rates. Armed with pseudolaw, they waste government time and resources and, in their refusal to comply with the law, increase costs by forcing authorities to use the legal system to enforce compliance.

We began this article with an example from Hamilton City Council. Readers with experience working in council chambers would likely find the story familiar: pseudolegal adherents file spurious OIA or LGOIMA requests, placing significant strain on time and resources.<sup>134</sup> The LGOIMA is intended to promote the accountability of local government and allow the public to participate more effectively in the actions and decisions of local government by providing a mechanism for proper access to official information.<sup>135</sup> Ultimately, it is hoped that this would ‘enhance respect for the law’ and ‘promote good local government in New Zealand’.<sup>136</sup> The Act provides the public with a right to access any document that ‘contains policies, principles, rules, or guidelines in accordance with which decisions or recommendations are made in respect of any person or body of persons in [their] personal capacity’.<sup>137</sup> Adherents abuse this responsibility.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, residents influenced by conspiratorial and pseudolegal views used their right under the LGOIMA in an attempt to uncover what they believe is secret information and harass councils. Adherents have employed LGOIMA requests for various conspiratorial purposes. Requests include information on the COVID-19 vaccines, fluoridation of water, 5G towers, smart cities, 20-minute cities, and many other related topics, including whether councils have identified the requester or other individuals as ‘sovereign citizens’.<sup>138</sup> At least one person filed a LGOIMA request seeking more information about government approaches to COVID-19 in response to an overdue rates payment notice.<sup>139</sup> Occasionally, applications have been framed as an accusation that the council and its members are in breach

---

<sup>133</sup> Daalder (n 90).

<sup>134</sup> *Official Information Act 1982* (NZ); *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ).

<sup>135</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) s 4.

<sup>136</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) s 4.

<sup>137</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) s 21.

<sup>138</sup> See, for example, Tasman District Council (n 14); Ombudsman, *Chief Ombudsman’s Opinion on OIA Complaints about the Refusal of Covid-19 Vaccine Contracts* (19 June 2023).

<sup>139</sup> Exchange between Redacted and Laura (4 November 2022) (on file with author). Others were angry about vaccine mandates. See Medical Apartheid in New Zealand and My Vaccine Pass Requirements queries Ref: 21425 (3 January 2021) <<https://storage.googleapis.com/hccproduction-web-assets/public/Uploads/Documents/OIA-Responses/2021/Final-Response-LGOIMA-21425-Medical-Apartheid-in-New-Zealand-and-My-Vaccine-Pass-requirement-queries.pdf>>.

of human rights law for conducting or facilitating illegal medical experiments on the population instead of a genuine request for information.<sup>140</sup>

Councils or agencies can deny a request to protect people from harassment,<sup>141</sup> but most of these LGOIMAs do not arise to the level of ‘improper pressure or harassment’.<sup>142</sup> Council can also deny requests that are ‘frivolous or vexatious’ or where ‘the information requested is trivial’.<sup>143</sup> These provisions have been used.<sup>144</sup> However, while many of the applications noted above would appear to run afoul of these sections, limiting the burden on local government authorities, and additional challenge exists. A requester is able to challenge the decision to refuse their request by making an application to the Ombudsmen.<sup>145</sup> The Ombudsman has clarified that requests should only be denied if it is ‘**plain and obvious to a reasonable person** that the request amounts to an **abuse of the right** to access official information’.<sup>146</sup> Additionally, ‘it is important to remember that it is the **request not the requester** that must be vexatious’.<sup>147</sup> In short, every request must be assessed on its merits and denying a request can exacerbate already strained relationships.<sup>148</sup> It is, therefore, often simpler for councils and agencies to respond.

Filing an LGOIMA request is a formal process governed by law. If an adherent believes that the government is illegitimate, however, it is odd that they would follow official procedures. This brings us to the second way that adherents waste time and resources: they refuse to voluntarily comply with their own legal obligations, forcing government actors to enforce compliance.

Many adherents simply respond directly to councils when receiving unwelcome news. One of the more curious examples is the ‘notices’ that adherents send to local governments, typically in response to rates notices.<sup>149</sup> The *Local Government (Rating) Act 2002* (NZ) empowers councils with the authority to set, assess, recover, remit, postpone or write off rates from ratepayers.<sup>150</sup> Because adherents believe the law is corrupt, they refuse to comply with rates notices and even challenge the legitimacy of the notices. This has led councils to pursue

---

<sup>140</sup> On the relationship between anti-vaxx conspiracies and pseudolaw see, Maria O’Sullivan, ‘Pseudolaw and Legal Fictions: Vaccine Mandate Claims During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Future Implications’ in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre (eds), *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 37.

<sup>141</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) s 7(2)(f)(ii).

<sup>142</sup> For an outline of cases and limits, see Paul Roth and Graham Taylor, *Access to Information* (Lexis Nexis, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2017) 165.

<sup>143</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) s 17(h).

<sup>144</sup> *Requests for information deemed vexatious and not in good faith due to offensive language*, Case No 546435 (March 2022).

<sup>145</sup> *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (NZ) s 27.

<sup>146</sup> Ombudsman, *Frivolous, Vexatious and Trivial: A Guide to Section 18(h) of the OIA and section 17(h) of the LGOIMA* (August 2019).5 (bold in original).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid* 5 (bold in original).

<sup>148</sup> See Roth and Taylor (n 142) 182-3.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Redacted to Hamilton City Council Rates Team (28 September 2022) (on file with author); Letter from Redacted to Hurunui District Council (10 March 2024) (on file with author); Letter from In LandsAirWater Council-Criminal Division to Jason Beck, Hurunui District Council (20 June 2024) (on file with author). The concept of ‘LandsAirWater’ is LAW that is associated with modern iterations of the US-based sovereign citizen movement. As an example, see Brandon Joe Williams, ‘Breakdown of the Matrix (I Doubt You Can Handle It)’ *One Stupid Fuck* (August 2024) <<https://onestupidfuck.com/state-national-theory>>. (the current website is for version 3.0 of his approach to state national theory. Version 2.0, which contains the information and LAWS and is on file with the author). Williams writes ‘The Letters in the word LAW break down into: LAND, AIR and WATER. That is what the word “law” means; the 3 jurisdictions. (L)and, (A)ir, (W)ater’: 7.

<sup>150</sup> *Local Government Act 2002* (NZ).

litigation against those who refuse to pay rates.<sup>151</sup> Even where courts quickly dispense with pseudolegal claims,<sup>152</sup> it wastes time and resources.

For instance, in response to overdue rates notice, two people living in the Western Bay of Plenty District sent a letter to John Holyoake, the Chief Executive Officer of the Council. Addressed to ‘John Holyoake or Agent Acting’, the letter was infused with sovereign citizen-inspired language. It sought clarification as to whether Mr Holyoake was making a ‘claim for unsolicited goods and services’. whether he was an ‘Agent of the Crown’, whether he was bound by the *Crimes Act 1961* (NZ), and whether the rates requests were misrepresentations under commercial law.<sup>153</sup> Alongside this letter, the authors sent a ‘formal notice of fee schedule’, noting that sending a letter or calling their phone will cost the council \$5,000 per contact. Of course, this is not how the law works. The fee schedule is not enforceable, and the homeowners are not able to avoid the obligation to pay council rates. Nonetheless, even if the CEO is not required to respond to frivolous notices such as these, the Council must still engage with the pseudolegal adherent. Enforcement action must be undertaken when the homeowner refuses to pay their rights.<sup>154</sup> This increases the administrative burden on councils as it increases costs on other ratepayers.<sup>155</sup>

Another example concerns ‘Janine of the House of Arabella.’ Janine has sent notice to ‘every council officer within each of the New Zealand Council Corporations’, claiming that these authorities are engaging in fraud and deceit for a litany of reasons. They include:

charging property rates, taxes, and making the people liable for council’s own debt, for placing fluoride into the water, for all revenue activities as parking fines and property fines where no harm has been done, continuing to promote vaccines where evidence of harm of changing human DNA, 5G towers & devices, chemtrailing chemicals from the sky, weather manipulation, placing false misleading information in the media and other changes as evidence becomes available.<sup>156</sup>

On the basis of these alleged crimes against the people of New Zealand, Janine sought damages on behalf of all people and declared herself ‘Commander and Chief over all the Crown Corporations’. She then declared that councils would cease and desist from those crimes, New Zealand would now be under Biblical law, national debts would be paid off, and ‘all personal

---

<sup>151</sup> See *Tasman District Council v Hellyer* [2024] NZDC 9781 (enforcing rates); *Davis v Whangārei District Council* [2024] NZHC 1899 (enforcing rates).

<sup>152</sup> *Miller v South Wairarapa District Council* [2024] NZHC 2024 (Miller sued the council, but the claim was rejected under *High Court Rules 2016* r 5.35A as a plain abuse of the process of the Court); *Williams v Hauraki District Council* [2020] NZHC 381 (rejected under r 5.35A)

<sup>153</sup> Letter from Redacted to John Holyoake or Act Agent (17 August 2024) (on file with author).

<sup>154</sup> Amy Ridout, ‘“Sovereign citizens” tying councils up with rates refusal and red tape’ *Stuff* (10 June 2023) <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/news/131910627/sovereign-citizens-tying-councils-up-with-rates-refusal-and-red-tape>>.

<sup>155</sup> While potential complications might arise when an adherent claims to be Indigenous and fails to pay their rates for rates remissions purposes, courts typically dismiss pseudolaw cases as having no basis. See *Davis v Whangārei District Council* [2024] NZHC 1899 [31]-[37] (denying Davis’s pseudolegal claims as having no prospect of success); cf *Opotiki District Council v Tawhai* DC Opotiki CIV-2008-047-17, 20 February 2009 (finding that Tawhai’s land is not Māori customary land and is therefore rateable); cf *Rerekura v TSB Bank Ltd* [2020] NZHC (denying Rerekura’s claim, based on a Māori sovereignty, as having no prospect of success).

<sup>156</sup> Email from NowFreedomforAll@Protonmail.com to [redacted email address] (15 October 2024) (on file with author).



& income & goods & service taxes’ would be cancelled.<sup>157</sup> To remedy those fraudulent and illegal actions, she calculated the current debt owed as \$24,892,991,374,021.20 to be paid in ‘any currency of my choice or Pure Gold’, with 10% interest accruing ‘per week until settled in full’.<sup>158</sup> This notice may appear to be the work of one creative (and perhaps troubled) individual, but the instrument was witnessed by three others, who were willing to sign and mark the document with a red thumbprint. Janine posted her notice on [publicnoticesnz.com](https://publicnoticesnz.com),<sup>159</sup> so as to give it legal effect (it does not). Perhaps most alarming is the fact that even if this notice is particularly creative, it is not unique. The website [publicnoticesnz.com](https://publicnoticesnz.com) is filled with pseudolaw notices, including notices, ‘unrebutted affidavits’, claims of individual rights, commercial lien notices, and other similar instruments. Janine calls herself a Suv’eran, like the members of NDA mentioned above, indicating relationships or networks across the Tasman.

Similar developments have occurred in Australia, where adherents routinely refuse to pay parking tickets,<sup>160</sup> and rates.<sup>161</sup> In 2023, the significant increase in Australian pseudolaw adherents challenging councils rates led one South Australian law firm that specialises in tax to nominate 2023 the ‘Year of the “Sovereign Citizen”’.<sup>162</sup> Many councils have been ‘inundated’ with ‘baseless correspondence’ from residents challenging rates decisions and refusing to pay charges. Australian pseudolaw adherents refuse to pay for the same reasons seen elsewhere:

1. the ratepayer has not entered into a contract with the council and has never agreed to sign any contract;
2. the *Corporations Act* 2001 and *The Bills of Exchange Act* 1909 apply;
3. the rates notice is not legally binding; and
4. rates are unlawful and illegal.<sup>163</sup>

These notices place local government staff in difficult positions. Eventually, they are forced to commence debt recovery proceedings. However, as Michael Kelledy notes, these are usually commenced in the minor civil jurisdiction of the Magistrates Court, which permits legal representation in only special cases. As a result, ‘council officers are being required to appear on behalf of their council, including in those matters that proceed to trial’ and engage directly with pseudolegal adherents.<sup>164</sup>

Failing to pay rates is only one way that pseudolaw adherents can waste time and resources; adherents also refuse to seek approvals to undertake work. Instead of complying with building

---

<sup>157</sup> Janine of the House of Arabella, ‘NOTICE: Orders & Instructions for Immediate Action, Great Seal of the Suv’eran Commander and Chief Over the Crown Corporations’, 10 October 2024.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid 5.

<sup>159</sup> Public Notices NZ ‘Notice of Liability with Immediate Effect’, <<https://publicnoticesnz.com/notice-of-liability-with-immediate-effect/>>.

<sup>160</sup> *Rossiter v Adelaide City Council* [2020] SASC 61; *Branch v Town of Victoria Park* [2023] WASC 231; Alex Turner-Cohen, ‘Melbourne council’s perfect response to sovereign citizen trying to avoid parking fine’ *News* (1 February 2023) <<https://www.news.com.au/finance/money/costs/melbourne-councils-perfect-response-to-sovereign-citizen-trying-to-avoid-parking-fine/news-story/20611f9f626e208e9dbac2c60538d462>>.

<sup>161</sup> Daniel Peters, ‘“Sovereign Citizen” torn to shreds by council’ *News* (28 August 2024) <<https://www.news.com.au/finance/money/costs/sovereign-brilliantly-shut-down-by-council-worker/news-story/0b5764d7c8520624aa31f7d12ee204b4>>.

<sup>162</sup> Kelledy (n 14).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. See also, Simpson Grierson, ‘Emerging issues for councils – creative arguments for disputing rates liability’ (29 February 2024) <<https://www.simpsongrierson.com/insights-news/legal-updates/emerging-issues-for-councils-creative-arguments-for-disputing-rates-liability>>.

consent processes under the *Building Act 2004* (NZ) for an addition and modification to their home, the O'Donnells obtained 'consent' from 'a person called "Piripi" of the Hapu Tangata Whenua Suveran Authority of Te Ika a Maui'.<sup>165</sup> The council prosecuted the O'Donnells, eventually resulting in a fine of NZD 20,000. Successful prosecutions have also arisen in Australia,<sup>166</sup> suggesting enforcement action is working effectively. However, this ignores the reality that these actions force councils to spend resources investigating, that many infractions are not prosecuted and, where they are, ratepayers bear the expenses of prosecutions.<sup>167</sup>

Wasting time and resources can involve harassment. As we noted above, some farmers filed liens on their property during the US farm crisis to forestall foreclosure. As sovereign citizen pseudolaw developed, adherents adopted new and novel tactics. Characterised as 'paper terrorism', this involved filing volumes of documents during litigation, filing numerous lawsuits, and even filing fraudulent liens against their perceived enemies.<sup>168</sup> This tactic has continued. In 2009, for instance, two adherents filed more than USD 250 billion in fraudulent liens, demands for compensation and other claims against local government officials in Minneapolis.<sup>169</sup> Although the victims were eventually able to prove the forms were false, they incurred substantial emotional and financial distress. One public employee noted that 'it was scarier to engage with offenders who used sovereign citizen tactics than with murderers, given the prospect of facing lawsuits or fouled credit ratings'.<sup>170</sup>

Pseudolegal adherents in Australia and New Zealand have adopted similar tactics, filing many volumes of documents during litigation,<sup>171</sup> and targeting local government authorities. For instance, in 2024, Hamilton City Council carried out a flood risk study on property within the council area. The study identified several homes as occupying a flood-prone area. One unhappy homeowner sought indemnity from the council 'for loss of value and increase of insurance for adding a flood risk' status to their land information memorandum (a summary of information about the property).<sup>172</sup> While a homeowner may have some remedies in this situation, especially if the council has incorrectly identified flood-prone areas, this homeowner turned to pseudolaw. In their letter, the homeowner notified the CEO of Hamilton City Council, Lance Vervoort, that they had filed a 'commercial lien on your property', which they will remove 'once the flood risk on mine is removed'.<sup>173</sup> There was no basis for filing a lien against Vervoort, but because this sovereign citizen tactic is not well-known in New Zealand, it was registered. Fortunately, the Hamilton City Council was able to have it removed. Nonetheless, the event indicates how techniques that divert time and resources from legitimate government purposes can be used as a form of harassment.

<sup>165</sup> Belinda Feek, "'Sovereign citizens' Bradley and Michelle O'Donnell fined for illegal building work' *New Zealand Herald* (3 February 2025) <<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/sovereign-citizens-bradley-and-michelle-odonnell-fined-for-illegal-building-work/6A6XGDIRTZGDDC7BCYO2OMXPBE/>>; see also Natalie Akoorie, 'Owners of unconsented woolshed converted house given temporary reprieve' *RNZ* (15 November 2024) <<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/533921/owners-of-unconsented-woolshed-converted-house-given-temporary-reprieve>>.

<sup>166</sup> *Turnbull v Clarence Valley Council* [2023] NSWSC 83.

<sup>167</sup> Feek (n 165).

<sup>168</sup> Pitcavage (n 32); Charles E. Loeser, 'From Paper Terrorists to Cop Killers: The Sovereign Citizen Threat' (2015) 93 *North Carolina Law Review* 1106.

<sup>169</sup> Erica Goode, 'In Paper War, Flood of Liens Is the Weapon', *The New York Times* (23 August 2012) <[www.nytimes.com/2013/08/24/us/citizens-without-a-country-wage-battle-with-liens.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/24/us/citizens-without-a-country-wage-battle-with-liens.html)>.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. See further Harry Hobbs and George Williams, *Micronations and the Search for Sovereignty* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) 71.

<sup>171</sup> McIntyre et al (n 49).

<sup>172</sup> Letter from Redacted to Paula Southgate (7 May 2024) (on file with author).

<sup>173</sup> Letter from Redacted to Lance Vervoort (18 March 2024) (on file with author).



Curiously, adherents also seem to clash with local councils because of their dogs.<sup>174</sup> Under the *Dog Control Act 1996* (NZ), all dogs in New Zealand must be registered.<sup>175</sup> Councils set a date by which to register a dog. If the dog owner refuses to pay, the council can issue fines and even impound the dog (and assess the owner with fees for impounding).<sup>176</sup> This is a significant issue. In other work, we have discussed the case of *James v District Court at Whanganui*,<sup>177</sup> which involved a ‘Sovereign Man under Common Law’ appealing his infringement notice for failing to register his dog all the way to the New Zealand Court of Appeal.<sup>178</sup> Similar cases exist.<sup>179</sup> In Hauraki District Council, for example, one dog owner replied to the Council: ‘Phoebe and Toby do not wish to take part in your said ‘Dog registration’, be that our land of substance follows best practice of the Whakamaninga Maori Government’.<sup>180</sup> The dog owner explained further that ‘Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Maori version) stat[es] that our Kura [sic] are taonga, handed down over generations...exempt from legislation...this tax is now exorbitant without reason’.<sup>181</sup> The dog owner also requested information from the council, such as ‘double blind, randomised long term controlled trials studying the long term effects of the microchip procedure’.<sup>182</sup> This is a unique request, but it is characteristic of the manner and form of pseudolegal engagement with local government.

The administrative burden pseudolegal adherents increasingly impose on local government authorities may not appear as significant as instances of violent threats and intimidation or attempts to construct parallel institutions. It is far more routine, however. It also produces different challenges. Pseudolegal adherents are a classic example of the free-rider problem. Acting as though they are not subject to the law, they benefit from council services without contributing. Instead of collecting rates, local governments are forced to spend money to enforce compliance, draining and diverting resources from ordinary governance functions and increasing costs on others.

#### IV. Conclusion

Contemporary pseudolaw adherents employ tactics originally developed by the sovereign citizen movement in the United States to bother, disrupt, harass, and threaten legal actors in numerous ways. Their ideology and tactics have spread around the world. In this article we have explored the impact of pseudolaw on local government with a case study on Australia and New Zealand. We find that pseudolaw adherents employ similar tactics in new and novel ways. They maintain they have legally justified arguments and processes but (mis)interpret law to support anti-state activities that create problems for others.

Most legal scholarship has focused on the impact of pseudolaw on the administration of justice, but the phenomenon has a wider reach. Given their immediate interaction with the public, councils, local government staff, and authorities are on the front line of pseudolaw. While many

---

<sup>174</sup> Letters between Redacted and Keeley Faulkner (21 March-20 May 2024) (on file with author); see also *Taikato v Tauranga City Council* [2022] NZHC 3004.

<sup>175</sup> *Dog Control Act 1996* (NZ) s 34.

<sup>176</sup> *Dog Control Act 1996* (NZ) s 42.

<sup>177</sup> [2023] NZCA 181 (18 May 2023).

<sup>178</sup> Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young and Joe McIntyre, ‘Understanding Pseudolaw’ in Harry Hobbs, Stephen Young, and Joe McIntyre, *Pseudolaw and Sovereign Citizens* (Hart, 2025) 1, 2-3.

<sup>179</sup> *Loftus v Auckland Council* [2020] NZHC 416; *Loftus v Rewi* [2020] NZCA 297.

<sup>180</sup> Email from Anna Harris, 8 August 2024 (on file with author).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

of the challenges local government face are common to those dealing with pseudolegal adherents, others are unique. The very nature of local government is such that it affects people in direct and quotidian ways. Pseudolaw adherents will target local authorities because those authorities are seeking to enforce the corrupted laws of the state. Further, unlike courts, which can pass rules that allow registrars to decline to file documents,<sup>183</sup> local governments owe duties to the public at large. They cannot easily adopt processes that allow them to ignore or exclude people who espouse pseudolegal views.

It is important to note that local councils are not the only level or form of government affected by pseudolaw. Pseudolaw adherents target vulnerable individuals and communities, including Indigenous peoples. Just as many pseudolegal groups draw on foundational and archaic legal instruments like the Magna Carta in an effort to bolster their claims, some graft onto the rights and status of Indigenous nations and communities. The WMG and NDA discussed above are just two of multiple pseudolegal organisations that muddle their legal theories with the language of Indigenous rights. Another is Jenny Robin, who styles herself as Lady-Crown: Turikatuku III of the Mauri Crown, and melds Indigenous sovereignty with sovereign citizen rhetoric.<sup>184</sup> So too does Grandmother Murala, an ‘Aboriginal Senior Lore Woman who also holds a Juris Doctor in colonial law’, and echoes the claims of the Frankston Peoples Council and My Place that the Australian Constitution was surreptitiously corrupted in 1973.<sup>185</sup> The influence of sovereign citizen pseudolaw in Indigenous communities is so broad that Indigenous groups in Australia and Canada have issued warnings against it.<sup>186</sup> The issues that pseudolaw is creating for Indigenous peoples and communities are unique from local governments and require additional research.

In this article, we have detailed an alarming phenomenon, but there is some good news. Pseudolaw activity may be decreasing from its peak with the dissipation of COVID-19 restrictions and mandates. Nonetheless, experience from the United States and our observations here suggest that pseudolaw is not going away. Instead, adapting to local contexts, it is becoming a more enduring feature of local politics and government. A broader, systemic response is required to meet the pseudolegal challenge.

Until and unless this phenomenon is taken seriously, local authorities in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, will be left to continue to respond to adherents in an ad hoc and reactive manner. As described above, one council has instituted new lockdown procedures in the face of death threats. Others have moved public meetings online to avoid confrontations. Some local government actors have adopted a sharper approach. In 2024, one pseudolegal adherent sent a letter to the Thames Coromandel District’s Mayor claiming that the Council was a ‘fictitious [sic] entity’ and that the Mayor and Councillors were ‘all liable to prosecution in actions of bad faith, on the grounds of not following due process of law done with intent to coerce and deceive,

---

<sup>183</sup> See *Richards v Beresford* [2023] NZHC 500; Hobbs, Young and McIntyre (n 52) 340; *Re Gauthier* [2017] ABQB 555, [6] (Rooke ACJ).

<sup>184</sup> ‘The Sovereign Crown of the Mauri Nation’ *Mauri Crown* <<https://mauricrown.org/>>.

<sup>185</sup> Grandmother Wisdom, ‘1973 Constitution Change’ <<https://grandmotherwisdom.com/1973-constitution-change/>>; ‘Info, for We The People’ *Frankston Peoples Council* <<https://www.frankstonpeoplescouncil.org/for-the-people-info>> (linking pdfs of Dick Yardley’s Notice of Treason and Timeline to Treason that describe the corruption of the constitution); My Place Australian ‘Law-Lore’ <<https://web.myplaceaustralia.org/law-lore/>>.

<sup>186</sup> Sovereign Yidindji Government, ‘Public Notice: Sovereign Citizen Pseudolaw’ (PN 107, 3 November 2004); Hiawatha First Nation, ‘Public Notice Issued by the Williams Treaties First Nations’ <<https://www.hiawathafirstnation.com/public-notice-issues-by-the-williams-treaties-first-nations/>>.

to enslave myself and others’. The letter received a concise response that preserved government time and resources. Mayor Len Salt replied simply: ‘Go f[uck] yourself, kind regards, Len’.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> Annemarie Quill, ‘Mayor has “no regrets” over signing off email “go f...yourself” RNZ (26 January 2024) <<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/506802/mayor-has-no-regrets-over-signing-off-email-go-f-yourself>>.