Candidates, voters and voting
in New Zealand's 2022 local government elections

EDITED BY
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and
Christine Cheyne

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Contributors

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He has stood for election to local councils on four occasions, twice in the UK in the 1990s and more recently in NZ. In 2019 he contested the Palmerston North Mayoralty and was 47 votes short of being elected to the City Council. In NSW he is seeking to pivot this expertise and experience into the fascinating study of local government with a determination to identify best practice and disseminate it throughout the sector.

Christine Cheyne has a long-standing research interest in local government having worked in the sector in the late 1980s and then completed a doctoral thesis in the early 1990s on public participation in local authority planning processes. She was one of three members of the 2006-2007 Local Government Rates Inquiry Panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government to review local government funding. After nearly 30 years at Massey University, she became an independent researcher providing research mentoring and supporting researchers at Te Pūkenga with professional development and preparation for the PBRF 2026 Quality Evaluation.

Charles Crothers was Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand and Senior Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg. He completed his PhD at Victoria University of Wellington and has worked at the VUW, the University of Auckland, and the University of Natal in Durban. Charles' last areas of research included social theory, methods of applied social research and policy processes, the history and current situation of Sociology and settler societies (especially New Zealand and South Africa) with a particular interest in settlements. Latterly Charles focus has included population and election studies. He was Editor of *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* and former Vice-President of the Research Committee on the History of Sociology of the International Sociological Association.

Grant Duncan is an author and political commentator based in central Auckland. His recent books are concerned with political trust and the arts of government.

Dani Lucas, of Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Raukawa, and British descent, is dedicated to studying governance systems. Her Masters dissertation critically analysed the inclusion of indigenous peoples in local governance. Since its completion, Dani has used this research to influence policy and help build frameworks by presenting to the Local Government Review Panel and collaborating with city councils. Her work reflects her commitment to making governance more inclusive and equitable. Dani has previously worked in policy at both the Treasury and the Social Wellbeing Agency, and, most recently, as an Analytics Leads at Nicholson Consulting.

Luke McLean is a lecturer and data analyst for the School of Environmental Sciences at AUT. He undertook his PhD at the Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town after completing a Zoology BSc at Queens University Belfast. Lukes' research areas include evolutionary

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Jeffrey McNeill is an honorary research associate in the School of People Environment and Planning, Massey University and a public policy consultant specialising in subnational governance and environmental management policy. He was formerly a senior lecturer in environmental policy at Massey University following an extensive career in New Zealand central and regional government and as a consultant. His research focuses primarily on the regional level of government and non-state regulation and their implications for environmental management.

Seán Mahoney has had a long-standing fascination with local political leadership. He has worked in and with local authorities both in England and New Zealand. He recently completed a Masters thesis on how elected mayors get things done and is looking to expand on this research further. He is the General Manager of Sector Performance for Taituarā – Local Government Professionals Aotearoa which includes supporting council officials as leaders to work effectively with elected members.

Mike Reid is a principal policy advisor at LGNZ, the association of local authorities, where he works part-time on a range of issues, including governance, local democracy, and fiscal sustainability. He completed his PhD at Victoria University Wellington on the topic of strengthening local governance and local government and was a regular lecturer in the university's Master of Public Policy Programme. He has published widely on local government and governance issues and is currently undertaking research on turnout in the 2022 local elections as well as local government's role in enhancing democracy.

Karen Webster is Senior Lecturer and Postgraduate Programme lead in Leadership and Management for the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at AUT University, and previously held part time teaching positions at the University of Auckland. She completed her PhD at AUT, MBA at Massey University and BSc (Physiology at Otago University), after Registered Nurse training at Auckland School of Nursing. Her wide-ranging research interests focus on health governance and leadership, Māori and Pākehā governance models, sustainability, and local government representation. Karen's research and teaching follows 15 years' experience in Auckland local government, two decades of service in the New Zealand Army, 10 years professional real estate and 10 years nursing in the public and private sectors. She is an advocate for Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based central and local governance. Karen has previously held directorships in the charitable arts and disability sectors.

1. Introduction

Jeffrey McNeill and Christine Cheyne

Elected local government remains the poor cousin of New Zealand politics. The national media largely ignores it except when a spat arises between councillors and mayor or elected members and the executive or when a district experiences a civil emergency. In rare circumstances the government will replace an elected council with an appointed commissioner or commissioners giving momentary commentary about taxation without representation, but these events are of largely arcane interest. Except when they occur in Auckland because of its sheer size and place in the national economy the interest and impacts of local government are of local concern only; national politics, rather, structure the national news cycle.

Within academia, too, New Zealand local government remains the domain of a few researchers, many of whom have contributed to this book. The New Zealand Political Studies Association struggles to provide a single panel on local government in its annual conferences, the New Zealand Geographical Society conferences struggle even more, despite the inherently spatial nature of local government. And the academic contribution is in any case largely ignored. A scan of the footnotes to the draft and final reports of the Review into the Future of Local Government (2022, 2023) is remarkable for a complete absence of references to any of the national or international local government academic literature. Rather, the panel relied primarily on the 'grey literature' as researchers call these sources: Productivity Commission and Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal reports and, to a lesser degree, newspaper stories and council reports.

Such neglect is a concern. Academics and the local government sector itself have long rehearsed the arguments for strong and successful local government: as the bastion of democracy and, more prosaically, the part of government that makes decisions that most affects its citizens in their day-to-day lives. Yet New Zealand's local government has been painted as lacking the confidence of the public. Some critics point to a decline in voter turnout as a measure of this public dissatisfaction (Asquith et al., 2021; Edwards, 2016; Reid and Crothers, this Volume).

More fundamentally, local government has been found wanting in terms of representing its citizens. As Duncan, McNeill and Reid (all this Volume) all show, councillors are disproportionately propertied older, white males. The recent Review into the Future for Local Government's (RFfLG) proposals for adopting alternative forms of public engagement with an emphasis on deliberative democracy is a response to this perceived lack of representativeness (Review into the Future for Local Government, 2023).

However, the RFfLG report takes no real account of the very real changes brought about by central government that make concerns about poor voter turnout irrelevant, specifically central government's determined effort to centralise functions right now. In the first instance, the government has abolished the twenty-two district health boards. As Duncan notes, these hybrid authorities composed of both government-appointed and citizen-elected board members, have never

been popular but they did provide a salient from which to advance local democracy. Indeed, public health falls firmly within the local-government sphere for many if not most European countries.

This centripetal force applies to lower levels of government, too. The controversial Three Waters initiative has its genesis in funding challenges faced by some local governments to fund their potable, waste and storm water management infrastructure. The catalyst was the microbial contamination of Havelock North water supply that laid half the town down ill and killed four. The government initially proposed management of local government infrastructure by four water entities each governed by a board of members appointed by local governments and iwi. In the face of bitter opposition by local government, the government subsequently revised its intentions now to create ten entities, each matching regional council boundaries. The entities are still to be governed by appointed boards.

A similar sort of regionalism is intended for environmental and urban planning. Currently, territorial and regional councils share planning functions under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). In response to long and loud criticism of this legislation the government has passed the Natural and Built Environments Act this year, that will establish regional-level planning panels responsible for both territorial and regional levels of planning and regulation. These panels, too, are to be appointed rather than elected.

Continuing the tradition established by local government researchers, Jean Drage and Christine Cheyne (Drage, 2002; Drage et al., 2011; Drage & Cheyne, 2016), Jeffrey McNeill, Massey University, convened a one-day symposium on New Zealand local government following the 2022 local elections to explore the sector in a multi-disciplinary way. In preparing for the symposium, we agreed that there is a need for two symposia. The first, reported on here, was convened online in February 2023 to explore the electoral issues surfaced in the 2022 elections. The second, intended to be held in early 2024, will explore the structural changes to and the implications of those changes for New Zealand local government. The spacing was to give time for the government's structural changes to be realised.

Since the symposium the Review into the Future of Local Government published its final report in July (Review into the Future for Local Government [NZ], 2023). The report is potentially far-ranging if its recommendations are to be adopted and implemented. The Review had not been addressed other than in passing in the Symposium roundtable discussion. It was seen as both being established and reporting far too late to have any meaningful impact on the Sixth Labour government's de facto reform of the sector identified above. Following its launch, the then Minister of Local Government, Kieran McAnulty, noted that the report was not government policy, but rather that it:

> would provide an opportunity to work with local government to agree on what changes needs to be made to make it fit for purpose for 30-to-50 years…Reforming local government is important, but 'bread-and-butter' issues and recovery from recent disasters take precedence in the short term (Teodoro, 2023).

Launched on a Wednesday by the weekend there was little coverage in the national news media.

The 2023 symposium was structured around three themes relevant to elections which are also used for this edited collection:

- Perspectives
- Candidates and issues, and
- Representing who?

In the first section, **Perspectives**, contributors provide a context for the 2022 elections. Andy Asquith argues that there was nothing at all unexpected in the results (and, indeed, in the reaction to the results) of the elections. Asquith identifies several factors that ensure that turnout remains low

including the lack of relevance of local government in the eye of voters, the low calibre of candidates, confusion around voting systems (FPP and STV), and the lack of a contest in many elections. While there was a new initiative to promote voting in elections in the form of a legislative requirement on local authority chief executives to promote the elections, Asquith argues that this further undermined the relevance of local government as it moves that responsibility from elected members to non-elected staff. That remains an assertion and evaluation of the new responsibility given to chief executives remains an area for further research. Asquith concludes by advocating consistent use of STV for all local elections to remove the confusion factor and as a mechanism for promoting more diversity in councils.

In the following chapter Mike Reid (Principal Policy Advisor at Local Government New Zealand) provides an overview of seven surveys carried out by Local Government New Zealand from 2001 to 2022. These surveys provide valuable empirical evidence about the factors that have been identified in international literature, in particular theoretical literature, on voter turnout. The surveys show that, over the 21 years, the reasons given for voting and not voting have not changed greatly despite policy changes and efforts to address non-voting. However, the 2022 survey did differ in one key respect – there was a significant drop in the proportion of respondents saying that lack of information about candidates and policies was a factor in non-voting. This is something that certainly warrants further research as it may indicate where helpful interventions might be made to improve voter turnout. The 2022 survey responses also indicated that, contrary to some media commentary, postal voting is not an impediment to voting. Both these chapters provide important signposts to further research and analysis both of 2022 election results and of future election results.

The second section of the book is on **Candidates and Issues**. The first chapter in this section, by Charles Crothers and Mike Reid, takes a deeper diver into Local Government New Zealand's 2022 post-election survey. They focus in particular on the issues that concerned voters. In general, the 2022 survey responses were consistent with other research that shows that voters are most concerned with local roading and water infrastructure which has been a long-standing district council responsibility, and public transport (a regional council responsibility). Voters were less motivated by concerns about arts and culture or local government's te Tiriti responsibilities. Survey respondents ranked housing as their top concern which indicates that local government is seen as being on the 'front line' by voters concerned about housing even though central government largely determines housing policy settings.

The ability of councils to influence housing supply, and affordability in particular, is limited and constrained by national legislation and policy settings, yet it was the most popular of the issues that mattered to voters. This may suggest that voters believe that councils have more authority in this space than is the case. It is certainly not a surprise, however, that most respondents who identified housing and housing affordability were those most likely to be negatively affected by the cost of housing, such as younger voters. More surprisingly, perhaps, climate change was only the fifth highest issue that respondents cared about: it perhaps may have received more prominence had the survey been distributed after the Auckland floods and Cyclone Gabrielle. It would be helpful to know more about respondents' understanding of the relative roles that central and local government play when dealing with climate change issues. As we would expect, student voters were unequivocal in the support they gave to this issue.

Jeffrey McNeill conducts a timely exploration of the democratic legitimacy of regional councils utilising election results and other information about candidates in the eleven regions that have councils with solely regional functions (i.e., excluding the regions that have unitary councils). This is timely as these councils have now existed for more than thirty years and with proposals in the Future for Local Government reform to facilitate structural change it is important to consider the legitimacy

of existing structures. Interestingly, using several measures of democratic health associated with the 2022 elections, McNeill finds that these regional councils demonstrate degrees of legitimacy that could be considerably enhanced.

Danielle Lucas examines the pressing issue of Māori representation which continues to be far from proportional. While proportional representation is clearly needed, she notes that this is not the same as partnership. She demonstrates that statutory mechanisms introduced in 2002 for proportional representation, namely optional Māori Wards and Constituencies are profoundly flawed. They can be modified to produce better outcomes and indeed need to be to give effect to tikanga, te Tiriti, and both domestic and international law.

The third section of the book, **Representing Who**, contains papers that look at the implications for those who are represented. Grant Duncan's chapter highlights the diminishing democratic quality of Auckland Council elections. Seán Mahoney examines the phenomenon of 'dual candidacy' whereby candidates can stand for election in more than one contest, typically mayoralty and councillor. In 2022 a significant number of successful mayoralty candidates were dual candidates. While the extent to which dual candidacy occurs may be related to the number of vacant mayoral positions, having some baseline data and investigating trends is an important contribution to local elections research.

Finally, Webster, McLean and Crothers examine the political agendas of candidates drawing on data from a post-election survey of candidates in the 2019 local elections in the various councils in New Zealand's seven most populous regions. Candidates were asked to indicate where they positioned themselves on the left-right political spectrum. Of those who did respond about 40% positioned themselves in the centre. Significantly, thirteen per cent of respondents did not indicate a political position. Diving a little deeper to find out candidates' policy priorities, the survey revealed that the top three policy areas were related to infrastructure and environment. Candidates' gender, ethnicity and political orientation influenced the agendas they pursued. Research on candidates' policy agendas is valuable given the limitations of the 150-word candidate profile statements that is optional under the Local Electoral Act. Several cross-cutting themes, addressed by several authors who have explored them with differing emphasis, are evident. Many contributions address the challenge of low voter turnout, but also the adoption of Māori wards. They also address the challenges of representation and how the current configuration benefits some groups over others.

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Part 1

Perspectives

2. False dawn or false hope? An assessment of the 2022 local elections

Andy Asquith

The biggest surprise about the outcome of the 2022 triennial local government elections is that anyone should be surprised. Once again only 40% of electors turned out to vote, a result generally claimed to indicate a lack of citizen engagement with their local governments. The disappointing turnout is not quite an example of repeat failure, but it comes close as the same processes from previous elections were repeated with somewhat similar outcomes despite intentions to increase turnout. The minor reforms enacted after the 2019 electoral round were in part meant to turn round the record levels of electoral apathy.

What was all the more disconcerting about the 2022 local elections is that over and above the position identified above, three significant issues involving the scope and scale of local government had had significant media coverage over at least the previous two years. As such, no one could argue that local government was not 'front and centre' in terms of media attention across New Zealand as the Resource Management Act, the Future for Local Government review and the Three Waters reforms all received (and indeed continue to attract) considerable media attention. Whilst it is not the place here to rehash these issues, it is at least worthwhile assessing how the issue of reform of the Three Waters had a direct negative impact upon local government, and directly on the perception amongst the general population of local government – ultimately presenting itself in disinterested voters not engaging in the electoral process.

However, it is useful to put the latest election turnout within the context of that of the last eight triennial local government elections (Table 1).

TABLE 1: VOTER TURNOUT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Year	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022
Turnout	48%	46%	44%	49%	41%	42%	41%	40%

Source: Department of Internal Affairs (2010, 2013); Local Government New Zealand (2019); Vote 2022 (2023).

What we can see is a general pattern of gradual decline in voter participation over the last 20 years, with the aberration of 2010 which coincided with the creation of the so-called 'super-city' in Auckland. The accompanying media attention to the creation of a single unitary council for Auckland grasped the imagination of Aucklanders, who given their number propelled national turnout to within touching distance of 50%. However, this was clearly due to the 'novelty' of the election for the new council. Since 2010 elections to the Auckland mayoralty, the one election to ignite public interest, have been non-events, lacking either contestability or candidates to inspire the citizenry.

However, such dispiriting figures need to be set against the context that in an international sense local government in New Zealand stands in an arguably enviable position. Not only does local government in effect enjoy the power of general competence – far removed from the straitjacket of ultra vires, but local councils also have financial autonomy. Consequently, local councils are responsible for raising *in excess* of 80% of their expenditure locally from rates and charges (Asquith, 2012). This compares favourably with the UK for instance, where local councils *receive* 80% of their income from central government in the form of ring-fenced grants – thus hampering considerably the idea of 'local voice, local choice' upon which local government is found. Rather, I argue here that lack of voter engagement is symptomatic of a failure by local government to promote its relevance to its citizens so that they want to engage with their councils.

Relevance

In the first instance, local government has failed to promote its relevance to its citizens. Broadly, although the four well-beings (social, economic, environmental and cultural) under the Local Government Act (2002) in effect empower local government with the power of general competence (Asquith, 2016; Reid, 2018), we hear very little about this from many local government leaders. Hence, when the central government in Wellington announced it was stripping away responsibility for water infrastructure from local government, the overwhelming narrative from many mayors and councillors was essentially that 'without water we are nothing'. Even if one takes the view that local government has failed to invest in water infrastructure for three decades and central government had to do something, the 'we are nothing' argument ignores the opportunity and potential offered by the four well-beings. There was no better exemplar of this than the speech made by the CEO of Hutt City Council, Jo Miller at the launch of Future for Local Government Review in 2021. At this event, Miller spoke with passion about the challenges facing New Zealand society, and the role which local councils ought to be pursuing to meet these challenges (Radio New Zealand, 2021). More widely, the 'localism' campaign of Local Government New Zealand has sought to enhance the status of local councils (Reid, 2018; 2021).

If voters heard leaders of institutions already perceived as having little relevance decrying the fact that they were about to become even more irrelevant this may have discouraged voting. It is possible that voters would find it even harder to engage with institutions clearly (in the words of some of those involved) in terminal decline. The lack of vision which this illustrates is highlighted by both McNeill and Asquith (2022) and Stoney et al. (2023) who highlighted the somewhat reactive, almost passive policy-taking role of New Zealand local government during the Covid-19 pandemic. This again, in the eyes of the general population, was indicative of institutions of little or no relevance to their daily lives. In contrast, central government – rightly or wrongly – was arguably perceived as very proactive and relevant and reflected in record voter turnout in the 2020 general election.

Political competence

The competence of politicians has been brought into question, too. The endeavours of several high-profile mayors and councillors during the 2019-2022 electoral term did little to endear local government in the eyes of the voting population. For example, very early into the council term of office, the newly elected mayor of Tauranga called for the council to be suspended. Eventually, the Department of Internal Affairs appointed commissioners to run the organisation. In Invercargill, a dysfunctional council became increasingly estranged from its high-profile mayor, Tim Shadbolt, and in Wellington a report highly critical of council governance served to ensure Andy Foster became a one term mayor. Whilst these were the headline grabbing examples of poor governance, other examples generated news media coverage and continue to do so. The dysfunctional relationships

between mayor and councillors and the council executives within both Auckland Council and Gore District Council reinforce poor public opinion about local government elected members.

Promoting participation

The 2022 elections, too, were significant for another reason. Following the poor turnout in 2019, the responsibility for promoting both local democracy and local elections was specifically given to local government chief executives. Along with colleagues at the time, I argued that this was an error on the part of the Department of Internal Affairs (Asquith, Cardow and Webster, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c). The changes not only excluded both mayors and councillors from promoting local democracy – those with a genuine interest and stake in local democracy, but it gave responsibility to a group of individuals who may have most to benefit from weakened democratic engagement, the chief executives. While many chief executives in local government understand and support the ideas of local democracy, engagement and citizen participation, others appear to have a poor commitment to these ideals. They seemingly regard their time in local government as another step on the managerial ladder where they can demonstrate their 'competence' through finding cost savings and efficiencies. Promotion of ideas which they perceive to undermine their career aspirations may not be a priority for them.

Satisfaction and disinterest

Whilst both frustrating and entertaining, low turnout in local elections traditionally has been rationalised as somehow signifying 'satisfaction' on the part of voters. Had they been dissatisfied, according to this argument, then people would have voted to change the political landscape of their council. For example, Grant Smith, the newly re-elected mayor of Palmerston North in 2019 in an interview with a local newspaper was reported as saying 'the council had done a reasonably good job and that was reflected in voter turnout' (Manawatu Guardian, 2019). Galbraith (2017) counters this argument by asserting that people engage in the democratic process because they are satisfied with what the politicians are offering.

The key reasons for voter non-participation were laid out by Asquith, Webster and Cardow (2021). It is useful to examine these arguments to ascertain the extent to which the conditions identified have been still held firm in the 2022 local electoral round: that local government lacks both meaning and there is a failure to articulate its purpose. Hence, it is argued that citizens simply do not have access to either information about local government or those standing for election. It is still a matter of concern, that the official candidate booklet that remains the prime source for electors to learn about their aspiring representatives' limits candidates to a 150-word biography. Several years ago, research was undertaken that involved analysis of the biographies of candidates from three electoral rounds to test this hypothesis (Asquith and Cardow, 2014). The results confirmed the stereotype of the typical candidate as being local to the area, family-orientated and a longstanding member of several local organisations. The brief biographies meant that it was difficult for voters to distinguish between candidates and instead would need to rely on other sources of information, in particular personal knowledge of candidates. This latter point was confirmed by the then prime minister, John Key, who in 2016 said he didn't look at candidate biographies but voted for those who he knew (Asquith, 2015).

In terms of voters supporting candidates with whom they are familiar, the incumbent mayor or councillor has a much better chance of retaining their role than an unknown candidate. Bush (1981) identified this trend in New Zealand, replicating trends identified elsewhere, by Sancton (2018) in Canada and Maginn et al (2017) in Australia. The upshot of this, however, is that our councillors are increasingly not reflecting wider New Zealand Society. The triennial audit of councillors conducted by Local Government New Zealand illustrates that on average, our mayors and councillors are 'male, pale and stale' – the opposite of the richness and diversity in wider New Zealand society. One

unfortunate effect of this is the increasing disengagement of young voters especially in terms of local government. Ellis (2006) has observed that the failure of young adults to develop a voting 'habit' in any of the first three elections they are eligible to vote in, effectively leads to terminal disengagement throughout their adult lives.

Someone to vote for

Elections ought to be about contestability. Yet in every election since 2001, there have been uncontested mayoral elections despite the mayoral election having the potential to ignite interest in local government as evidenced in the 2010 contest in Auckland. The 2022 elections not only had uncontested mayor elections, but an alarming number of council and community board seats were uncontested, with several having no candidates whatsoever. Both Manhire (2022) and Radio New Zealand (2022) reported that once nominations were closed, across the country some 238 people were automatically elected without competition as a result of being the only candidate nominated – including the mayors of Hurunui District Council, Central Otago District Council, Kawerau District Council, Central Hawke's Bay District Council, Hauraki District Council, Hastings District Council and Stratford District Council.

In an article examining party political affiliation, Webster et al. (2019) demonstrated that when candidates have an overt political party affiliation in local government elections, then their chance of electoral success increases significantly. Despite this empirical evidence, the two main political parties rarely field candidates with a political party 'badge'. Whilst there is a tendency for left leaning parties – the Greens and Labour to field candidates overtly – though not nationally, the right leaning parties – notably National and ACT, still field candidates covertly.

Too often, candidates run as 'Independent' when they are far from being independent. To use just a small number of examples from the 2022 successful candidates: the new 'Independent' mayor of Nelson is Nick Smith, the former long-serving National MP and local government minister; another is Ron Mark in Carterton – the former New Zealand First Defence Minister. Indeed, local government has a long history of recycled parliamentarians recycling themselves: Phil Goff, the Auckland mayor (2016-2022) and Lianne Dalziel, Christchurch mayor (2013-2022), both served as cabinet ministers in Helen Clark's 1999-2008 *Labour* government. Perhaps voters might engage more if they knew what the core values of candidates were as demonstrated by their publicly acknowledged party affiliation.

Confusing voting systems

Prior to the abolition of District Health Boards (DHBs) in 2022, most voters were required to understand three very different electoral systems if they were to engage fully in the electoral process. Whilst Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system is used in national general elections, all DHBs were elected using Single Transferable Vote (STV), whilst individual councils were free to choose between STV or First Past the Post – with the majority choosing the latter. Hence, the process of actually voting could be argued to be an inherently complicated process and one not exactly inviting citizen engagement. This complexity was not helped by the lack of education around elections and the different electoral systems in use. The New Zealand Political Studies Association (2018) has long been an ardent supporter of the need for civics education in schools and throughout society more generally. It seems (to me at least) that no-one in Wellington is either interested or bothered about this burning issue given the on-going lack of interest on the part of the current government or the other major political parties. Given the observation of Ellis (2006) noted above, this should be of grave concern.

There is a school of thought which argues that the lack of overt political party activity in local elections directly impacts upon the quality of candidates that voters can choose from. In theory, the political parties can act as a quality assurance mechanism to ensure that only the best candidates are selected to stand for election. This system operates successfully in the UK (c.f. Wilson and Game, 2012). Certainly, some form of prequalification system could be used to root out candidates who have little knowledge or understanding of local government. A better calibre of candidate can also lead to a better quality of debate on the hustings.

The cost of participation in an election campaign in larger councils can be prohibitively expensive. Whilst it is always possible to find candidates elected having spent virtually nothing, candidates in bigger councils – especially the mayoralty or in councils where the ward system has been abandoned for council at-large elections, the cost can be significant. I have stood as a self-funding candidate in New Zealand and as a candidate supported by a national political party in the UK where candidates are not required to contribute financially to their campaign. In the UK a wider range of (vetted) candidates can add to both the calibre of candidates and to the level of debate and can remove the obstacle of candidates often having to self-fund themselves or become beholden to benefactors which can lead to future conflicts of interest if the candidate is successful.

A significant problem facing councillors once they are elected, is they lose profile and presence within the community. As Drage (2008) eloquently details, the governance role of councillors almost always dominates the representative role of councillors. Hence, whilst a councillor may have been elected on a strong community representative platform, they become literally buried in paperwork within the town hall as they are compelled to undertake the governance function. Those who persist in articulating the community representative role soon find themselves as outcasts. The New Zealand model of public management found in local government which has its origins in the Fourth Labour government's public sectors reforms in the late 1980s, and clearly embodied in the 1989 local government reforms, clearly undermines the community representative function of mayors and councillors. The reforms reshape the role of councillor firmly into one similar to that of a non-executive director on a private sector company board – something which mayors and councillors are clearly not.

Where to from here?

We are therefore left with a question: where do we go from here? The optimists amongst us can look at the recently released report on the Future for Local Government which is excellent in both its grasp of the role, scope, scale and *potential* of our councils. Further, the Report offers a range of recommendations which, if implemented, have the potential to fundamentally transform local democracy and local government in New Zealand. The adoption, for instance of the compulsory use of STV by councils is to be encouraged, as is the lowering of the voting age to for local elections to engage young people earlier in the importance of democratic engagement and voting – especially noting the observations of Ellis (2008). Noting the reference to councils being overwhelmingly 'male, pale and stale', it is recognised that STV tends to produce results which better reflect wider society.

The recognition that there is a dire need for greater governance education for mayors and councillors to hopefully avoid the all-too-common occurrence of dysfunctional councils which are never far away from being front page news. The importance of the local government sector to New Zealand through the creation of a dedicated central government department or ministry to facilitate a more effective working relationship is to be welcomed too. In the eyes of the populace, these actions *may* go some way to redress the negative view too many have of local government.

In its entirety, the Future for Local Government report can be seen as a celebration of what local government can and should be. There are however three considerable hurdles which I fear will doom

the report finding and all the benefits contained within. Firstly, the current Hipkins Labour Government seems disinterested in local government per se. Neither the current local government minister nor his opposite number in the National Party have been particularly vociferous in offering support to the Report's recommendations. Without bipartisan support the Report will join the Shand Report into Local Government Finance simply collecting dust on library shelves, another great missed opportunity. Local government too needs to accept and embrace the need for radical change. If it is to survive as an institution rather than being simply a vessel of central government change is a must.

The very idea of change for institutions which are inherently conservative, will be, I fear, is a step too far. Many incumbent mayors and councillors who were elected using 'First Past the Post' will not freely embrace change, for example, to the electoral system. Whilst STV offers the chance to change the composition of our councils for the better – the adage that 'turkeys don't vote for Christmas' applies here! There is a school of thought – to which I would subscribe – that is if the composition of councils reflected their communities better, then their communities might be more likely to engage in the electoral process. As things stand, the 'male, pale and stale' appearance of too many of our councils simply doesn't reflect the rich diversity of New Zealand society. Whilst adopting STV would not be a silver bullet, it would be an important step towards moving us towards councils which better represent the composition of our communities (c.f. Hayward, 2016).

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3. Local elections research and analysis: past, present and (?)future

Christine Cheyne

Introduction

The three years of the last term of local government, 2019-22, were tumultuous times for local government with significant reform legislation progressing in environmental management and water services and a review of the sector (with a draft report delayed until after the October 2022 local election) on top of a pandemic and intensifying climate change-induced weather events. Local elections in 2022 undoubtedly were impacted by these external factors. More so, arguably, than some other triennial local elections, the 2022 elections prompt numerous research questions and projects beyond the long-standing preoccupations with voter turnout and media coverage. The questions I want to pose are: who is asking the questions and who is doing the research? I begin by sketching the background to current local elections research in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is necessarily sketchy as there has been little previous analysis of local elections research, making this a timely survey. Proposals relating to local elections in *He Piki Tūranga, He Piki Kōtuku*, the final report of the Future for Local Government Panel (Future for Local Government Review Panel, 2023), are critically examined. The paper concludes by considering challenges and opportunities for strengthening the impetus and impact of local elections research.

Local government and local elections research 1970-2023

Local government remains an under-researched field within political studies, public policy, public management and urban governance and related scholarly disciplines in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa). However, this neglect by researchers is not unique to this country. In an introduction to a 2021 special issue *Local Government Studies* on comparing local elections and voting in Europe, the guest editors commented that local elections and voting are 'relatively underexplored' and noted that '[a]lthough elections and voting are central in much political science research, our knowledge and understanding of their local patterns and dynamics is surprisingly fragmented and incomplete' (Gendźwiłł & Steyvers, 2021, p. 1). As with most social-science research in this country, university-based researchers contribute a significant proportion of the paltry quantum of research on local government. Their scholarship is supplemented by government (typically, Department of Internal Affairs) and non-government (most notably, Local Government New Zealand) research and analysis. Within this corpus of university, government and other scholarship, local elections are the focus of an even smaller number of researchers. The triennial local elections provide a stimulus for short-lived commentary and analysis by public interest journalists and other media commentators. And they provide the impetus for research by academic researchers, some of which has been disseminated in triennial research symposia held over 30 years or so.

The already small base of researchers on local government and local elections in Aotearoa, is being further undermined as university and other tertiary education organisations struggle with funding shortfalls. Loss of revenue from international students due to border closures during the Covid-19

pandemic, and reduced numbers of returning international students once border restrictions eased along with inflationary pressures in 2022-2023 has further threatened academic research particularly in some social sciences and humanities where many local government researchers are located. Several universities, including AUT, Massey University, University of Waikato, Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Otago announced significant retrenchment in 2022 and 2023. As well as the loss of researchers due to retrenchment, there have been further departures from academic positions and from research roles in central government and in the local government sector with the retirement from paid employment of key people who have undertaken research. Of course, for many researchers both those who have been employed in tertiary education organisations and those employed elsewhere, 'retirement' does not necessarily mean the end of scholarly activity. However, without the research infrastructure provided by universities such as access to electronic books and article databases, research software, and internal funding, research activity is likely to be more limited.

Local government elections have been the focus of specific scholarly attention for many decades. Not only have local elections been the focus of political scientists, most notably Graham Bush at the University of Auckland (Bush, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1981, 1992), they have also drawn attention from researchers in other disciplines. For example, following a tradition of scholarly interest by electoral geographers in the influence of location variables on voting decisions, former University of Canterbury geographer Ron Johnston carried out research on the 1968 and 1971 Christchurch City Council elections (Johnston, 1974) and (with James Forrest, former University of Otago geographer on the 1971 Dunedin City Council elections (Forrest & Johnston, 1973).

From (at least) the mid-1990s NZ Political Studies Association had 'local government roundtables' at the time of the annual conference. These roundtables were for brief presentations on aspects of local government, including local elections. By the early 2000s, stand-alone research dissemination events modelled on the VUW School of Government post-general election seminars were held, the most recent of which was in February 2023 organised by Dr Jeffrey McNeill at Massey University. While there have been other research events such as the 'Representation and Participation in New Zealand's Local Government: Ideas and Practices' seminar hosted by the New Zealand Politics Research Group in 2000 (see Drage, 2002b, p. 10), the local elections research symposia date from 2005, when a day-long event seminar was held in the Railway West Wing at the Pipitea campus of Victoria University of Wellington. Since then, seminars have taken place every three years. See Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: LOCAL ELECTIONS RESEARCH SYMPOSIA **2005-2023**

Election year	Symposium venue and date
2004	Victoria University of Wellington, 18 March 2005
2007	Massey University (Wellington campus), 2 April 2008
2010	Massey University (Wellington campus), 14 Dec 2010
2013	Massey University (Wellington campus), 30 Jan 2014
2016	Massey (Wellington campus), 16 Feb 2017
2019	University of Canterbury[1]
2022	Massey University (online), 13 February 2023

[1]Cancelled because of Covid-19 pandemic. Was to take place adjacent to annual New Zealand Political Studies Association conference.

Local government researchers are located in range of organisations including:

- public TEOs (this includes academic kaimahi on continuing and fixed term contracts, and postgraduate researchers)
- core public service government departments
- Ko Tātou LGNZ, Taituarā

- Independent crown entities such as the Local Government Commission, Electoral Commission and Productivity Commission
- independent inquiries
- consultants
- journalists.

A few are self-employed.

Local government studies is a sub-discipline of political science/studies but teaching of this subject has been uneven across political science/studies departments and has changed (mostly diminished) over time. However, local government teaching and research is central to some other subjects including public sector management, public finance, law, political communication, environmental (including regional and urban) planning and management, Māori/indigenous studies, urban geography/sociology and social policy. Indeed, contributors to local elections research have been drawn from all these academic disciplines. Those employed as academics in these teaching areas have been small in number, but their research output has been supplemented by that of postgraduate researchers undertaking master's and doctoral theses. Local elections research has even been the focus of a scholar with a PhD in French History (Carlton, 2014).

When looking at the range of contributors at the six local elections research symposia, a diversity of institutional loci and disciplines is reflected in the contributors. Although mostly from Wellington, where symposia took place, participants also came from a diversity of organisations including media and community organisations. See Box for an example of a local elections research symposium programme.

2013 Local Elections Research Symposium Future Directions for Local Elections Thursday 30 January 2014	
Presenter	**Paper Title**
Janine Hayward *University of Otago*	Electoral reform and local government
Mike Reid *Local Government New Zealand*	Understanding turnout: how do we explain turnout in NZ elections and what are the prospects for the future?
Andy Asquith and Andrew Cardow *Massey University*	Was Jim Hacker right after all?
Jean Drage *Christchurch political scientist*	Local Elections: The Impact that Candidates and Local Issues have on Voter Turnout
Christine Cheyne *Massey University*	Policy responses to low voter turnout in local elections: what can – and will anything - be done?
Karen Webster *AUT*	Super City super deflated: Voter turnout and elected member turnover
Dean Knight *Victoria University of Wellington*	Rhetoric or Reality? Recasting Local Government's Purpose and Role

Local elections research encompasses a broad array of concerns including:

- Electoral systems – STV, FPP
- Voting methods/technology
- Representation reviews, wards
- Voter awareness/understanding/ knowledge
- Mayoralty contests
- Impact of council type (unitary, regional, district, Auckland)
- Media coverage (or lack of)

- Individual contests (or lack of)
- Voting patterns, election results
- Candidate demographics – age, gender, ethnicity
- Voter turnout – youth, Māori, Pacific, Asian, etc.
- Voting age
- Rolls – ratepayer and resident

While the paucity of academic researchers has meant that the benefits of critical mass have not been available, the thin and wide spread of researchers across teaching subjects has encouraged interdisciplinary connections between researchers and indeed some local elections scholars have moved between disciplines. In some cases, connections also extend to collaboration in research and publications albeit some collaboration remains within a tertiary education organisation (see, for example, Asquith et al., 2021; Webster & Crothers, 2022).

In summary, prior to the 1990s, research on local elections was sparse and the number of researchers was small reflecting the lack of central government capability, sector capability, limited interest from academic researchers and the even more limited number of academic programmes on local government. Two seminal books on local government, the first in 1980 and a new edition in 1995 by Professor Graham Bush at University of Auckland provided much needed impetus for local government (including local elections) research (Bush, 1980, 1995).

Building on Bush's enormous corpus of local elections research, political scientist Jean Drage edited a special issue of the journal Political Science in 1999 – which also included a key article on local elections by Bush (Bush, 1999) – and co-edited three further local government texts which included chapters addressing numerous aspects of local elections (Drage, 2002a; Drage & Cheyne, 2016; Drage et al., 2011). Local elections research has been covered in an introductory political studies text (Hayward, 2015). However, with only just one chapter on local government and one on local elections in the 6th edition and just one chapter on local government more broadly in the 7th edition (Hayward et al., 2021), there is disproportionately little attention given to local elections in what are intended to be comprehensive overviews of Aotearoa's political system.

Considerably supplementing academic research, Local Government New Zealand has undertaken numerous studies of local elections candidates, voting patterns and other aspects (see, for example, Local Government New Zealand, 2017, 2020). Much of this work has been led by Mike Reid who has held joint posts in the local government peak body (since 1996) and academia but who has also published throughout his career (see, for example, Reid, 2016, 2019). Arguably, he fills the very big shoes vacated by Professor Graham Bush.

The Department of Internal Affairs has supported research on local elections through the publication of local authority election statistics. Outside of this core public service (and some small-scale research undertaken by the Local Government Commission) other central government funding that might be available for local elections research would be funding distributed through contestable funds administered by government research funding bodies. In the 1990s, a substantial investment was made by the then Public Good Science Fund in the New Zealand Political Change project which over seven years from mid-1995 investigated the impact of the change to the MMP electoral system in 1996 (Boston et al., 2000). This funding for research on change to the electoral system for Parliamentary elections is in stark contrast to the funding for research changes to the electoral system in local government. Despite ongoing concerns about voter turnout in local elections and the need for equitable Māori representation at all levels of government, there has been no public funding for local elections research.

In addition, to the research by the organisations discussed in this section, it is also worth noting that valuable local elections analysis has been provided by some journalists, sometimes with funding from public interest journalism. In particular, there has been in-depth or at least longform analysis by news media such as Stuff, RNZ and The Spinoff as part of local elections coverage.

He Piki Tūranga, He Piki Kōtuku – Review of Future for Local Government

The importance of local elections research is underscored in the final report of the Review of Future for Local Government Panel released in June 2023. The panel had been established in April 2021 by the then Minister of Local Government Nanaia Mahuta at the request of the local government sector. Its task was to examine how New Zealand's system of local democracy needed to evolve over the next three decades. It was emphasised by the Minister that 'now more than ever, local governance participation and democracy needed to be strengthened' (Mahuta, 2021). It was noted that the review was happening more than 30 years since the last major review of local government in 2000-2001.

That review had culminated in three new statutes, including the Local Electoral Act 2001. Clearly, the electoral system is central to the wider framework of local government. Likewise, in the 2023 review, which was intended to 'focus on how our system of local democracy needs to evolve over the next 30 years' (Mahuta, 2021), local elections are a major focus of the review panel's deliberations and recommendations. In the three decades since the 2000-2001 review, Aotearoa's population (in particular, its demographic diversity) and economy had changed significantly with increasing globalisation. At the same time, different understandings and practices were increasingly evident in Crown-Māori relations and the review was described by the Minister to offer 'an important opportunity to explore how we can embody the Treaty partnership through the role and representation of iwi/Māori in local government' (Mahuta, 2021). The review took place against a backdrop of major reforms to water services management and resource management which would bring significant change to local government's existing roles and functions which were already being tested by climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, technological change and demographic change.

The final report of the Review of the Future for Local Government Panel in June 2023 has one main recommendation around local elections:

> 11. Enhance local democracy in order to increase access and representation by:
> - providing for a 4-year local electoral term
> - adopting ranked voting (also known as single transferrable vote or STV) as nationwide method for local elections
> - lowering the threshold for the establishment of Māori wards enabling Te Tiriti-based appointments to councils
> - lowering the voting age for local elections to 16 (Future for Local Government Review Panel, 2023, p. 21).

This recommendation is situated in the context of a chapter titled 'Replenishing local democracy' and preceded by a chapter that stresses the need for local government to embrace 'Te Tiriti and te ao Māori'. Together these chapters flag the need for a major overhaul of arrangements for representation and participation in local government. Local elections researchers have for some time now highlighted the need for changes encompassed in recommendation 11. As well, they have sought more inclusive and deliberative democratic processes (see, for example, Cheyne, 2016).

It is clear, too, that Te Tiriti partnership is unlikely to be delivered through existing local government structures. The panel recognises that

> Local government is a Te Tiriti partner and the system needs to change to honour and give effect to Tiriti-based partnerships between local government and Māori. Local government must embody a more culturally specific exercise of kāwanatanga, where

te ao Māori, mātauranga Māori, and tikanga are woven into its fabric (Future for Local Government Review Panel, 2023, p. 10).

Further, it asserts,

To give effect to local government's responsibilities, obligations, and opportunities as a Te Tiriti partner, it must embrace and support iwi and hapū to exercise rangatiratanga (Future for Local Government Review Panel, 2023, p. 72).

To progress Te Tiriti partnership, the Panel proposes that councils be required to develop 'partnership frameworks' with hapū/iwi and Māori to give effect to Te Tiriti provisions. In so doing, this will mean that new governance arrangements are created. and complement those that already exist. Local elections researchers may therefore need to investigate the nature of new frameworks for representation and decision-making, and of accountability of representatives to citizens.

While political realities, most observably the 14 October 2023 general election, will determine central government's response (delayed by the election) there is reason to think that there might be more to emerge from the review than just abstract 'futures thinking'. Generally, responses to *He Piki Tūranga, He Piki Kōtuku* from many commentators have been positive. Regardless of whether the report recommendations in their entirety are implemented, individual recommendations can be adopted and current and future local elections researchers should examine the merits of these recommendations, and implementation issues. Already, the Hipkins-led Labour Government has moved to implement the recommendation to lower the voting age to 16 for local elections with the introduction of the Electoral (Lowering Voting Age for Local Elections and Polls) Legislation Bill in August 2023. While this is largely symbolic, as the Bill cannot pass before the election, the Bill's introduction nevertheless will galvanise its supporters who appear to come from across the political spectrum. The Green Party supports lowering the voting age to 16 and David Seymour has also indicated support from ACT.

Notwithstanding pessimism in some quarters (including in contributions to this book) about central government's response, the local government sector is motivated to get traction on (some of) the reform agenda. They have not just the usual self-interest, but 'skin in the game' as the FfLG review was prompted by Local Government New Zealand. Therefore, the sector is now responding to the Minister's exhortation to reach consensus within the sector prior to the general election so if a Labour government is re-elected, reform can be progressed following the election. As Milne (2023) points out, although some recommendations can easily be green-lighted, there is a challenge with gaining consensus within the sector, with three councils having pulled out of Local Government New Zealand this year and others may follow.

Local elections research going forward: challenges and opportunities

Challenges for future local elections research include the small number of academic and other researchers who have actively disseminated research at triennial symposia and/or published research findings. Having regular (triennial) local elections research symposia as stand-alone events not connected to any one disciplinary body contributed to building a network of researchers from across several disciplines and organisations. However, there is a lack of demographic diversity (especially age and ethnicity) in the small complement of local elections researchers. Organisational change and restructuring in tertiary education are likely to further reduce the numbers engaged in local elections research. The lack of funding and the fragmented research activity (with researchers thinly spread across public tertiary education organisations, government departments, and the local government sector) means that local elections research has been patchy.

With the relatively small number of local government and local elections researchers it is not surprising that, during the past two decades at least, some paper presenters have often contributed to several symposia. The programme for the most recent (February 2023) symposium featured several

of the same presenters and was again organised by a Massey University researcher. With presenters from symposia held nearly two decades ago being that much older, and in several cases close to retiring, it is critical to ensure that early and mid-career researchers being encouraged to undertake local elections research. However, without job security and research funding the prospects of new and emerging researchers becoming active in this field of research are slim.

With retrenchment, retirements, redeployment and other factors leading to losses of long-standing contributors to local elections research, the question of how local elections research can be sustained and become reinvigorated in the short-term and long-term urgently needs to be addressed.

Given the few degrees of separation that is found between people from, and/or living and working in, Aotearoa New Zealand (Davidson, 2015) there is the potential for in-group bias which could result in research agendas being skewed. At the same time, the few degrees of separation should also ensure that researchers can readily connect with one another. Factors that militate against this include heavy academic workload, disciplinary silos, and lack of funding for networking and travel. Contributions from early career researchers are critical but the precarity of much academic employment is exacerbated for this group (Simpson et al., 2022). The existing (remaining!) research community needs to proactively foster involvement in research projects, networks, publications and research dissemination events. In particular, the involvement of Māori and Pacific researchers in local elections research needs to be actively sought as the outcomes of local elections have particular salience for the ethnic populations to which they below. For Māori as tangata whenua the very structures of local government may lack resonance. Therefore, local elections research is connected to much bigger and arguably more pressing questions about te Tiriti-based forms of local government. Teles (2023, p. 8) notes that 'the (sub)field of local electoral studies, for a long time under-researched, still has a lot to offer, not only for those interested in local government studies, but also for the wider political science community.

Despite challenges facing current and future local elections research there are some developments and factors that provide encouragement. The cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of local elections research ensures that research is not dependent on the fortunes of any one academic discipline. There is and has been a collaborative, inclusive ethos across the 'research-scape' with research symposia forging academic, professional, political and community research connections. The broader definition of research now adopted for the Performance Based Research Fund 2026 Quality Evaluation and the focus on research impact arguably should encourage and reward much-needed local elections research in tertiary education organisations is rewarded.

Methodological diversity has characterised local elections research but, as noted by Nicholls (2017) the theoretical and comparative elements of existing local government research more broadly need strengthening. When looking at voter turnout research this comment is particularly salient as reference to theoretical explanations is largely absent despite the significant body of literature over several decades since rational choice explanation emerged (Blais 2000; 2006). More explicitly theoretically-informed research is important because as 'unmediated access to the world is a chimera and particular lenses are always in place when scholars attempt to explore and understand a specific phenomenon' (Teles, 2023, p. 6). However, it is worth noting that theoretical frameworks have been predominantly developed in particular geographical contexts with their specific local government institutional arrangements and often need to be adapted if they are to be relevant to other historical, cultural and political settings.

Research symposia held in-person from 2005 to 2017 attracted a wide range of attendees not just academic and public sector researchers. Candidates, elected members, staff from councils and other local government sector bodies and members of the community were all able to attend. Registration fees, if any, were very low compared with academic conferences. The online event in 2023 had a

smaller attendance perhaps due to limited publicity. (Although it coincided with the arrival of Cyclone Gabrielle numbers attending the 2023 symposium were not affected by that event.) Going forward, further research symposia and publications from them will be important for bringing together local elections researchers and other stakeholders. Digital technologies can be utilised to allow future symposia to have a hybrid format to maximise both in-person and online participation.

As Teles (2023, p. 8) notes, local electoral studies has value for the wider political science community. It is therefore important to nurture local elections research in New Zealand, especially research that contributes to theoretical and comparative scholarship. The editors of the 2021 special issue of *Local Government Studies* referred to earlier in this chapter highlighted a number of directions for further research which indicate that lacunae in local elections research are not unique to New Zealand. Among other things, they identify a need for granular data to 'investigate the interplay between micro-, meso- and macro- explanations (to fully acknowledge and balance individual as well as aggregate patterns and dynamics of local elections and voting)', cross-national studies on the role of jurisdiction size and factors that moderate the influence of size and – what they call the 'micro-geography' of local elections – a focus on variations in electoral behaviour across councils (Gendźwiłł & Steyvers, 2021).

Additionally, the Future for Local Government Review recommendations regardless of central and local government sector action on them, provide fresh impetus for local elections research. Continuing societal pressures for electoral reform will prompt debate and research not just about elections but about the wider structures and processes of representation and participation, central-local relations, constitutional status of local government and public understanding of local government, to which elections are inextricably linked.

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4.   What post-election surveys tell us about the reasons people vote or not

Mike Reid

Ever since the then Minister of Local Government, the Hon Sandra Lee, mused about the introduction of mandatory voting after concerns were raised about low turnout in the 2001 local elections, the apparent lack of voter interest has become an ongoing narrative to be replayed every three years as councils start to go to the polls. Headlines like 'Why do so few people vote in local elections', (Vitz, 2022) have become typical across all forms of media. Giving added weight to these expressions of concern are the select committee inquiries into the running of local elections that have become the norm since 2004, inquiries that, while supposedly focused on the technical operation of local elections, almost always becomes a debate on how to encourage more people to vote.

This apparent disinterest in local democracy has also generated an increasing amount of local research, resulting, in the last decade alone, a number academic papers looking at local elections and turnout (see Asquith et al., 2021; Reid, 2016; Webster & Crothers, 2022). In addition, non-academic organisations, like the Local Government Commission, LGNZ, and the Auckland Council, have also undertaken or commissioned, surveys to better understand their motivations and seek information that might improve their election promotion campaigns and increase turnout. Critical to much of this research have been surveys of voters and non-voters.

Background and scope

LGNZ commissioned its first post-election election survey in 2001, with additional surveys undertaken in 2004, 2016[1] and 2022. The Local Government Commission (LGC), as part of its brief to review the effectiveness of the LGA 2002, undertook a post-election survey in 2007. In addition, surveys of voters and non-voters have also been undertaken in Auckland since 2010 by Auckland Council and Charles Crothers at AUT (2016). More recently, the Stuff media group surveyed voters and non-voters immediately after the 2022 elections.

Post-election surveys are surveys of representative samples of adult New Zealanders who voted or didn't vote at a local election.[2] The scope of these surveys tends to be built around several core questions, such as:

- Awareness of the elections
- Reasons for voting or not voting

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[1] The 2016 survey was made possible with support from the Institute for Governance and Policy Studies.
[2] Post-election surveys have been undertaken in 2001, 2004, 2016, 2022 by LGNZ and in 2007 by the LGC. In addition, Auckland Council has undertaken several post-election surveys since 2010 and Charles Crothers (AUT) surveyed voters in Auckland to assess motives for voting after the 2016 election.

- Perception of the voting experience
- How easy it was to find information about the election.

The first surveys (2001 and 2004) were surveys of a representative sample of cities and districts, rather than surveys using a national sample, as has been the case since the LGC's survey in 2007. While the overall results of the 2001 and 2004 surveys were consistent with the national findings of later surveys, they did allow some sub-national analysis and comparisons to occur, for example[3]:

- In the 2001 elections twice as many respondents from Rotorua District (20 per cent) mentioned that they voted because it was their democratic duty than respondents in Waikato District (10 per cent) with Wellington City respondents the second highest (14 per cent)
- When asked if they had received their voting papers 19 per cent of Wellington respondents stated no, compared to only 8 per cent in Rotorua
- In 2004, when asked why they voted, 22 per cent of respondents answered that it was to 'get the right people for the job', except in Waimate District, where this answer was supported by 31 per cent of respondents
- When asked, in 2004, whether they preferred STV to FPP, 56 per cent of Wellington voters agreed, compared to 24 per cent of voters in Waimate
- In 2001 Masterton stood out for the fact that virtually no respondents admitted to being 'strongly influenced by advertising campaigns' when deciding whether and how to vote
- Coincidentally, only 5 per cent of Masterton residents stated that their main reason for not voting was a lack of knowledge about candidates, compared to 25 per cent in Wellington and Rotorua District.

Turnout

Most post-election surveys begin by asking respondents whether they voted or not. And in most cases, with the notable exception of the 2004 survey (and the Stuff survey), respondents tend to vote at a much higher rate than the general population. Actual turnout numbers (not the average of councils) are shown in Figure 1.
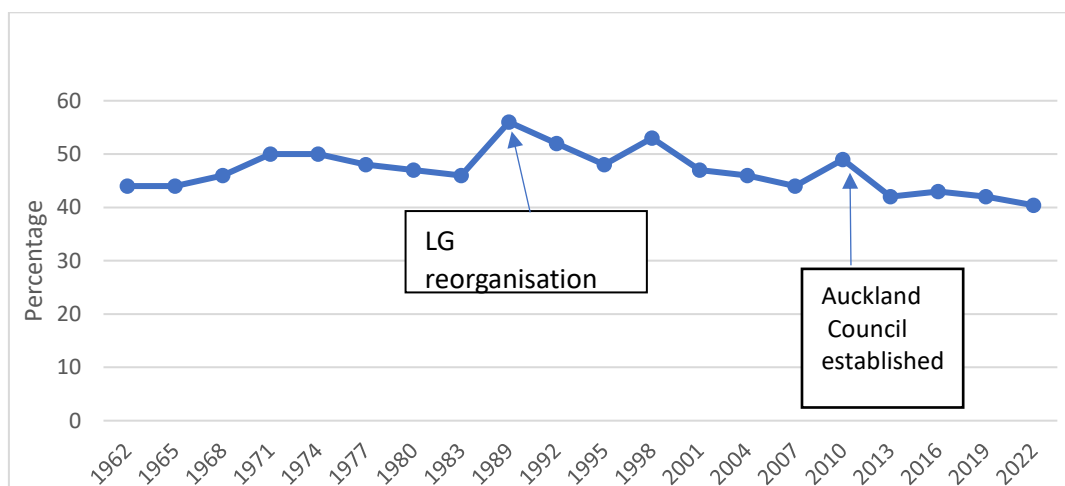

FIGURE 1: LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION TOTAL TURNOUT 1962-2022 (SOURCE: LGNZ)

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[3] In 2001 surveys were undertaken in Christchurch City, Wellington City, Masterton District, Waikato District and Rotorua District.

There are likely to be two main reasons for surveys indicating a higher turnout than occurred. The first is the possibility that the sample is biased. This occurs when the people asked to fill respond to the surveys are people who are more likely to vote, such as a middle-class bias. The second reason concerns the nature of the question. In his preface to the 2001 post-election survey 'To Vote or not to Vote', Graham Bush, former professor of Political Studies, Auckland University, suggests 'that when confronted directly, some non-voting respondents had a twinge of conscience about having abstained and told white lies to the interviewer' (LGNZ, 2001 p. ii). Put somewhat differently, it is possible that when asked if they voted some non-voters may have experienced a moment of uncertainty about whether voting is mandatory or not (as is the case in most Australian elections). In contrast, the survey undertaken by Stuff immediately after the elections, with a much larger sample, produced the accurate turnout number.[4]

Who voted

The format of the surveys and the size of the sample limits the ability to undertake in depth analysis at both a sub national and demographic level, except for the first two surveys which were surveys of a sample of districts and cities. The 2001 post-election survey, for example, showed the following variations:

- The turnout rate in Masterton District was 78 per cent, well ahead of the other districts and cities
- At 58 per cent, Waikato District respondents had the lowest turnout rate.

Later surveys were weighted to enable turnout to be identified at the level of the major ethnic groups, but without the ability to look at turnout by area. One exception was the Local Government Commission's (LGC) surveys, undertaken after the 2007 elections, which were both a post-election survey as well as a survey of attitudes towards local government. Those surveys found no significant association between voting behaviour and income and, interestingly, found that those people living with a spouse or partner were more likely to vote (49%) than those living without – a finding probably impacted by the fact that younger people are less likely to vote and less likely to have a partner or spouse.

Turnout by age 2001 and 2016

Both the 2001 and 2016 data show a similar corelation between age and turnout, with older citizens more likely vote than younger, noting that turnout had a convex shape in 2001, with a proportionally lower turnout amongst younger and older voters, the most recent surveys show more of a concave shape, with turnout of younger people increasing as a proportion of the whole.

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[4] More than 4500 eligible voters were surveyed over a period of three days between October 12-15; of those surveyed, 40% voted, leaving 60% who did not.
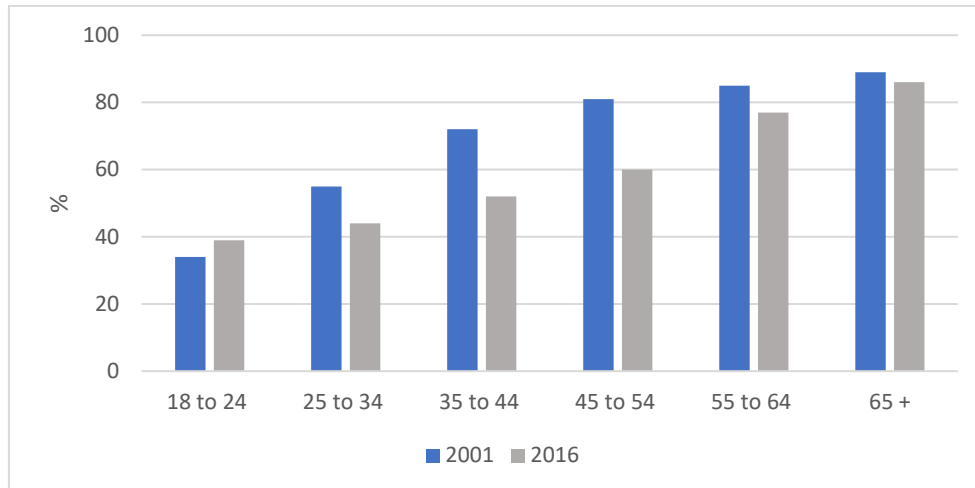
FIGURE 2: TOTAL TURNOUT BY AGE 2001 AND 2016

Turnout by ethnicity

Noting the qualifications discussed above (potential sample bias and tendency) the turnout rates for the 2022 local elections follow a similar pattern to previous years, with Pākehā New Zealanders having the highest voter turnout rate followed by Māori, see Figure 3. Unfortunately, the methodologies use in the earliest surveys often did not allow a breakdown of results by ethnicity due to small sample size and lack of weighting.
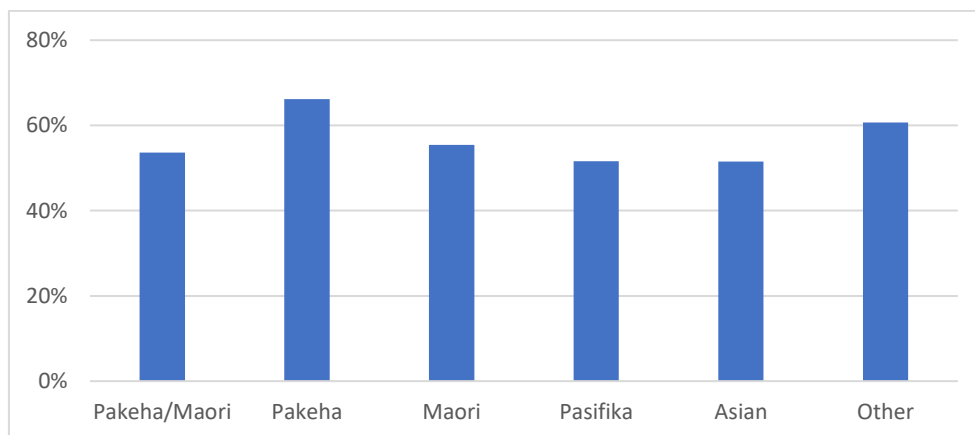
FIGURE 3: 2022 VOTERS BY ETHNICITY

Top reasons for not voting 2001 – 2022

The reasons why people choose not to vote are perhaps the most intensively examined findings of each survey, as the motivation for commissioning the surveys is essentially to reduce barriers to voting. Depressingly, given the intent of the surveys, the factors identified as obstacles to voting have not changed significantly since 2001, particularly the number of respondents who describe their reason for not voting as due to a lack of information on candidates or their policies – factors that should be able to be addressed through various forms of policy intervention. (That they didn't know enough about the candidates was also given as the most common reason why people did not vote (36%) in the Stuff survey. In addition, 23% of those who did not vote saying they did not receive their voting pack.) See Table 1.

Reasons given	2001	2004	2007	2016	2022
Not enough information about candidates	31	29	30	32	23
Lack of interest	14	18	19	16	18
Too busy/other commitments	14	12	17	9	13
Forgot/missed deadline	12	10	14	14	3

Some responses have remained relatively similar over the last two decades while others have varied. For example:

- Not receiving voting papers was given as a reason for not voting by 7% of respondents in 2001, 5% in 2007, and 9% in 2022
- The percentage of respondents who stated they didn't vote because their vote would not make a difference has consistently been around 5% since surveys began
- The percentage of respondents who stated that there were no candidates that shared their views varied from 6% in 2001, 15% in 2007 and 6% in 2022.

A new question added to the 2022 survey asked non-voters whether they would have voted if there had been a different voting method, 52% of non-voters replied in the affirmative. This was reinforced by the Stuff survey which found Aucklanders, and those aged 18-44, agreed that online voting would get more people voting. Interestingly, Stuff also found that more than two-thirds (69%) of respondents who didn't vote later regretted their decision.

Top reasons for voting

For agencies committed to strengthening our system of local democracy, it is not enough to know why people said they didn't vote, it's also helpful to understand the factors that make a person want to vote. Do people vote out of a sense of duty, out of a sense of affection for the community, town or city, or because they have a grievance? Understanding the reasons for voting should help policy makers and legislators when the time comes to redesign our democratic institutions so that they are better able to fulfil voters' expectations.

When asked why they voted one reason given by respondents, beginning in 2001, was the importance of fulfilling their democratic duty as citizens. There has also been an increase in the number of respondents who voted because they wanted to have a say, a reason associated with the rights that accrue to citizenship, rather than duty. These finding were echoed by the 2022 Stuff survey of voters and non-voters which found more than two-thirds of those who voted said they saw it as a civic duty, while about half said it was an opportunity to make a difference in their region. Interestingly, the LGC's 2007 survey found that women voters were more likely to say that it was 'important to vote' than men, but men were more likely to say they voted because it was a democratic 'right'. Auckland voters gave a different ranking. The Auckland Council's 2016 survey of voters found that the most frequently ranked reason for voting was 'to have my say' (27 per cent). See Table 2.

Reasons given	2001	2004	2007	2016	2022
Voting as a democratic duty or right	26	44	41	45	55
To have a say	17	22	17	44	57
I could not complain if I had not voted	7	20	14	38	N/A*
Concerns about specific issues	0	0	0	21	19

* At time of writing this result had not yet been calculated for the 2022 survey.

The 2022 survey asked voters about the issue which they cared most about. It was not entirely surprising that the group that cared more about climate change than any other demographic group was students, at 62.5 per cent. Also not surprising was the makeup of the group that cared most about public facilities, such as parks, community centres and libraries. This group consisted of those people more likely to make use of them, namely women, younger rather than older voters, and Pakeha/Māori.

Suggestions for increasing turnout

The 2022 LGNZ survey included an additional question asking respondents for suggestions on how to increase turnout in the future. The most popular suggestion was to provide more information about the actual role that councils play in their communities. It is a suggestion that aligns well with international research that points to a lack of awareness about the role and importance of local government as a reason for low turnout. It is also consistent with the argument an important driver of turnout is salience, that is, if people believe that the salience of their local council is high they are more likely to make the effort to find out information about candidates and vote (Asquith et al. 2021 and Reid 2016), see Figure 4.
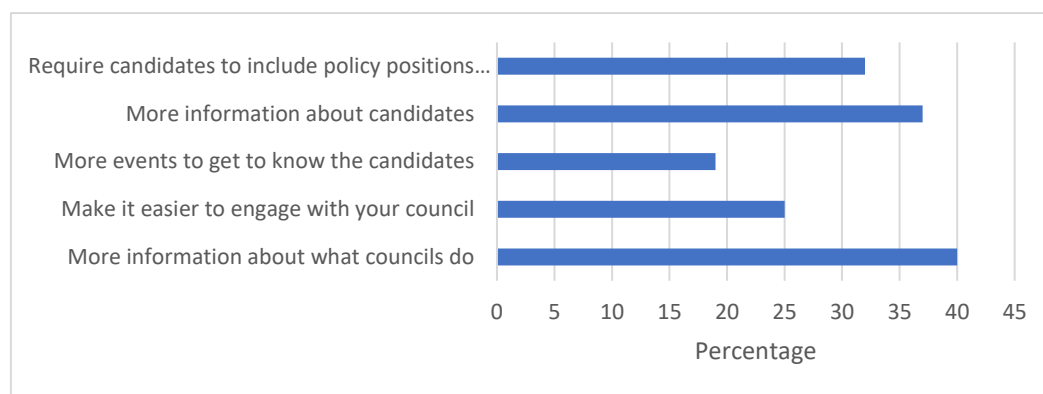

FIGURE 4: SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING TURNOUT

Respondents also identified the need for more information on candidate policies and on candidates themselves. This suggestion is consistent with the reasons given for not voting, especially the reason that getting candidate information was difficult – a reason that has been consistent since surveys began in 2001. Of particular interest is the support for 'making it easier to engage with councils'. This again aligns with international research, which shows that trust in institutions tends to be corelated to the openness and transparency of those institutions. It is a challenge for New Zealand councils which, over time, have come to operate more like corporate boards, with fewer opportunities for citizens to engage directly with decision-makers.

Non-standardised questions

Post-election surveys are also a helpful way to find out New Zealanders' attitudes to topical and related issues, such as STV and how people vote.

STV

The topical issue for the 2004 post-election survey concerned Single Transferable Voting (STV)[5], as 2004 was the first STV election, with all district health boards and a number of councils using that

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[5] Also known as 'instant run-off' voting and 'ranked-choice' in the United States.

system. Policy makers were keen to find out what voters, and non-voters, thought about the option. The post-election survey of that year found:

- 79% agreed that it was easy to understand how to vote using STV
- 68% agreed that voting with STV was simple
- 73% agreed that it was easy to fill in the voting form and rank the candidates
- 66% agreed that STV is a fairer system, as you can vote for as many or as few candidates as you like.

STV was revisited in the 2002 post-election survey, with 26% of respondents saying they preferred STV as an electoral system compared to 47% who preferred FPP. Those who preferred STV noted that it was 'fairer' and resulted in a greater range of representation, while those who preferred FPP noted that it was easier and less time-consuming.

Where to post completed voting papers

Post-election surveys have been a helpful way to track existing and emerging trends in electoral practice. One such trend concerns the decisions voters make about where to post their voting papers. This has become a topical question given the significant decline in the number of NZ Post boxes, meaning that some voters may need to travel significant distances to post their completed papers. Both the 2016 and 2022 surveys asked for information on where voters put their completed voting papers (Figure 5).
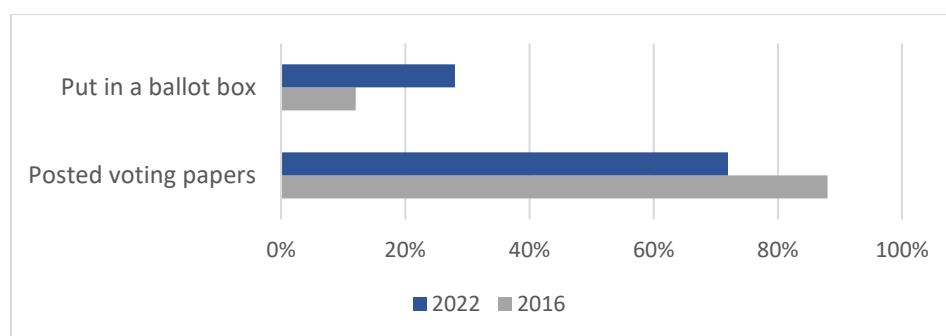

FIGURE 5: POST OR BALLOT BOX? WHERE COMPLETED VOTING PAPERS WENT

Figure 5 highlights what appears to be becoming significant trend, with the percentage of voters placing their completed voting papers in some form of ballot or voting box, usually placed in a supermarket or library, increasing from 12 per cent in 2016 to 28 per cent in 2022. This finding coincided with a campaign organised by LGNZ which saw ballot boxes (funded by the Department of Internal Affairs) distributed to a number of larger councils for distribution.

Voting system preferences

Over the last decade the modernisation narrative has begun to dominate much of the discourse about voting methods. Where postal voting was the significant innovation in 1989, at least its universal adoption, the impact appeared to be short lived.[6] As Graham Bush noted in 1980, 'postal voting acts like a yeast of between 20 per cent and 30 per cent, although this is workable only once' (Bush, 1980 p.201). Following disappointment at the turnout rate in 2013, the Government agreed to investigate the possibility of online voting, and DIA commissioned Nick Leggett, the then Mayor of Porirua, to

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[6] Postal voting was first mooted in 1947 and implemented by various council from then until 1989 when it became universal, with the exception of Hutt City in 1992.

lead an inquiry into its suitability for Aotearoa New Zealand. The inquiry was supportive of its introduction and recommended that a trial be held.[7]

Efforts were made to establish a trial of online voting in both the 2016 and 2019 local elections, both of which failed to get approval of the government to go ahead. Despite the lack of a local trial, online voting is common in local elections elsewhere and organisations like LGNZ and others advocated for regulatory change to enable a trial to go ahead (see LGNZ, 2023). Not surprisingly, local governments are keen to understand public views on voting methods, especially online voting, which became a question in both the 2016 and 2022 surveys (Figure 6).
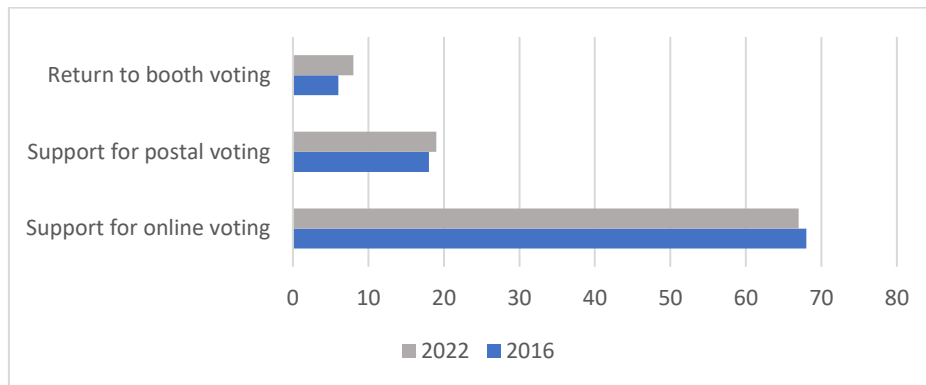
FIGURE 6: RESPONDENT VIEWS ON VOTING METHODS

Three options were given to respondents, to support a return to booth voting, support for postal voting as currently practiced, or support for online voting. Interestingly there is virtually no difference between the preferences expressed in 2016 and those expressed in 2022, with online voting receiving by far the most support.

Awareness of elections

Two questions that both LGNZ and Taituarā are vitally interested in concern the degree to which citizens were aware that local elections were occurring and, for those who were aware, where they received the information from. This information has been tracked since 2001, with the results showing a high level of awareness, although declining gradually (Figure 7).[8]
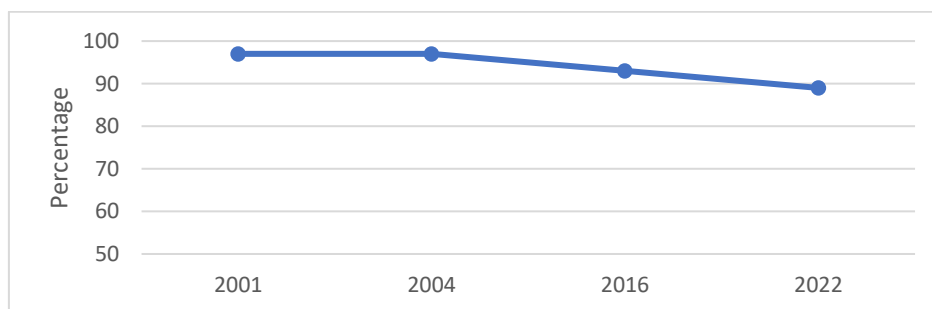
FIGURE 7: AWARENESS OF LOCAL ELECTIONS

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[7] For an example of the mayor's support for online voting see https://scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1208/S00168/porirua-mayor-pushing-government-for-online-voting.htm
[8] Ironically, 2016 and 2022 both saw the biggest local promotion campaigns to encourage people to stand and vote run by LGNZ and Taituarā.

Not surprisingly, the sources that were used by respondents to find out about election in the early surveys, such as radio and newspapers, are no longer the leading sources of information. Figure 8 shows the changes that have occurred since 2004.
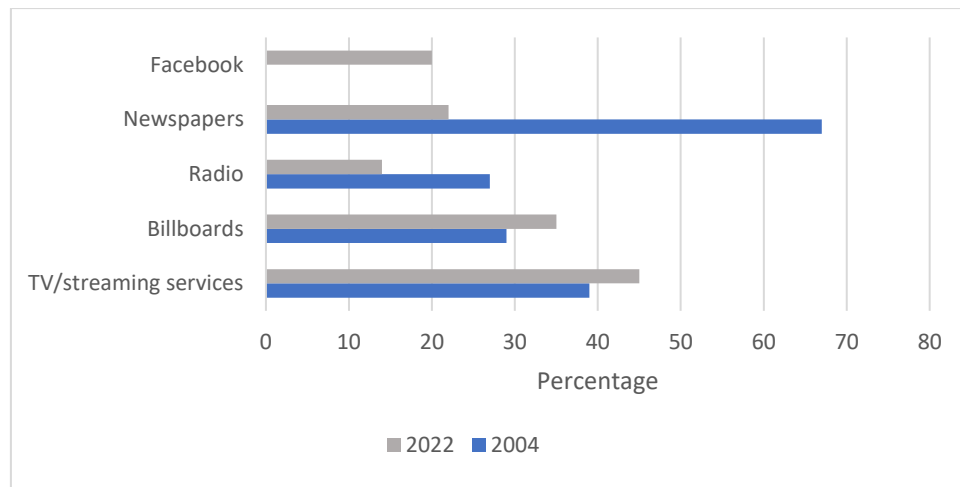

FIGURE 8: SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT CANDIDATES AND THE ELECTION

One of the most dramatic changes is the much smaller role, though still important, played by newspapers when it comes to citizens seeking information about the local elections. Radio has also declined, although not to the same extent. Interestingly, more people in 2022 stated that they made use of billboards than in 2004, which is somewhat surprising. The other two sources of information which simply did not exist in 2004 were Facebook and streaming services.

Observations

Since 2001 post-election surveys have become an increasingly important tool for agencies wanting to better understand the factors that motivate people to vote or not in local elections. Two decades on, however, we discover, despite policy changes and campaigns designed to address the main reasons given for not voting, that there has been relatively little change in the reasons that respondents give as to why they vote or don't. On the other hand, the fact that the share of respondents saying that they didn't vote because they could not find enough information about candidates and their policies fell significantly in the 2022 survey. This drop may be related to the intervention of Policy Local (https://policy.nz/2022), an online interactive voting advice application that enabled citizens to search for information on candidates and policies. Also somewhat surprising, is the relatively constant support given to postal voting, despite ongoing criticism in the media about the lack of post boxes and the time taken to receive voting papers.

We also need to be cautious when taking some of the reasons given for not voting at face value. Reasons like, 'lack of information', or 'didn't get around to it in time', might be better regarded as excuses rather than reasons, noting that historically citizens would have made greater efforts to gather information about candidates, such as going to street corner meetings. As Graham Bush commented in 2001, 'many of the so-called "reasons" for abstaining impressed more as excuses rather than genuine explanations for behaviour' (LGNZ, 2001).

Possibly more important than attempting to understand motivation has been the use of surveys to seek information on the effectiveness of promotional campaigns and other initiatives to make voting easier. It was not a surprise to find that in 2022 fewer people relied on newspapers and radio for

electoral information with greater use being made of social media. What was interesting, however, was the increase in the number of respondents who had taken notice of candidate billboards.

In addition to feedback on the effectiveness of promotional campaigns, the surveys have also been able to track changes in how people voted. The 2022 survey, for example, highlights a significant shift in the number of people choosing to return their completed voting papers ballot boxes in places like supermarkets and libraries and a corresponding decline in the number making use of formal post boxes. Given that only a limited number of councils took part in the trial of ballot boxes (supplied by LGNZ with funding from DIA) it is hoped that the practice will be extended to all councils in 2025.

Regarding the future of post-election surveys, the past two decades have highlighted several issues, such as inconsistent methodologies and different survey questions, that have made tracking long term trends unnecessarily difficult. These and other matters need to be considered for the future, including the need for a standard methodology and a core set of common questions.

Most of all, the agencies that have an interest in having a strong and healthy local democracy need to come to agreement on their relative roles, including a commitment to future surveys and, the equally important question, which agency or agencies will take the lead in determining when surveys will be undertaken, how they will be undertaken and how they will be funded.

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Part 2

Candidates and issues

5. Voters' issues in the 2022 local authority elections

Charles Crothers and Mike Reid

According to the Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2002) the last few decades have seen a 'dramatic revival of interest in local democracy around the world', a level of interest which New Zealand has not escaped. Internationally, the focus on local democracy reflects the impact of urbanisation and the challenges of governing cities, the enthusiasm for decentralisation and devolution by multi-lateral agencies to marginalise the influence of national elites in developing nations and, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the re-creation of civil society in the former eastern-bloc countries.

In Aotearoa New Zealand this revival can be partly dated back to the Local Government Act 2002 that strengthened the constitutional standing of local government and provided councils with both general empowerment and a broad purpose to promote well-being and citizen engagement. The potential for local government to play an enhanced role in the governance of the nation begged the obvious question, one that researchers began to explore: is the democratic nature of this sphere of government sufficient to provide the accountability that should accommodate any additional roles or powers. One, and by no means the only, focus of this scrutiny has been the number, and diversity, of those who vote in local elections, and the factors that motivate them to vote or not.

Voting, a necessary though not sufficient, feature of a healthy democracy, performs several functions. As Bush noted more than 40 years ago, while elections are, in their pure form, 'the statutory mechanism for legally determining the composition of the governing body of each council or board for the ensuing term' they also 'ritually reaffirm the sovereignty of the community and the fact that local bodies (*sic*) are its subordinate agents' (Bush 1980 p.194). In terms of popular perception little has changed in the past 40 years. Since at least 2001, the narrative accompanying local elections has been one of growing citizen disinterest as indicated by declining turnout (see Reid 2016). Adding to this sense of growing democratic failure Parliament has held select committee inquiries into the running of local elections that follow a consistent theme of low voter turnout. For example, the report on the 2016 election has a header, 'Voter participation in local elections is too low' (Justice Select Committee, 2019, p.37).

Whether driven by concerns that local democracy is possibly failing, or a desire to simply do better, since 2001 we have seen a growing interest wanting to know more about people's reasons for voting in local elections, or not. This has led to a range of post-election surveys, the most recent of which is discussed below.[1]

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[1] Post election surveys of voters and non-voters include LGNZ, (2001, 2004, 2016 and 2022, and DIA 2007. In addition, Auckland Council has undertaken its own post-election surveys since 2010.

The 2022 local election – what motivates voters

It is difficult to ascertain what voters (and non-voters) are concerned about in voting or not voting in local authority elections. Electoral support for candidates with particular platforms might be one indicator but often candidates' views are condensed into short statements or carried by a group manifesto. Moreover, there can a range of reasons for supporting any candidate other than their platform, while some voters' concerns may involve quite complex structures of preferences. However, examination of results can help with the understanding of local government politics in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some of the concerns are of wider interest and are used to pinpoint local authority voters' attitudes in 2019, especially regarding the national government's water management and local government reforms

This chapter attempts to tease out voters' concerns using two main questions included in the LGNZ 2021 post-election survey: reason for voting and topics of concern. An earlier study LGNZ (2016) looked at reasons but did not cover topics.

The data analysis uses either percentages or means/standard deviations of display the range of answers: where possible items are ordered in terms of popularity of response. Factor analyses are used to detect patterns amongst items, with the possibility of identifying where other not asked questions might lie. The factor analysis results should be treated as entirely descriptive intended to be helpful for the analysis. Then several items are cross tabulated in terms of degree of support by different social groupings (location, tenure, age, gender, family structure, employment situation, etc.) Key differences are identified and commented on. Only simple results are presented but it must be borne in mind that often social background variables are intertwined e.g., old respondents are more likely to be property owners.

The survey

The survey was carried out in the last weeks of October 2022 and involved a sample size of 1000. All respondents were New Zealand citizens or residents. Respondent composition reflected the wider New Zealand population geographic distribution (Figure 1) and the type of locality. Fifty-eight percent lived in major cities, 30 percent in regional towns and 12 percent in rural communities.
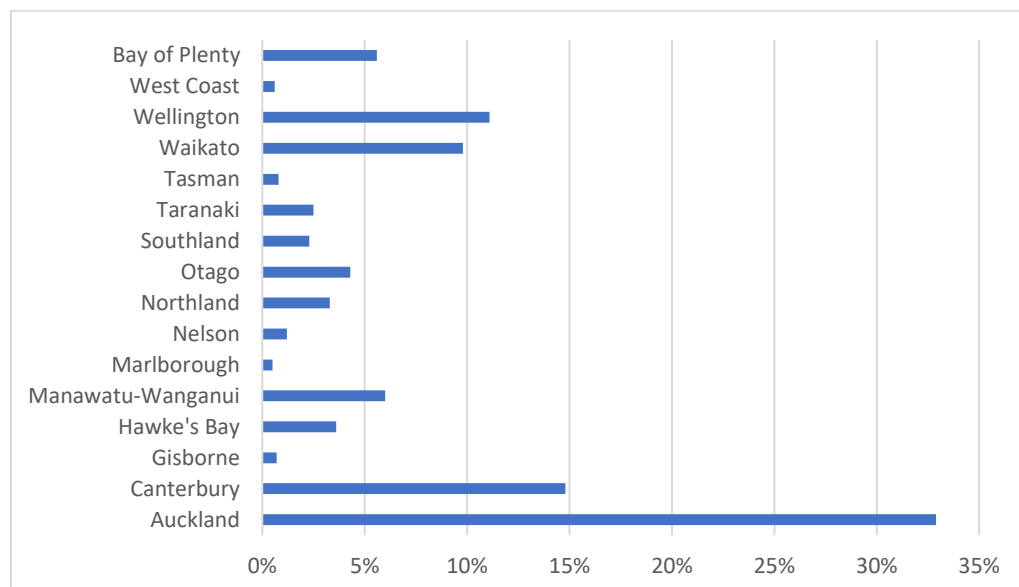

FIGURE 1: REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Fifty-eight per cent of respondents were female, with males comprising 41 percent, and gender-diverse, non-binary and non-specified gender the remainder. Most (64 per cent) were Pākehā, with the next largest single group being Asian respondents. Māori and Māori/Pākehā combined made up 16 per cent of respondents. These proportions will differ to the national ethnicity data published by Statistics NZ as respondents were only able to choose a single ethnic category. The largest group of respondents were full time paid employees, (41 per cent). The next two largest groups were retirees (17 per cent) and part time employees (15 per cent).

The share of respondents who had lived at their current address for ten years or more, or between one and five years was similar, at respectively 32 per cent and 34 per cent. The smallest group of respondents by tenure were those who had lived at their current address for less than one year (12 per cent). Most respondents (63 per cent) paid rates directly to their local council due to owning their a residential or business property.

A common feature of post-election surveys is the propensity of respondents to claim that they voted when the available evidence suggests that they may not have. Although 60% of respondents indicated that they had voted the actual turnout was closer to 40%.[2] Assuming the survey is taken as soon as practicable after an election, and so diminishing the possibility that respondents may have forgotten whether they voted or not, this phenomenon suggests two factors. One is a potential bias in the sample, with the people who respond to surveys being more likely the same people who vote. The second factor is the degree to which respondents, given the link between voting and state legitimacy, perceive voting as a civic duty with the result that not voting may in some way be unlawful or at least frowned on.

Who voted

As noted above some 60 per cent of respondents indicated that they voted in the 2022 local authority elections, the first time since 2001 that local authority elections did not include voting for district health boards. Respondents who were more likely to vote more than the average tended to be male, older, property owners, South Islanders, and employers (Table 1).

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS MORE LIKELY TO VOTE

Category	% of respondents
Employers	72.7
Retirees	81.3
Lived at same address >10 years	75.8
Couple with no dependents	73.6
South Island residents	67.9
Males	66.3
Respondents >61	85.3
Property owners	72.7

In contrast, respondents who voted less than average (that is, more than 40 per cent of respondents who indicated that they did not vote), tended to be poorer (unemployed or part time employees), students, younger and have lived at the same address for less than a year (Table 2).

[2] In the 2016 post-election survey, 63 per cent of respondents across New Zealand, including Auckland, indicated that they had voted, even though the actual proportion of eligible voters who voted in the local government elections nationally was approximately 43 per cent.

Category	% of respondents
Part time, or not in, paid employment	46.5
Student	59.0
Lived at the same address <1 year	45.9
One parent family with 3 or more dependents	60.9
People flatting or boarding	52.9
Respondents aged 18 – 25	56.0
Asian	48.5
Pasifika	48.4

Main reasons for voting

The survey distinguished respondents' reasons for voting from the issues that they considered important. The most popular reasons (Figure 2) included being aware that the elections were happening and knowing how to vote; a belief that participating in the local elections was important and a desire to have a say.

FIGURE 2: MAIN REASONS FOR VOTING

Three reasons have been selected for further analysis, knowing how to vote, knowledge of the candidates, and the belief that a vote would make a difference.

Knowing how to vote

Respondents who gave 'knowing how to vote' as their reason for voting were highlighting both their familiarity and comfort with the voting process. Retirees (68.9%) and those who had lived at the same address for longer than ten years (52.9%) were more likely to give this as their reason for voting. Students were much less likely to give this as a reason for voting (37.5%). Interestingly, women and rural voters were less likely to give this as a reason for voting. The propensity to give this as the reason for voting increased with age.

Knowing the candidates

Overall, only 18 per cent of respondents identified their knowledge of one or more candidates as a reason for voting, with little difference between groups of voters, with a few exceptions. For example,

22.6 per cent of respondents from regional towns gave this as a reason for voting, compared to 14.8 per cent of respondents living in a major city. Respondents who were comprised the greatest percentage giving this reason were employers running their own business, 37.5 per cent. Given that people with business experience constitute a relatively high proportion of candidates it is not surprising that they may be known by other members of the local employers or business community.

I think my vote will make a difference

In contrast to those who identified that one of the reasons for voting was personal knowledge of a candidate(s), more than 44 per cent of respondents identified the belief that their vote will make a difference as a reason for voting. These respondents were more likely to come from a major city (46.7 per cent) as opposed to a rural community 35.8 per cent).[3] Women were more likely to give this as a reason for voting than men, and retirees, at 54.1 per cent were significantly more likely to give this as a reason for voting than students (18.8 per cent). In terms of ethnicity, Pākehā/Māori respondents (57.8 per cent) were more likely to say that that they thought their vote would make a difference than others, especially Pasifika (27.3 per cent).

The issues that voters cared about

In addition to their reasons for voting, the survey asked respondents to identify the issues that they cared about and provided an initial list of potential issues in the questionnaire. The issues identified by most respondents were climate change, public facilities, housing, three waters, public transport, and local government reform (Figure 3).
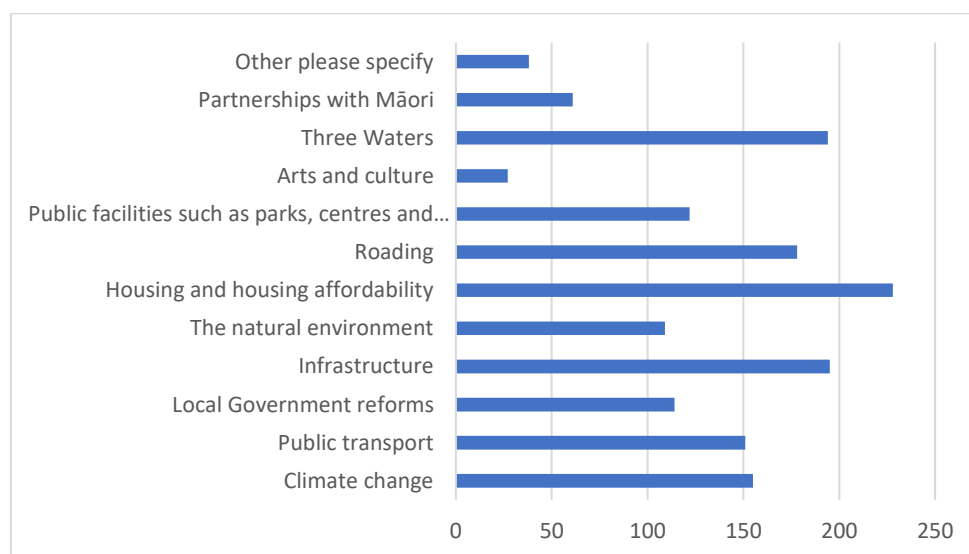
FIGURE 3: ISSUES THAT RESPONDENTS CARE ABOUT MOST

Climate change

Respondents who identified climate change as an issue that they cared about were more likely to be students, women, Pākehā/Māori or Pākehā. The proportion of students who identified climate change as an issue, at 62.5 per cent, was significantly higher than other groups. Interestingly, rural voters were more likely to have identified climate change than respondents who lived in cities or

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[3] This finding is somewhat counterfactual given that a vote is likely to have more influence in a local authority with a small population than a large one.

regional towns. Support also came from those who had lived in their current address for less than a year, and those who flatted – two categories that would include a high proportion of students.

Public Facilities

An issue that motivated many respondents was the provision of public facilities, such as parks, community centres and libraries. Voters who identified public facilities as an important issue were more likely to be women, younger rather than older, and Pākehā/Māori. There was also a curvilinear relationship between the importance of public facilities and the length of time that respondents had lived at the same address, with residents who had lived at an address between one and ten years more likely the rank the issue highly.

Housing

As an issue that voters cared about, even though local government plays only an indirect role, housing and housing affordability received the greatest number of mentions at 38 per cent. Those who identified it were more likely to be women (46.2 per cent), residents living in the North Island, part time workers, people with disabilities, larger single parent families, new residents, respondents under the age of 35, and Māori and Pasifika respondents.

Three waters

The reform of drinking, waste and storm water was the second equally mentioned issue that voters considered important, along with infrastructure, both identified by 32 per cent of respondents. Respondents who identified three waters as important were likely to be men who live in the South Island, older (>66 years old), Pakeha, and have resided in the same location for longer than 10 years. Other groups who identified three waters as important were couples, retired voters, and either self-employed or unemployed.

Public transport

Public transport was identified by 25 per cent of respondents as an important issue. Not surprisingly these respondents tended to live in Auckland and other major cities (which have public transport services), or were recent residents, full time employees, and flatting/boarding.

Local government reform

Local government reform in general (excluding three waters' reform) was mentioned by only 19 per cent of respondents. Groups which gave greater mention to local government reform were employers, respondents who were retired and who had lived at the same address for more than 10 years (marginally), and Asian.

Conclusion

A healthy democracy involves significantly more than a high turnout. The factors influencing turnout can be important. For example, a high turnout might reflect huge voter dissatisfaction whereas low turnout does not necessary signify voter dissatisfaction. Understanding what motivates people to vote is therefore important. Consequently, research into the reasons that voters and non-voters have for their respective actions will continue to have an important place in future policy development.

LGNZ's 2022 post-election survey provides some useful insights into the factors that voters considered important, noting that salience, in itself, may not be a sufficient reason to vote. In general, most of the findings resonated with existing research findings. Voters who identified public facilities as an issue they cared about were more likely to be women, younger, single parent and either not in

employment or in part time employment, given that these groups are more likely to use facilities such as parks and libraries.

The survey cast some light on the nature of the issues that voters cared most about. The matters that received the most prominence were those, with exceptions, that are associated with the traditional or historic role of local government, such as roading, infrastructure, three waters, and public transport. People were less likely to want to vote because they felt strongly about arts and culture or Māori/local government relationships, reflecting, perhaps, the state of understanding about the role local government plays. Housing and climate change were something of an exception.

The ability of councils to influence housing supply, and affordability in particular, is limited and constrained by national legislation and policy settings, yet it was the most popular of the issues that mattered to voters. This may suggest that voters believe that councils have more authority in this space than is the case. It is certainly not a surprise, however, that most respondents who identified housing and housing affordability were those most likely to be negatively affected by the cost of housing, such as younger voters. More surprisingly, perhaps, climate change was only the fifth highest issue that respondents cared about: it perhaps may have received more prominence had the survey been taken after the Auckland floods and Cyclone Gabrielle. It would be helpful to know more about respondents' understanding of the relative roles that central and local government play when dealing with climate change issues. As we would, expect student voters were unequivocal in the support they gave to this issue.

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6. Regional council legitimacy in the 2022 local government elections

Jeffrey McNeill

Introduction

While New Zealand local government has faced a chorus of criticism over the last decades, regional councils, created as part of the 1989 local government reforms, have faced ongoing challenges to their existence both from the public and government. The Nelson-Marlborough Regional Council was disestablished in 1990 while most of the others have faced breakaway movements within their regions at some time. These movements were driven by concerns that subregional interests were ignored, and by the perceived inefficiencies of the regional councils. More broadly, successive governments have sought to restructure elements of local government with the intention to improve councils' performance. The most significant of these initiatives has been to create the Auckland Council, a unitary authority, in 2010 to provide a single voice for the city-region. Now, central government is transferring important local government functions to stand-alone regional entities. Territorial councils' potable, waste and storm water infrastructures are to be managed by regional water entities (the Three-Waters project later renamed Water Services reform), while territorial and regional council environmental planning functions under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) are to be transferred to regional planning committees under the Natural and Built Environments Act 2023 (NBEA).

These structural changes underline the regionalisation of existing local government functions, but not confidence in the democratically elected regional councils. Despite their regional span, the 10 water entities responsible for the three waters are to be managed by boards consisting of appointed members representing councils and iwi.[1] The NBEA's regional planning committees are to consist of members appointed by each region's local councils together with iwi representatives. While there has been sometimes vociferously expressed concern about the future ownership of the local authorities' water infrastructure assets, there have been few expressions of concern at the erosion of local democracy or discussion of the role of regional councils within these proposals.

This lack of confidence in local government generally and in regional councils specifically can be framed in terms of legitimacy: the reliance by government of the voluntary compliance of external actors for the compliance of its policies (Taylor, 2019). Fritz Scharpf suggests legitimacy has two parts (Scharpf, 1999; Schmidt, 2012). Input-legitimacy is the participation in decision-making *by* the people, measured by the public acceptance of those making policy decisions. Output-legitimacy is the effectiveness of those policies *for* the people. Elections are important in this framework as they

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[1] Originally the government proposed establishing four supra-regional water entities to manage the three waters. Following strong opposition to the proposal, the government decided in April 2023 to establish ten entities that match existing regional council boundaries, with the Nelson City and Tasman and Marlborough districts forming a single entity.

provide the means for determining who will make those decision and the infrastructure of political accountability of policy outcomes. The apparent lack of confidence in regional councils can be therefore framed as a legitimacy deficit because of a lack of representativeness in decision-makers and the failure to realise the promised outcomes of those decisions.

This chapter explores regional council input-legitimacy as expressed in the October 2022 local government elections. The chapter firstly identifies structural challenges to regional council input-legitimacy and their efforts to increase input-legitimacy through reforming representation structures. It then explores the public indications of input-legitimacy as expressed in the October 2022 local government elections. It uses data published by the regional councils on the election candidates and election results. It also draws on councillors' own statements published in the councils' candidate profiles distributed with voting papers and in a few cases publicly available material published on the Internet. The study focuses on New Zealand's eleven regional councils. The unitary authorities – those councils with both territorial and regional council functions, i.e., Gisborne, Marlborough and Tasman Districts and Nelson City councils – and the city-region Auckland Council are excluded as they have a wider range of functions than the metropolitan[2] (Wellington, Canterbury) and provincial regional councils (Figure 1).
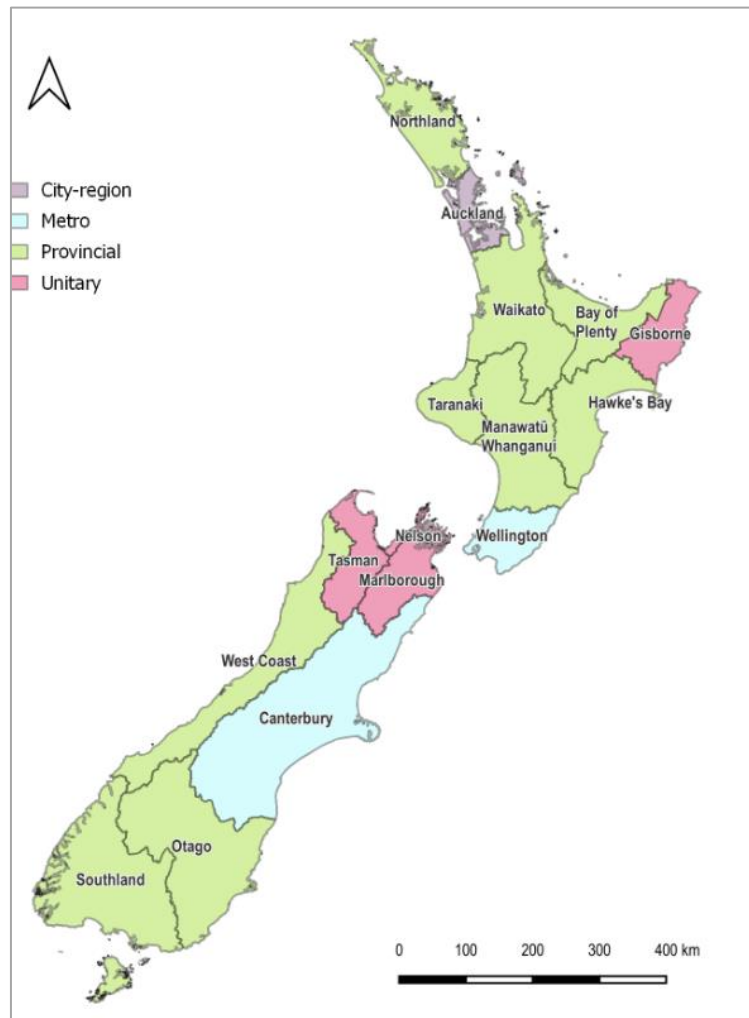

FIGURE 1: NEW ZEALAND'S REGIONAL COUNCILS

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[2] i.e., a region containing a city or city conurbation with over 250,000 inhabitants.

Structural challenges and council responses to input legitimacy

Although regional councils are part of New Zealand's democratically elected local government regime, established and operated under the same legislation as the district and city councils, they face structural challenges in establishing community coherence and hence input-legitimacy. They were established primarily with the intention of undertaking integrated natural resource management functions under the RMA. Their boundaries were accordingly determined by using river catchment watersheds that captured whole river catchments but not necessarily communities. These boundaries worked to strengthen existing regions with established strong regional identities, such as Taranaki and Southland. Others, such as Manawatu-Whanganui and Canterbury, were amalgams of different communities with strong cores of identity but contested peripheries.

As well, regions have an inherent tension between their urban and rural populations. These two constituencies show very different values in national elections. In these elections typically the liberal-conservative National Party dominates in the rural areas, the social-democrat Labour Party in cities. Environmental values are strongest in the largest cities: thus, the Greens received a quarter of all of its party votes in the 2017 general election from just six city electorates. However, the regions typically consist of a single city where most of a region's population lives and a large and comparatively thinly populated hinterland. As a result, some councils have had very fractious histories where the urban and rural factions deadlock, such as Waikato and Canterbury. Such a deadlock was a factor leading to central government replacing Canterbury's elected council with appointed commissioners in 2010 (Creech et al., 2010).

Canterbury provides an extreme example. It has a population of nearly 630,000, of which 378,000 (60%) live in Christchurch metro-city urban area, an area forming less than one percent of the region's total land area (Figure 2). The 'progressive' urban populations (The Greens received 10% of the party vote in two electorates in 2017) somehow must be reconciled within the regional council with the more conservative values of their rural hinterlands (typically with 3-4% of the Green vote). Correspondence is reduced as parts of the city are allocated to rural wards to achieve a uniform population balance between wards.
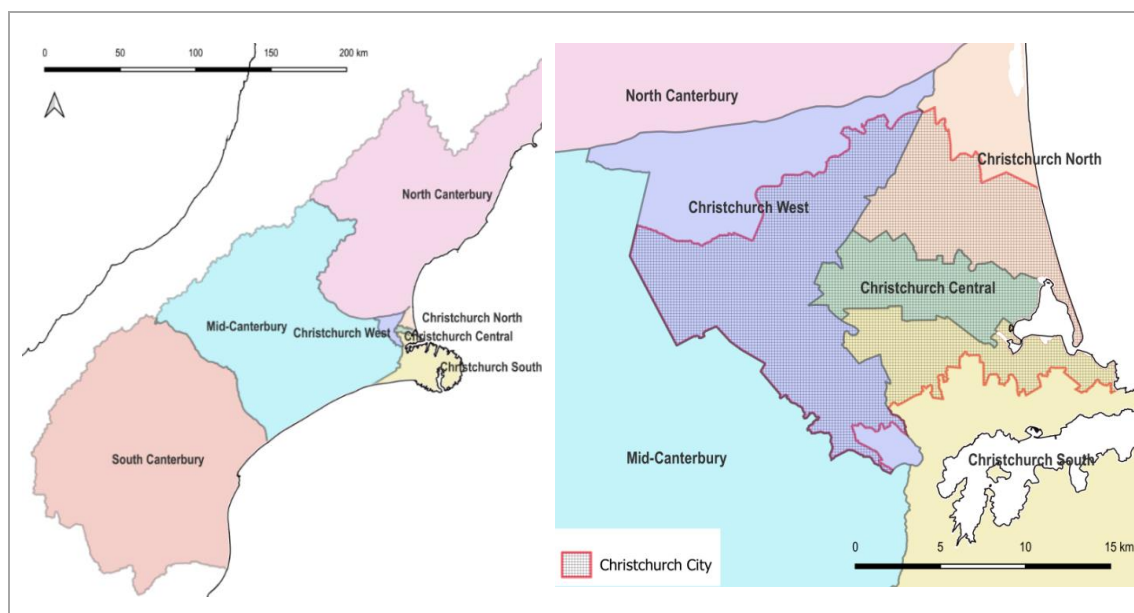

FIGURE 2: CHRISTCHURCH CITY WITHIN THE LARGE AND PREDOMINANTLY RURAL CANTERBURY REGION

Also, the councils' natural resource management functions are primarily regulatory rather than services provision with little impact on citizens' daily lives. Although councils undertake flood

protection such as building and maintaining river stop banks and promoting soil conservation on farms, and emergency management they provide only localised benefit apparent only when there is an emergency. Public transport provision is relatively small-scale for most provincial councils, significant only in the metro-regions. In short, regional councils are automatically at one remove from their communities that in any case may lack strong regional coherence. This lack of daily engagement with citizens suggests low electoral interest and hence low voter turnout.

Determining the appropriate numbers of councillors on a council is fraught (Purdam et al., 2008), but New Zealand electorate to councillor ratios are very high compared to many other western countries. The councils vary considerably in their electorate to councillor ratios: West Coast with one councillor per 4,660 inhabitants, Wellington one for 40,000, and the median (Northland and Otago) with one councillor per 19,000 inhabitants (Table 1). Councils with high ratios could be expected to be less representative of the different communities in their regions than those with low ratios.

A final challenge is to ensure local Māori voice at the council table. Māori have historically been under-represented in local government (Hayward, 2011). However, this challenge takes on additional importance because the Treaty of Waitangi recognises Māori ownership and guardianship rights for the natural environment that coincide or overlap to differing extents with the regional councils' natural resource management functions. An extra layer of complexity has been introduced as the Crown settles Treaty of Waitangi grievances with iwi by establishing ad-hoc special purpose co-governance authorities to manage some of the larger rivers, including the Waikato and Whanganui.

Iwi (tribal), rūnanga and hapu (clan or sub-tribe) boundaries were considered but rejected by government as the basis for defining regional boundaries when the regional councils were established. As a result, current boundaries do not align with traditional rohe (territory). Further, the rohe are subregional: Te Puni Kokiri (Ministry of Māori Development) database shows that all councils have at least six separate iwi and Māori authorities in the regions, while a quarter have over 20 (Te Puni Kōkiri, n.d.) (Table 1). Further, some rohe extend across several regions. The exception is Ngai Tahu whose rohe extends over all the South Island except around Nelson. It is therefore able to provide a single position for the South Island. However, it also has strong local identity in its 18 rūnanga that make up the iwi.

In response, the regional councils have sought to facilitate Māori representation on the councils. The Bay of Plenty Regional Council introduced Māori wards and constituencies in 2001. Māori ward candidates are voted for by electors on the Māori electoral roll. Their wider adoption was facilitated by a legislative change in 2021 and nearly half of all councils established Māori wards in time for the 2022 elections: five (45%) regional councils and 29 (43%) territorial councils.

A different means of ensuring iwi representation was established for the Canterbury Regional Council as a consequence of the Ngāi Tahu iwi's Treaty of Waitangi settlement claim, in which the tribe's rangatiratanga was recognised by the Crown. The Canterbury Regional Council (Ngāi Tahu Representation) Act 2022 empowers Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu to appoint up to two members of the Environment Canterbury Council with full decision-making powers. A selection process for these representatives involves the 10 Waitaha Canterbury Papatipu Rūnanga [sub-tribe] (Canterbury Regional Council, n.d.). This approach means only Māori claiming local iwi heritage have rights.

Evidence of legitimacy failure and success in 2022 election results

In the first instance public engagement and hence input-legitimacy of a democratic institution can be gauged by voter turnout and candidates on offer. This section first reviews these measures before

using councillors' genders and employment as simple indicators of councils' representativeness of their wider constituencies.

The number of candidates willing to stand for election provides a simple indicator of the health of local democracy; conversely, uncontested elections are seen to be an indicator of a lack of public engagement with public institutions. In 2022 over half (7) of the regional councils had uncontested seats, with a third each having two or three uncontested seats. Four of these were in Māori wards, the others were predominantly rural wards. Uncontested elections can be seen to indicate a lack of engagement by the public in an institution, but this is unlikely to be the case here. Rather, these candidates all have impressive credentials and proven track records and any candidate going up against them would likely lose their deposit. For example, the uncontested Wairarapa ward candidate for Greater Wellington council is a former mayor in the Wairarapa. She was also the regional council's deputy chair leading up to the election, a position she kept post-election. The Māori ward councillors, too, have held important iwi governance roles.

Voter turnout is considered the gold-standard for measuring input-legitimacy. It reflects the extent to which citizens feel they are a part of the political process. Although council turnout rates had not been published by the Department of Internal Affairs at time of writing, some generalisations can be made. Māori wards had notably fewer votes cast than general wards. For example, general ward councillors received 8,300 votes each while Māori ward councillors received 1,500 votes on average. This low number suggests a lack of engagement by Māori in the elections.

Councillor election platforms

New Zealand is remarkable for the lack of explicit national-level political party participation in local government politics, especially outside the metro-cities. Accordingly, most candidates do not give party allegiance that could be used to discern political positions. However, election platforms of the successful candidates provide an insight to the perceived relevance of regional councils: how concerned were councillors with regional issues? The various regions face and had faced a range of different challenges in the previous three years and these differences could be expected to manifest in the candidate statements. More generally, the elections had been preceded by a period of national turmoil resulting from the Covid-19 epidemic and the central government's response to it. There was accordingly concern that anti-democratic and similar single-issue candidates would take strength from the Covid-19 protests and would seek to undermine democratic processes. Certainly, a number of these candidates were identified by the media prior to the elections (Vance & Mitchell, 2022). Some made clear their views in their biographies but not all. At the same time, many territorial councils including 30 forming the 'Communities 4 Local Democracy' coalition had been opposing the controversial Three Waters initiative that were seen to have local impacts (Communities 4 Local Democracy, 2023) .

In the event nearly all successful councillors steered well clear of these controversies. Northland candidates tended more than others to oppose Three Waters. One Waikato and two West Coast councillors have track records of being anti-1080 poison pest control, though they did not promote these positions in the elections. Several have somewhat colourful pasts that were highlighted in the media clearly to discredit them. But these form a small minority. The remaining councillors sought broader appeal.

Many and especially incumbent councillors emphasised their demonstrated governance competence and experience in business peak bodies, NGOs, iwi trusts, and council committees. Some emphasised their professional expertise and knowledge with many listing their academic qualifications, particularly in agriculture, environmental sciences or business. Candidates also claimed local affiliation where they

could. For example, a Christchurch North East councillor stated, 'I was raised in Bexley, and went to school in New Brighton, Shirley, and Aranui', all local places. Others reminded voters that they had brought home the bacon, for example by ensuring flood protection upgrading or improved public transport for their communities.

Some candidates very clearly played on topical regional issues. Many of the West Coast candidates for example, emphasised the need to address flooding following the 2021 floods. Wellington ones had a high focus on public transport, an important topic following abysmal service since the Covid-19 epidemic lockdowns. Absent live local issues, some played to their region's treatment by central government in Wellington. Such parochialism perhaps reached its peak in Taranaki, where several councillors sought to mobilise regional pride to challenge by an obdurate and out of touch central government. For example, one candidate asserted, 'unfortunately in the last few years central government changed a lot of rules…These changes have made a lot of extra work for council, NGO's and communities with not a lot to gain in Taranaki.' Southland and Northland councillors expressed similar sentiments. Collectively, the successful candidates showed competence, governance skills, and awareness of local issues and values.

Representativeness

Regional councils have long been criticised for their apparent sectoral capture and lack of representativeness (McNeill, 2016). The results of the 2022 elections suggest these problems persist (Table 1).

TABLE 1: COUNCIL COMPOSITION BY REGION

Council	Māori wards	Councillors		Electorate: councillor ratio	Primary sector (%)		Female Clrs	Chair/Deputy (Male Female)
		Number	Unopposed		Region	Clrs		
Canterbury	2	16 (14*)		39,013	16	36*	29%	M/M
Wellington		13	2	40,115	3	7	38%	M/F
Bay of Plenty	2	12		25,475	10		33%	M/F
Hawke's Bay	2	11	3	15,082	14	36	38%	F/M
Horizons	2	13	2	18,746	12		31%	F/M
Northland	2	9	1	19,900	16		22%	F/M
Otago		12	1	19,100	10		25%	F/M
Southland		11	1	9,009	18	45	9%	M/M
Taranaki		10		11,960	17	40	30%	F/M
Waikato	2	14		33,486	14	29	36%	F/M
West Coast		7		4,657	14	86		M/M

*Elected councillors

New Zealand local government is largely a male preserve (Hayward, 2011) and this imbalance was reflected in the regional councils' compositions (no councillors indicated gender diversity). The proportion of women on councils range from a high of 38% (Wellington, Hawke's Bay) with an average of 29% excluding the West Coast that had no woman councillors. Southland has one. These last two councils have historically had very low numbers of women councillors; West Coast has always been all-male except for the last triennium when two women were elected. In comparison, women make up 48% of members of Parliament.

The primary sector is over-represented on provincial councils in comparison to its proportion of the regions' workforce. This apparent sectoral capture is very clear in strong farming regions, including Southland and Taranaki where over 40 percent of councillors are farmers. The West Coast provides the most obvious example of capture: five of the seven councillors are involved in the mining sector, a sixth is a farmer. On the other hand, the metro-dominated Wellington Regional Council has a single councillor associated with farming but many government bureaucrats.

Such capture is however more nuanced. Most councils show a strong internal urban-rural schism. Urban wards are typically represented by councillors from a wide range of professions and backgrounds; rural wards that make up near half of many of these councils are nearly all represented by farmers. Further, it is too simplistic to apply a blanket productivist-environmentalist overlay: many of these farmer councillors are involved in local stream and bush-care and other environmental initiatives. They want to do good by the environment.

The Canterbury Council provides a good example of the difference between town and country. It has seven electoral wards – four city and three rural wards – each with two councillors. (The runanga appoints two councillors, determined by identity rather than geography.) Notably, five of the six rural ward councillors are farmers.

Councils appear to understand the need to address these apparent challenges to input legitimacy post-election. Chairs are elected from within the council and clearly councils seek to increase representativeness, at least through choice of chair and deputy. For example, despite the low proportion of women councillors, nearly three-quarters of councils (8) have women chairpersons. Two more have women as deputy chair. Councils also appear to address the urban-rural gap with the chair and deputy representing one of each.

Discussion and conclusion

This analysis of regional council 2022 elections suggests that the input-legitimacy of regional councils may not be as small as is sometimes suggested. The quality of the councillors and their engagement with local and regional issues collectively make a case for continued or even strengthened subnational governance in New Zealand. Even the criticisms levelled at local government of low engagement evidenced by uncontested seats and low voter turn-out can be questioned. These metrics are coarse and overlook the nuanced of local circumstances. Candidates do stand when they think they have a chance and voters will turn out when there is something to vote for.

Many councils are also trying to increase their legitimacy by becoming more representative of their communities. The significant initiative this election was the adoption of Māori wards by nearly half the councils. The election results suggest that initiative is a work in progress. Low voting in the Māori wards suggests a lack of engagement by Māori compared to electors on general wards. Similarly, the relatively high number of uncontested seats could be seen as a lack of trust in councils. On the other hand, we should not overlook the stature of these councillors; one was subsequently elected chair of the Northland council. Additionally, some Māori-identifying candidates with Iwi-centred election platforms standing in the general wards were elected. One of these candidates was subsequently elected as the youngest and also first wahine Māori chairperson of the Hawke's Bay Regional Council. Another was elected deputy chair of the Canterbury Regional Council. Māori voice on council can be greater than the Māori wards suggest.

Nevertheless, the 2022 elections highlight input-legitimacy challenges relating to the extent to which councillors represent the different interests of their regions' citizens. This study indicates councils can be captured by narrow interests. Capture has immediate implications for individual regions' representativeness, but the phenomenon needs to be explored further. In the first instance it can be argued that apparent capture of councils such as occurred on the West Coast should be expected. Most councillors are concerned primarily with local and regional issues and can be expected to be representative of their electorates' values. The West Coast has a very strong and long history of extractive industry and a conservative culture to match; a strong demonstration of that ethos at the council table in that light is to be expected. The complete lack of women councillors, too, underlines an historical deep conservatism within the region. They were well supported, the three wards having

48, 49 and 59 percent voter turnout rates and most councillors having clear majorities that allay concerns of vote-splitting within a disunited opposition. Its elections cannot be written off as an aberration.

The West Coast provides an extreme example, but it appears to play out in the divide between town and country. At the other extreme, rural voice can be seen to be marginalised, for example with the Wellington Regional Council, where one councillor represents the rural sector. Other councils show a more even split that can lead to acrimony and a breakdown in council performance when the positions cannot be reconciled. Many councils have clearly sought to minimise discord by balancing town and country by having a representative of each as their chair and deputy.

Yet this town and country bifurcation is to over-simplify and ignore more systemic problems. Rural areas support a diverse range of rural experiences beyond those people and communities engaged in primary production (Pomeroy, 2022). For example, despite the historical dominance of extractive industry in the West Coast's economy, the region supports a thriving tourism sector that has long been at odds to extractive industry. Further, the Greens received 8% of the West-Coast-Tasman electorate party vote in the 2017 general election.

Rather, the West Coast results raise systemic questions about council composition that has important implications for the other councils. Capture and marginalisation of community diversity might well be a consequence of small council size rather than intention. Councils are so small that they are unable to reflect the granularity of their regions' different communities. The relatively small number of councillors overly aggregate preferences.

Increasing the number of councillors on a council may be a way for to increase granularity and representativeness to increase input legitimacy. Such a solution goes against the tendency of many New Zealand local governments to 'rationalise' their councils, i.e., reduce the number of councillors. However, it promotes local democracy.

This study suggests that an underlying challenge to regional council input legitimacy is primarily structural rather than reflecting an inherent lack of public confidence in regional government. The 2022 elections show that regional-level and by extension local government democracy in New Zealand is more robust than its critics would have us believe. Its legitimacy is challenged by geography and structures but rather than redrawing boundaries to provide more homogenous wards or establishing parallel authorities, a commitment to grow regional councils to become true form of government may provide at least part of the answer.

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7.   Partnering or prohibiting? The road to improving Māori wards and constituencies

Dani Lucas

This chapter looks at one current growing form of representation, Māori wards and constituencies (MWC), to assess how they currently work for tāngata Māori. It focuses on MWC (rather than other mechanisms of Māori representation at local government) as in the lead up to the 2022 local elections they were the only direct and separate form of representation for tangata Māori. 'Separate' here means voted in only by Māori and 'direct' means able to vote at the final decision-making body on council (at full council). Although other forms of representation for Māori are vital, such as the Independent Māori Statutory Board (IMSB) in Auckland and Te Tatau o Te Arawa in Rotorua, they do not provide 'separate' and 'direct' representation for tangata Māori. This form of representation for mana whenua is essential alongside representation in MWC.[1]

This chapter draws from an unpublished dissertation completed as part of a Masters of Indigenous Studies at Victoria University of Wellington (Lucas, 2022). It builds on the work of those who have previously raised the ineffective and unfair representation of Māori at local government (Pirsoul, 2018; Bargh, 2020; Bargh, 2016; Bishop, 2010; Mutu, 2019; Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, 2009; Human Rights Commission, 2010; Webster & Cheyne, 2017) by focusing specifically on MWC and using data from before the 2022 Local Government Elections and the insights gained from interviews with two Māori elected councillors and a Māori local government official.

It provides a brief history of Māori participation in local government before assessing the barriers that occur in the creation, establishment and implementation of MWC with the hope of improving how they function in future, and to shift us towards a form of local governance that better reflects te Tiriti. Future work that gathers the perspectives of more Māori officials would be of great value.

Recent changes in Māori wards and constituencies

In 2021, the Local Electoral (Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Act 2021 brought Māori representation on local governments into the spotlight. This legislation removed the requirement for holding public referendums on the establishment of Māori wards and constituencies on local bodies, with the immediate consequence of an additional 32 local governments introduce

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[1] After the Local Election 2022 - Ngāi Tahu received seats on Environment Canterbury with 'the same functions, powers, responsibilities, rights, indemnities, and duties' of other Council members' (section 7 subsection 7 of the Canterbury Regional Council (Ngāi Tahu Representation) Act 2022). Section 14 also notes that the Act does not prevent a Māori constituency from being created.

MWC in the 2022 local government elections. Although the reforms have seen an increase in the number of councillors in MWC, there remains a history of exclusion for Māori in local government.

Māori forms of local governance (based on the land and one's connection to it) were challenged with the arrival of whalers, sailors, and an influx of immigrants in the early 1800s (Derby, 2015; Ballara, 1998; Greaves in Hayward et al., 2021; Waitangi Tribunal, 1987; Hayward et al., 2021, Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, 2009; Potaka, 1999; Te One 2019). As a result, in 1840, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (te Tiriti) was signed to create a way for both cultures to live together, by providing the framework for each culture to govern their own affairs while working together to jointly govern Aotearoa New Zealand. Although te Tiriti created aspirations of partnership, pre-existing forms of Māori governance were ignored and the role of Māori in local governance was minimised by the new settler government (Ballara, 1998). By the 1870s, many Māori were unable to vote for the settler government, were rapidly alienated from their land and quickly assimilated into a British education system.[2]

With the establishment of provinces in 1852 and the reforms in 1876 and 1989, Parliament conferred substantial powers on local bodies with no obligation to te Tiriti (The Counties Act 1876; Cookson, 2019; Wallis & Dollery, 2000; Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2020). Since 2001, reforms have continued with the introduction of the Local Electoral Act 2001 (LEA) and the Local Government Act in 2002. Although initially having no mechanism for separate and direct Māori representation, an amendment to the LEA in 2002 provided a mechanism to create MWC. Despite these provisions, local governments failed to implement MWC and Māori representation through western forms of local governance has remained low.

Historically, Māori have not had proportional representation in local government in Aotearoa New Zealand (Gagne, 2016; Hayward, 2010; Sullivan & Toki, 2012) (Table 1). Table 1 shows that, although trending upwards, since the beginning of Western forms of local governance in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori have not had proportional representation. It is important to remember that proportionality is not partnership. In the lead up to the 2022 local elections, there was no effective mechanism for local governments to provide Māori representation as required through tikanga, te Tiriti, and both domestic and international law. The next section explores the barriers that exist in using MWC to achieve partnership at local government.[3]

Barriers when establishing MWC

The process for creating MWC is in section 19Z of the LEA, subject to Schedule 1A. However, during this process, issues arose due to the unclear role of Māori communities in consultation, the racism experienced by Māori communities during this consultation and the amplification of these issues by MWC's non-compulsory nature.

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[2] See the New Zealand Constitution Act 1852 which, although not preventing Māori explicitly from voting, excluded most Māori by requiring individual title of land to vote. Most Māori land was communally owned. See also the Native Schools Act 1867, which saw education for Māori children become a British curriculum in English.

[3] The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights all call for adequate representation of Māori. Domestic legislation (for example, the Local Government Act 2022 and the Resource Management Act 1991) also maintains that Māori must be involved in local government).

TABLE 1: MĀORI POPULATION COMPARED TO MĀORI COUNCILLORS 1998 - 2019[4]

Year	Proportion of the population that is Māori (%)	Proportion of councillors that identify as Māori (%)
1998	14	5.5
2001	15	5.3
2004	15	4.3
2007	15	4.8
2010	16	7.4
2013	17	-
2016	16	10.1
2019	17	13.5

Data: Local Government New Zealand, 2020 pp8-11; Local Government New Zealand,2019 p8; Stats NZ 2020a; Stats NZ 2018.

The unclear role of Māori communities during consultation for MWC

A lack of representation for Māori in local governments means it is even more important that councils engage Māori communities when making decisions that impact them. However, this does not always happen. In the lead up to the 2022 elections, there was no standard way for local government to consult the public on the creation of MWC. Rather, 'councils could make decisions about creating Māori wards without public input but could also devise their own public input process if they prefer' (Department of Internal Affairs, 2021, p15). This is evident in the diverse approaches taken by Tauranga City Council and Rotorua Lakes District Council. Tauranga City (Tauranga City Council, 2021) sought community input before releasing their initial proposal, while Rotorua Lakes decided on the initial proposal without public input (Rotorua Lakes District Council, 2021a).

Consultation that does not prioritise Māori views is also reflected in the continuation of MWC. Every six years a council must undergo a representation review and redraw their boundaries including redeciding if they have an MWC. This can lead to a majority non-Māori council discussing and determining the effectiveness and continued existence of an MWC. According to an interviewee,

> Effectively your non-Māori colleges are deciding if a Māori ward is effective or not – not the community that put you there. They [the Māori community] should be the ones deciding if you were effective in the Māori ward seat.

Racism experienced during consultation

Interviewees recounted the difficulties discussing Māori representation. One recalled,

> It got very nasty... they wrote nasty letters, people were threatened. We had white powder [like anthrax] sent to the building... It was surprising that people were willing to go that far to frighten us.

Another stressed the impact such 'public debate' can have on the community:

> it opens up racism and this is particularly harmful for the tamariki and rangatahi to listen to. Does this help build Māori community or make us feel disempowered?

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[4] These data have been previously critiqued (see Vowles & Hayward (2021)) and although it had a low response rate, it is the best available and consistent with other findings that representation for Māori is not proportional.

Other councillors have also previously raised this point. In 2017, Mayor Phil Goff agreed with having an elected Māori representative in principle but feared the division a referendum could cause in Auckland (Harawira, 2021).

When establishing MWC, there are two main barriers to fair and effective representation. An unclear consultation process relegates Māori to a community of interest not a partner while racist rhetoric impacts the Māori community. These barriers are repeated every election cycle, due to the optional nature of MWC.

Making MWC compulsory

If MWC were mandatory, numbers would almost double (Table 2). If MWC were mandatory, there would be 106 Māori members (rather than 65) and 66 local councils with MWC (rather than 35).

TABLE 2: MāORI MEMBERS AND MWC UNDER MANDATORY MWC REQUIREMENTS

Council type	Unitary		Regional		Territorial		Total	
mandatory (m)/ non-mandatory(nm)	m	nm	m	nm	m	nm	m	nm
Number of Māori members	9	7	16	12	81	46	106	65
Proportion of all members that are Māori members	13%	10%	13%	10%	13%	7%	13%	8%
Councils with MWC	5	3	10	6	55	26	66	35
Proportion of councils with MWC	83%	50%	91%	55%	83%	39%	85%	45%

Calculations based on 2022 local government election numbers.

Although making MWC mandatory would create a significant increase in Māori representation, it would fail to provide proportional, let alone Tiriti-based partnership, to Māori. Making MWC mandatory would increase Māori political power and help address issues in consultation and racism by limiting how often 'public debates' occur.[5] However, due to calculations in the LEA, even if MWC were mandatory, only 85% of councils would have MWC - not all.

Barriers when implementing MWC

When implementing an MWC, the formula in the LEA limit Māori member numbers and influence.

Calculating the number of Māori members

The LEA dictates how many Māori members can be in an MWC. Schedule 1A clause 2 (to create a ward) and clause 4 (to create a constituency) provides the calculation for this using the formula:

nmm= (mepd/(mepd+gepd)) x nm
where:
- nmm is the number of Māori ward members
- mepd is the Māori Electoral Population of the district
- gepd is the general electoral population of the district
- nm is the proposed number of members on council as decided by the council.

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[5] In the lead up to the 2022 local elections, some councils did not want MWC as they were prioritising mana whenua representation. Although separate and direct mana whenua representation is also essential at local government, this can be done alongside mandatory MWC.

This calculation runs into two main issues. Firstly, it restricts some councils from having an MWC. Secondly, it is based on the Māori Electoral Roll, which splits political power and has data and philosophical issues attached to it.

The calculations in the LEA 2001 prevent some councils from having Māori members and therefore MWC if the Māori member calculation produces a fraction. Schedule 1A clause 2 subclauses (3) and (5) for a ward (or clause 4 subclauses (2) and (4) if you are creating a constituency) of the LEA 2001 dictate that fractions must be 'disregarded unless it exceeds a half'. Ōtorohanga District provides an illustration. In February 2022, the district had a MEP of 2,280 and a general population of 8,410 and 7 members on the council (Local Government Commission 2020b). Therefore:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\text{nmm} \quad &= (2280/\ (2280 + 8410)) \text{ x } 7 \\
&= (2280/10690) \text{ x } 7 \\
&= 0.213 \text{ x } 7 \\
&= 1.49
\end{aligned}
$$

As a result, Ōtorohanga will only have one Māori member as 1.49 is rounded down to 1.0.

This rule becomes concerning when the calculation produces *only* a fraction that is less than a half, meaning some councils are restricted from having Māori members. In February 2022, there were one regional and eleven territorial councils unable to adopt an MWC (Local Government Commission 2020). However, only a few of these councils acted on this in the lead-up to the 2022 local elections with Waimakariri, Selwyn, Mackenzie and Queenstown-Lakes district councils all resolving against Māori wards. The remaining territorial authorities have postponed the decision. West Coast was the only regional council to have a fraction less than a half and it, too, postponed its decision.

If a local body is able to overcome these barriers, and is eligible to create an MWC, further issues arise with the calculations in the LEA because the calculations rely on the Māori Electoral Roll. In Aotearoa New Zealand there are two electoral rolls; the 'general' roll for anybody eligible to vote and the 'Māori' roll for people of Māori descent. The Māori roll was originally created for Māori seats in the national government (Electoral Act 1993). However, the roll now impacts local level elections as well. In local government elections, the Māori electoral roll is used to calculate the Māori Electoral Population (MEP) which is then used in the Māori members calculation discussed in the previous section. The MEP is calculated under Section 3(1) of the Electoral Act 1993:

$$\text{MEP} = (m\ /\ (m + g)) \text{ x } d$$
where:
- m is the total number of Māori descent electors registered on the Māori electoral roll
- g is the total number of Māori descent electors registered on the general electoral roll
- d is the total number of people of Māori descent in the census.

The use of the Māori electoral roll in this calculation leads to three fundamental problems: the 'splitting' of Māori political power, data issues, and philosophical issues around identifying as Māori. Having two rolls has created a skewed political arrangement for Māori that result in less separate and direct representation on local councils. Nationally, just over half (52.4%) of Māori eligible to vote are on the Māori roll, resulting in seven seats in parliament. In comparison, if all Māori eligible to vote were on the Māori roll, there would be 14 (Bargh, 2020). The same problem occurs at local government, meaning there is a discrepancy between the number of MWC created in the lead up to the 2022 local elections and the number that would be created if the total voting population of Māori were included. For example, there are 14 territorial authorities with only 40 per cent or less of their eligible Māori population on the Māori roll. Across all the territorial authorities, the highest proportion of eligible Māori on the Māori roll is 68 per cent (in the Far North District), meaning

there is no territorial authority with separate and direct representation for the entire eligible Māori population.

Poor ethnicity data in both general population estimates and on the Māori roll bring the inputs of the LEA 2001 calculations under scrutiny. The 2018 census was not accurate for Māori across Aotearoa New Zealand (Kukutai & Cormack, 2018), resulting in a range of imputation techniques, including using administrative data, to fill gaps in the census (Stats NZ, 2019). This raises serious concerns about the accuracy of population data for the Māori population (Leonard, 2021). Issues in estimating the Māori population directly impact the amount of representation Māori have at both local and national governments.

Philosophical issues

A more philosophical issue regards the ability for Māori to be on the general roll. Why has central government created this option? By allowing Māori to be on the general roll, is the government hoping that there would be Māori who do not want to be recognised as Māori? Was the hope that all Māori would eventually be on the general roll? And if that is the case, is this a hope by the government that Māori would assimilate? What does it mean when a colonial government asks you whether (or not) you want to identify with your indigenous heritage – how do they want you to answer? Complex internalised colonisation, assimilation and structural racism can decrease the number of Māori who do choose to acknowledge their indigenous heritage, sustaining and exacerbating the existing political power imbalance.

The calculations in the LEA 2001 codify western political perspectives in confusing calculations, that limit the voice and political power of Māori in local government. This prevents councils from being able to embody partnership, preventing fair and effective representation for tangata Māori. Using an alternative base population (to the MEP) would make these calculations more transparent and avoid issues of the Māori roll. Alternative base populations could be 1) Māori eligible to vote, or 2) the Māori general population.

If the Māori population eligible to vote was used as the base population (and Māori wards were mandatory) there would be 91 Māori members across Aotearoa New Zealand (instead of 81 using the MEP, or the 46 that will exist in 2022). There would also only be three (compared to 12) TAs that would not be eligible to have Māori wards (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020a, 2020b; Local Government Commission, 2020). Similarly, if the base population for MWC was the total Māori population (and MWC were mandatory) there would be 135 Māori members and only one council (Mackenzie) that would be ineligible. This shows that changing the base population has real impacts on the representation that tangata Māori receive.

Changing the base population is not a new idea. Te Ururoa Flavell, when introducing the (failed) Local Electoral (Māori Representation) Amendment Bill in 2010, stated that politicians are accountable to everyone, not only those that can currently vote. In his Bill, Flavell states

> the number of Māori seats would be in proportion to the total Māori population of the relevant territory or region. And why not? Surely our decision-making bodies should reflect our communities (New Zealand Parliament, 2010: 11794).

As one interviewee summarised,

> Māori representation should be based on population and not what roll you are on. Māori wards are based on how people get elected not on how people should be represented.

Barriers when using MWC

Barriers experienced in the creation and implementation of MWC are amplified by barriers when using MWC. The context Māori members operate in limits their effectiveness and divides their accountability, increasing barriers to fair and effective representation for Māori communities.

Diverse representation

Māori members are expected to do what is best for the local area, while representing multiple diverse and distinct views from within the Māori community. The Tauranga City Council outlines the immense expectations on Māori members:

> Māori wards are intended to substantially represent th*e importance of the Māori community voice*, to provide assurance that *issues of priority to Māori* can be more directly brought to Council, and to promote confidence in local government decision- making processes, knowing that where *there is a distinctive Māori perspective* related to a matter, *someone* will be able to interpret and weigh up the associated issues. Importantly Māori wards are intended to address a concern that local government does not at present represent Māori issues, or wider issues with real implications for the Māori community [*emphasis* added] (Tauranga City Council, n.d. para. 7).

The assumption that one (as is the case in Tauranga) Māori member will be able to represent all Māori is flawed. 'The umbrella term Māori obscures the cultural and historical differences between groups *within* Māori identity' (Greaves in Hayward et al., 2021:25). This sentiment is echoed by Bishop when discussing the flawed assumptions in biculturalism:

> Firstly, it assumes that the partnership relationship exists between two homogenous parties and does not take into account 'cultural pluralism' or the fact that many Māori identify themselves as part of other ethnicities or groups. Secondly, it does not consider the importance of separate and distinct iwi and hapū (Bishop, 2010:30)

Māori members also need to work across the '...range of groups within each iwi that have different interest and they all want and should be able to engage in different ways – hapū, rūnanga, settlement entities, and they all have the right to have a relationship with council' (Interviewee). Māori members also have a duty to represent both mātāwaka and mana whenua (Te One, 2019: 237; Human Rights Commission, 2010: 20; Bargh, 2016). These groups have diverse rights, needs and perspectives within and between them, as one interviewee explained:

> There are mana whenua and mātāwaka issues here and some deeply complex layers of how people are going to navigate that...At the moment, mātāwaka engagement is generally through other organisations where you have groups that can bring forward Māori voice – this brings up the challenge of diversity of thought across these groups.

Combined these ineffective council boundaries, the consolidation of Māori voice, council capability issues and a persistent minority role, can increasingly limit the effectiveness of Māori members for their communities, as an interviewee observed:

> It is not perfect, and our people want us to deliver more than that as they see poverty around them, and they see our lands and our lakes being polluted. They want action. This is intergenerational change as it was caused by intergenerational oppression and assimilation.

Underlying issues

The system of local government in Aotearoa New Zealand is underpinned by a British worldview. Although Māori are entitled to have their own, separate sphere of influence, Māori are also entitled to take equal part in the system that governs the joint spheres – including having the ability for this sphere to reflect Te Ao Māori. Currently, this system does not support Te Ao Māori views in many ways. Firstly, it functions on a short-term cycle not with an intergenerational view. Secondly, it places emphasis on where you are living, not where you are from or whakapapa to. Thirdly, it makes decisions by vote rather than consensus building. Fourthly, it enforces Western understandings of boundaries making it difficult for Māori and councils to maintain and establish Tiriti relationships

These clashes between Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Pākehā are evident throughout the three stages of establishing, implementing, and using MWC. When creating MWC, the partnership Māori expect and the 'independence' councils must appear to uphold come into conflict. When implementing MWC, western liberal perspectives of proportional representation are codified in the calculations in the LEA 2001, which cut across Māori understandings of mana whenua and Tiriti rights. When on council, Māori members face interlinked issues that diminish effectiveness by steamrolling over boundaries, both physical and non-physical, that are important to Māori communities. Māori members are expected to represent a broad and diverse range of views across the Māori communities, while being restricted to local government boundaries. Challenges at every stage of creating MWC mean, as a mechanism for representation, they are unable to flex to Te Ao Māori and are destined to have limited success as part of a wider system that does not reflect all Māori.

Conclusion

Representation of Māori is both beneficial to and required of local governments. However, history shows that Māori have been locked out of both legislative change and inadequate representation. Introduced in 2002, MWC sought to create partnership between Māori communities and local councils. However, the way MWC currently function prohibit fair and effective representation for tangata Māori.

However, MWC remain an important mechanism for indigenous inclusion at local government and there are changes we could make to improve them. We could change the base population, discuss aligning boundaries, upskill members of council and have a discussion nationally about making MWC compulsory while strengthening relationships with mana whenua. This article is not against MWC, but rather in hope of improving them to move towards the partnership promised by Te Tiriti.

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8. New Zealand's 'team of rivals' – dual candidates or duelling candidates?

Seán Mahoney

'The battle for the mayoralty never ended' – Comment on Tauranga City Council Dysfunction (Review and Observer Team, 2020)

New Zealand still has a myriad of under researched and 'missing links' in our knowledge of local elections. The issue of candidate motivation and success in standing for more than one vacancy provides one such missing link. The New Zealand model of a collegial governing body also poses a particular conundrum when winning candidates for the mayoralty contest can find themselves sat around the governing table with the defeated candidates they fought 'toe to toe' with to secure office. This can lead to a potential 'Team of Rivals' scenario, a leadership strategy attributed to President Obama in recognition of Abraham Lincoln's strategy of surrounding his cabinet with rivals of 'high ambition and strong ego' (Coutu, 2009).

Horizontal restrictions and vertical freedom

The Local Electoral Act 2001 provides a range of horizontal restrictions on candidates in local elections. These include restricting a candidate from standing in more than one ward or constituency of the same local authority or for more than one subdivision of a community board area. A candidate cannot stand for a regional council and for election as a mayor, councillor, or community board. Whilst these restrictions are clear, this does not stop a candidate from standing for mayor and councillor, councillor, and community board or even all three. The Act does not place any restrictions on candidates standing in different territorial authorities nor does it address what would happen if a candidate found themselves successfully elected to two different authorities.

District councils elect a mayor from a district wide ballot and at the same time elect councillors to represent the district. The mayor has some limited formal powers, including chairing council meetings, appointing a deputy mayor, and establishing council committees. These powers though are not without recourse from the elected council and ultimately no decisions can be made by a council without a majority vote. The mayor's popular mandate translates to only one vote around the council table and despite the rise of party-political groupings in some of the larger councils, most councillors are still elected as independents (Webster, Asquith, Rohan, Cardow, & Majavu, 2019).

To add to the complexity, local elections often take place alongside elections to various other bodies such as licensing trusts and up to 2019 for District Health Boards which often provided avenues for candidates to stand in various other seats and make use of one set of campaign materials or efforts.

Dual candidacy

Current understanding

While the idea of dual candidates is not unique to New Zealand it is not a common feature globally and New Zealand's combination of directly elected mayors and low level of overt party-political candidates provides an opportune breeding ground for dual candidacy. In Australia for example, dual candidacy is permitted in New South Wales but is prohibited in Queensland. There is no clear research on the momentum of candidates to stand for multiple vacancies in a local election, nor of their success or the impact on public interest.

There are several mixed member system elections where a candidate can stand for election as both an individual and on a party list basis. Although the outcomes of these differ to our local elections, it does allow us to gain an insight in behaviours around candidates standing in multiple roles at the same time. It has also been shown that voters can use this information to maximise and incentivise the outcome, suggesting voters have an incentive to vote for the candidate where they perceive the candidate's greatest chance of success lies (Hizen, 2006). This could lead us to believe that dual candidates, so long as they are credible will receive greater success in the vacancy the electorate sees them as naturally fitting.

We have also seen changes to candidates' motivation and strategic intentions where they are able to receive a direct electoral impact in a mixed member election. Where candidates are standing as an individual but also placed on a list, they have an ability to push their own campaigns to maximise the dual candidacy and they tend to develop and deliver more intense and complex campaign strategies (Trumm, 2018). These candidates had adopted different campaign strategies, so maybe duality allows for a different style of campaign rather than just a doubling up of options.

In an older study within a New Zealand context, candidates who campaigned for the Auckland Regional Authority and the Auckland City Council elections held concurrently were studied as part of a wider study of this somewhat odd electoral arrangement. These candidates were able to stand for and represent the two different bodies and in the 1977 election we saw three of the candidates for the Auckland Mayoralty also stand for the Regional Authority. While one was successful in both, it is noted that two of the other candidates received a substantial 'sympathy' vote (having stood against an incumbent mayor) even though the duality is not considered for one of the main objectives of the study (Bush, 1985).

New Zealand's local elections are predominantly non-partisan. Without parties operating as an institutional gatekeeper in the role of party selection there is no intervening variable between candidates and voters (Webster, Asquith, Rohan, Cardow, & Majavu, 2019; Vowles & Hayward, 2021.

Mayors who find themselves having to govern with defeated candidates face the challenge of creating a successful and harmonious coalition. This cohabitation requires a different skill set to traditional party-based coalition making in local government (Debus & Gross, 2016). These challenges to the mayor of achieving their policy objectives with no guarantee of the confidence of the whole or a majority of councillors, leave them needing to create issue-based coalitions on individual decisions or attempt to press ahead using the sometimes limited powers of their office to achieve outcomes. Not surprisingly, mayors who don't have majority support will rank their influence as low, even if they have strong formal powers (Denters, 2006) so the need for the numbers really matters.

Vote maximiser

Dual Candidates possibly provides an opportunity for vote maximisation. Local election candidates are often considered to be rewarded for name recognition. In councils where some or all councillors

are elected at large, the barrier to being a dual candidate is nothing more than another $200 deposit, a small price to pay for a greater chance of victory, considering when campaigning over the same electorate.

Rise of dual candidates

This analysis looks at the impact of dual candidates firstly to determine if they are more successful than candidates who choose to only stand in one seat. The creation of a dataset allowed for an analysis of whether there were trends in these numbers and / or their relative success. Looking at the data over three electoral cycles has allowed for the establishment of a baseline for future analysis by drawing together Department of Internal Affairs statistics (Department of Internal Affairs, n.d.) with detailed analysis of electoral results at a council level.

The number of candidates who stood as dual candidates is shown in Table 1. The total number of those who were successful rose in 2022 and there was a marked increase in successful mayoral candidates.

TABLE 1: DUAL CANDIDATES 2016-1022

Candidates	2016	2019	2022
Dual Candidates	88	82	118
Elected Mayor	6	5	11
Elected Council	41	39	46

The overview presented in Table 2 provides greater detail of the number of candidates in the last three elections, noting that in 2022 Tauranga City Council did not return elected members. While the number of overall potential candidates for mayor rose significantly between 2016 and 2019 there was a reduction in the number of dual candidates. However, while there was little increase in candidates for mayor or councillor in 2022 there was a marked increase in dual candidates. One potential reason for this might be the number of mayors who did not seek re-election in 2022 (Piper, 2022) opening a route for existing candidates to seek the mayoralty.

TABLE 2: DUAL CANDIDATES DETAILED ANALYSIS

	2016	2019	2022
Mayoral Candidates	251	292	291
Council Candidates	1508	1559	1593
Total Candidates	**1759**	**1851**	**1884**
Dual candidates	88	82	118
Win ratio Mayor	0.27	0.23	0.23
win ratio dual Mayor	0.07	0.06	0.09
Win ratio Councillors	0.46	0.46	0.44
Win ratio dual Councillors	0.47	0.48	0.39
Mayoral Contests	67	67	66
Elected Councillors	696	710	707

Includes uncontested seats

What we do find is that over these three electoral cycles mayoral candidates' chances have stayed relatively stable, when calculated purely as the number of candidates over the number of vacancies with no accounting for other factors such as incumbency or gender. There was a slight decrease in 2019 due to the rise in candidate numbers. The chances for a dual candidate to be elected as mayor are well below the raw chances of a non-dual candidate and for a councillor they seem to be similar,

leading perhaps to a conclusion that being a dual candidate can shore up or strengthen a council election campaign.

Creating interest in contests

New Zealand's local elections have historically been contests with low public interest. This debate continues to raise challenges to the very nature and structure of these contests (Radio New Zealand, 2022). It could be hoped that where candidates stand in more than one vacancy this motivation and campaign effort might increase interest in these contests and therefore turnout. The council with the highest turnout in 2022 was Kaikōura District Council with 62% turnout and interestingly four dual candidates. Several other councils in the top ten turnouts had dual candidates, however the lowest turnout was Hamilton City with just 29.4% turnout and five dual candidates. When we look at the trends over the three electoral cycles there is no positive correlation between dual candidates and turnout and even a slight decrease in turnout as dual candidate numbers increase, so perhaps this cheapens the value or seriousness of the contest (Figure 1).
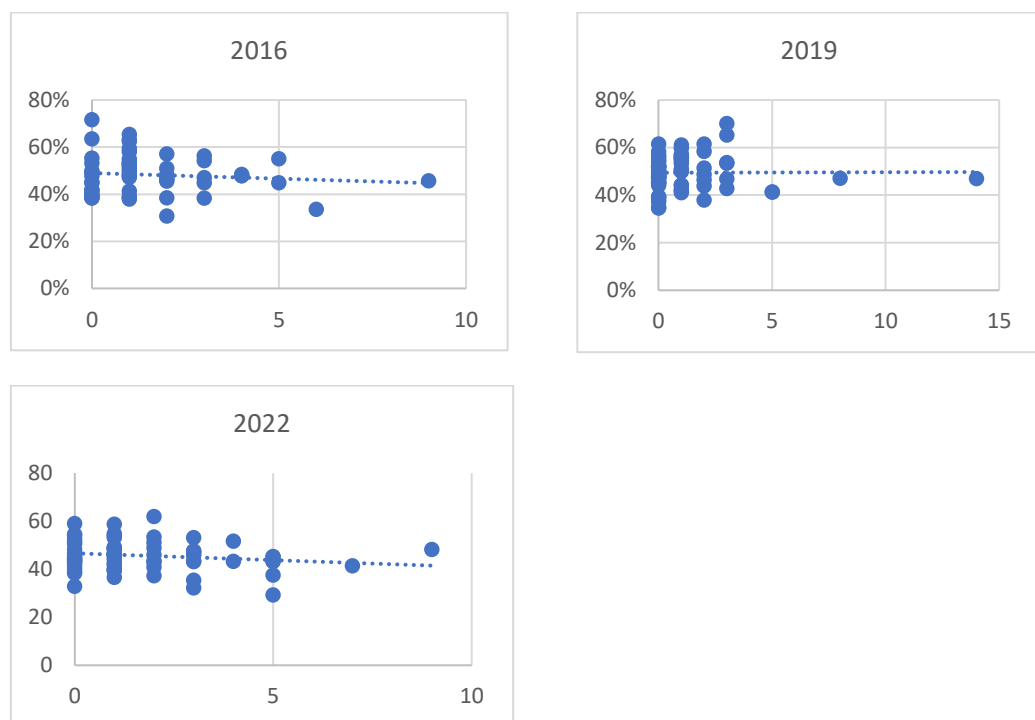
FIGURE 1 CORRELATION BETWEEN DUAL CANDIDACY AND ELECTION TURNOUT BY YEAR

2022 elections

Gender

Dual candidacy can provide additional insight into election campaign behaviour and outcomes. In 2022 we can see that females comprised nearly a third of all dual candidates (Table 3), yet only 18 percent of those winning the mayoralty were female and just over a quarter of those winning council seats. This suggests that while females tend to have demonstrated greater success at the ballot box in New Zealand as a proportion of those who stand (Webster & Crothers, 2022), this benefit does not appear to translate to dual candidates.

TABLE 3: DUAL CANDIDATES 2022 BY GENDER

Gender	Total Candidates		Elected Mayor		Elected Councillors	
	No.	Proportion (%)	No.	Proportion (%)	No.	Proportion (%)
Female	37	31.4	2	18.2	13	28.3
Male	81	68.6	9	81.8	33	71.7
Total	**118**	**100.0**	**11**	**100.0**	**46**	**100.0**

Councils' representation arrangements are made at a local level, and they do not all have the same election system or ward structures. The role of local councils electing some or in the case of Palmerston North and Dunedin all their councillors 'at-large' i.e., the whole district is one electorate has been raised as a possible motivator for council candidates also standing for the mayoralty. In the case of Tauranga this was raised as a negative for the city, however while Dunedin has retained at-large wards and dual candidates as part of the fabric of their campaign the picture is less clear in other councils. Looking at those councils with the largest number of dual candidates in 2022 (Table 4) there is a mix of both vacant seats and incumbents, a range of incumbents losing office and only 2 of the councils had at-large constituencies. It is hard then to see any real patterns from the 2022 election outcomes.

TABLE 4: DUAL CANDIDATES 2022, INCUMBENCY AND AT-LARGE

Council	Dual	Incumbent/Vacant	Incumbent W/L	At Large
Dunedin	9	Incumbent	Lost	Wholly at Large
Far North	7	Vacant		
Hamilton	5	Incumbent	Won	
New Plymouth	5	Incumbent	Won	At Large
Wellington	5	Incumbent	Lost	
Western Bay of Plenty	5	Vacant		
Whakatāne	5	Incumbent	Lost	
Whangarei	5	Vacant		

Tim, Tubby and knowing pain

The 2022 elections saw Invercargill City voters fail to re-elect Sir Tim Shadbolt after nine terms in office. Rather oddly as an incumbent Mayor he also stood as a dual candidate for council. This is not a common stance and may reflect a lack of confidence in the electorate. Sir Tim said he was standing for both as he was 'committed to resolving unfinished business', which given that he had been Mayor for most of the past 30 years caused some questions to be raised. A previous councillor was critical of Sir Tim's position saying, "I would never vote for anyone that has a bob each way" and calling it a backstop (Harding & Fallow, 2022). It may have felt like an attempt at a consolation prize for losing the mayoralty, but Sir Tim received neither.

Christchurch dual candidate Tubby Hansen thought that dual candidates can increase their profile even further by standing in both contests using two separate affiliations for his elections. Hansen has run unsuccessfully for Christchurch council since 1969 (Gates, 2022). His mayoral campaign was under the banner of Economic Euthenics, while his campaign for the council mayoralty was Progressive Nudist. Neither of these campaigns were successful and his quest for electoral success remains. Hansen wasn't the only candidate to use an interesting affiliation. Calvin Payne standing in

Selwyn District as a dual candidate used the affiliation 'Know Paine-Know Gain'; unfortunately for him the voters did not agree.

Vote for Stevey Chernishov…or Richard Osmaston...or don't

In 2022 Stevey Chernishov joined the long list of candidates looking to be elected as mayor of Invercargill City Council. The main difference between Chernishov and the other candidates was that he was also standing for a council seat on Southland District Council and Queenstown Lakes District Council (Savory, 2022). Unlike other dual candidates, he was looking to win and hold all three roles at the same time, something the Local Electoral Act does not forbid. Chernishov felt he would provide a "collaborative link between Invercargill, our regions throughout the south, and Central Otago". He wasn't the only candidate to spread themselves across boundaries. Richard Osmaston of the Money Free Party of New Zealand, stood for six mayoralties and two council positions.[1] Osmaston had stood for as a dual candidate in Nelson in previous elections but never thrown his hat so far and wide as he did in 2022. For Ormiston this was about raising the conversation 'above the banal' (Sivignon, 2022). While neither of these candidates were successful, their candidature raises an issue that had they managed to win multiple contests at the same time, so long as they were not in the same district, they would have been legally entitled to hold those offices at the same time.

Duelling candidates

While dual candidacy can provide some entertaining and interesting campaign styles, there is a more serious challenge that it brings to local political leadership under the current model. The New Zealand mayoral model is based on relationship building and negotiation rather than the legislative power of the role (Mahoney, 2021). In the 2019-2022 term there were a range of councils who saw challenges to their political leadership from the inability of a mayor to command a consistent majority. In some of these cases, Dunedin, Tauranga and Wellington being prime examples, the mayor was managing a council that had defeated rivals at the table. In the case of Tauranga this was noted as coming from 'dysfunctional governance arising from the failure or breakdown of key relationships' (Review and Observer Team, 2020). This breakdown ultimately led to the resignation of the Mayor and the replacement of the Councillors by a government appointed set of Commissioners.

While there is no formal role for councillors to be in 'opposition' in New Zealand's council structure mayors need to find ways to ensure that accommodate and support this opposition while remaining a functioning council. Despite the rise of duelling councils in recent years, most councils still function effectively and collaboratively, and post-election candidates work collaboratively and effectively to ensure a majority voice emerges. Dual candidates seem to generate little additional value to the election process and despite the risk of having defeated candidates at the table (Dunedin will have five this term), the alternative would be to risk losing some effective and capable councillors who might have tested the waters with a mayoralty bid (Burton, 2017). The possibility of a candidate being elected to multiple councils, while an entertaining prospect, still seems some way off being an eventuality.

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[1] He was mayoral candidate for Tasman, Buller, Westland, Nelson and Marlborough and also stood as councillor in Tasman and Grey Districts.

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Part 3
Representing who

9. Auckland's unrepresentative government

Grant Duncan

Since 2010, local government in the Auckland region has been based on a unified city-region structure that serves a population approaching 1.7 million. The unified governance was intended to provide the policy and planning effectiveness needed for rapid growth. Strategically cohesive planning and decision-making across the region would address an existing infrastructure deficit and provide for the future, it was thought. Efficiency and cost-reduction weren't primary aims of the reform, even though some administrative and IT duplication could be overcome. Businesses and central government had found it difficult to deal with the former seven local authorities and their differing policies and processes; it was argued that greater Auckland should have one executive mayor to speak for the whole region as its leader. This reform was undertaken without a local referendum, even though one of its stated aims was to improve local democratic participation and engagement.

Auckland Council now has an executive mayor (elected at large) who chairs a governing body with 20 ward-based councillors. Rates and bylaws are approved by this governing body, along with a unified plan and budget. Below that, there are 21 local boards with 149 elected members all told. Local boards have a place-making role, but they can be over-ruled by the governing body, and they have no rating or regulatory powers. There is a chief executive who leads the administrative structures of the council, and council-controlled organisations are tasked with managing major assets, especially transport and water.

This chapter assesses the Auckland Council in terms of representative government, alongside other institutions of government with local roles that have also been changing in recent years. How are Aucklanders represented now within local government? Can we call Auckland's system 'democratic'?

Representation deficits

For present purposes, I am mainly concerned with the formal sense of representation that is encapsulated in the long-standing maxim: 'no taxation without representation'. That is, local political representation in Auckland is vested in the governing body, which holds the power to tax, or to set rates on properties, and not in the local boards which lack such powers and are dependent on the governing body for their budgets. Representation in the now more common usage of descriptive representation – or the ways in which an assembly resembles the diverse community that it represents – is also important here, in particular regarding Māori.

The Auckland Council owes its existence – and its delegated powers to pass bylaws and set rates – to laws passed in the House of Representatives in Wellington. There are 26 electoral districts either fully or partially within the boundaries of the Auckland Council, and, at last count, there were 16 list MPs residing in Auckland (which will vary from time to time). That makes 42 MPs representing Aucklanders and/or based in Auckland: twice the number of representatives on the Council's governing body (one mayor and 20 councillors).

Aucklanders have twice as many representatives in Wellington as they have in Queen Street, then. Furthermore, based on a population estimate of 1.7 million, the representation ratio in Auckland's local government is approaching 1:81,000, when including the mayor. Councillors undoubtedly spend time in the community, but their wards have populations in excess of 80,000, so they can only get acquainted with and listen to a small minority. Some local boards, moreover, have populations above 100,000, which could be a large city, but those boards lack the powers of a normal city council.

For comparison, the Central Hawke's Bay District Council has nine members for a population (in 2018) of 14,142. That is a representation ratio of 1:1,571. The principle of 'one person, one vote' clearly doesn't apply equally across New Zealand in local elections.

Māori representation

The Royal Commission on Auckland Governance had recommended that Māori be represented on the governing body through two wards, using the Māori electoral roll, plus one appointed by a Mana Whenua Forum. The National-led government and the ACT Party's Rodney Hide, as responsible minister at that time, did not accept this recommendation. Instead, they created the Independent Māori Statutory Board (IMSB) with nine members to advance the interests of Māori in Tāmaki Makaurau. Seven members represent mana whenua and two represent mātāwaka (Māori who live in the Auckland Council area and affiliate with iwi outside of it). They are selected and appointed, not elected. Two appointed IMSB members sit (alongside elected councillors) with voting rights on each of the governing body's subcommittees that deal with the management and stewardship of natural and physical resources.

Direct representation of Māori in local government is as important as – or arguably even more important than – Māori seats in the House of Representatives, which have existed since 1867. While the Royal Commission's proposed two Māori wards for Tāmaki Makaurau would have cut across mana whenua boundaries, the current arrangement is an awkward compromise that's been controversial among Māori and non-Māori. There's been litigation over the selection of board members, for instance. The Council is also considering the establishment of Māori wards for future elections, in which case Māori representation would occur through both means. So, the form of Māori representation in Tāmaki Makaurau is far from settled.

Centralisation

In general, though, local political representation has been stripped out of Auckland. The recent reforms of public healthcare disestablished the district health boards (DHBs), the governance of which had been partially based on local elections. This has affected the whole of the country, not just Auckland; it was stimulated by the fragmentation in public health that had been exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. DHB elections may not have been very meaningful for many voters, but the Clark government's re-establishment of elections to health boards following the demise of the Crown health enterprises of the neoliberal 1990s was once seen as a significant restoration of local democracy. This was removed by the Ardern government and replaced by a centrally administered bureaucracy governed by ministerial appointees.

Similarly, the sixth Labour government plans to combine local water assets and vest them in ten regional water entities with balance sheet separation from city and district councils. The councils will have their ownership interests preserved and represented in the governance of these entities, but direct electoral accountability will be lost, and public water services (tap, waste and storm water) will be provided by the new entities. One of the concerns about the creation of the Auckland Council in 2010 was around the accountability of council-controlled organisations (CCOs), including Watercare,

which have their own boards of governors. These vital assets were placed at arm's length from the governing body and the local boards, making them less democratically accountable, it was argued. Local accountability to the people who depend on the water services in Auckland will be even more diluted, however, by incorporation into a wider regional entity under the Labour government's water services (previously, 'three waters') reform. The opposition National Party pledged to repeal these reforms, partly on the grounds that the governance model is 'undemocratic'.

Furthermore, central government can now override the Auckland unitary plan to undertake large-scale urban development. While this is deemed necessary to address a chronic housing shortage, people who have contributed to local consultation on the unitary plan have expressed displeasure at seeing central government give itself powers to over-rule them. There are, of course, cases in favour of each of the centralisation processes described above, but they come at a cost: local democratic processes are sacrificed as a result. The hollowing out of local democracy is visible in the structural changes made to local bodies and services, as much as in low voter turnouts.

Election 2022

Discussion of the crisis of local democracy tends to focus on the declining rates of voter turnout. Only 35.4% of registered voters turned out in Auckland's 2022 local election, which was lower than the national average. Turnout was highest (62%) in the 76–80 age bracket, but lower in higher-deprivation neighbourhoods. Those registered as 'Māori descent' turned out at lower rates across all age-groups (Allpress & Osborne, 2023). Given that the contest for mayor was not a foregone conclusion – especially before Leo Molloy and Viv Beck pulled out of the campaign – one might have expected greater interest and hence a boost in turnout, but that did not occur.

Of those who cast a ballot, 44.9% voted for Wayne Brown (born 1946), which means that only 15.9% of registered voters actually voted for him and made him mayor. According to a pre-electoral opinion poll, ACT and National supporters and people 60 and over were more likely than the average to support Brown for mayor. His nearest rival, Efeso Collins (born 1974), was more likely than the average to be supported by Green and Labour party supporters, Pasifika, and women aged 35–54 (Q+A Kantar Public, 2022).

Brown's success was based on generous financial donations and some self-funding (Niall, 2022) and on pitching to those who are more likely to vote. Efeso Collins was pitching to people who are less likely to do so: people in higher-deprivation neighbourhoods, and Pasifika and Māori. The election results show Collins won more votes than Brown in some areas of West and South Auckland, but especially in Māngere, Ōtāhuhu, Manurewa and Ōtara. In a sense, he was defeated by low turnout.

Wealthy, elderly, conservative white folk elected the new mayor. One can infer that they are more likely to be homeowners – people who directly pay Council rates and who hate seeing them rise, especially as they're mainly pensioners. In effect, elderly property owners (as against younger renters) elected the mayor. Although there's a universal adult franchise, the election of mayor Wayne Brown suggests an implicit return to the eighteenth century's property qualifications: those who own property, and hence pay tax, elect one of their own to represent them. This is reinforced by the continued existence of the non-resident ratepayer roll, which allows property owners to vote in more than one local election.

Distrust rules

In the same pre-election opinion poll cited above, 49% didn't feel confident in the ability of Auckland Council to meet the needs of its residents. ACT and National supporters, and Wayne Brown

supporters were more likely than average to express that lack of confidence, and more likely to regard the impact of the Super City governance structure as negative. Supporters of Efeso Collins, on the other hand, were more likely than the average to express confidence in the Council (Q+A Kantar Public, 2022). The tiny minority of Aucklanders who voted for Brown were people with little trust in the system, and indeed Brown's campaign tactics played on that sentiment.

It's not all Mr Brown's fault, however. The Auckland Council was born with a congenital legitimacy deficit. It was not approved by a referendum, probably because the model would have been rejected. A similar proposal for Hawkes Bay was roundly defeated in a referendum. There were secessionist movements soon after the Auckland Council's inception, especially in North Rodney and Waiheke Island, and surveys have revealed low levels of political trust. Even when evaluated on efficiency grounds, let alone political trust, the Auckland Council's population is probably many times larger than the optimal size for a local authority, which may be around 100,000 (Duncan, 2016).

Moreover, sheer size may have been a factor in the Council's slow and uncoordinated communications, or 'poor command clarity', during the floods on 27 January 2023. The subsequent inquiry questioned some 'implicit assumptions' in the Council's internal culture, including 'complacency or optimism bias that Auckland was inherently 'big enough to cope with anything' [which] may also have partly contributed to the slowness in declaring the state of emergency' (Bush, 2023, p. 70). Much needs to be done to restore public confidence in the Council's competence in emergency management, let alone other matters.

Political distrust is a problem for any government, though. In elections, the people entrust legislative and executive powers to a tiny minority of their fellow citizens. A degree of scepticism and distrust is rational, as a democratic constitution implicitly accepts that no one can or should be trusted with powers that are ill-defined or unlimited in scope or duration. Serious contenders for office shouldn't ask voters for a blind faith, and they ought to know that the people's trust in them has to be earned, based on their personal integrity and the effective delivery of public services. As for Auckland, one can hardly say that a leader elected by only 16% has the confidence of the people, and their confidence can only have been eroded when he reacted inappropriately during and following the natural disaster mentioned above.

We cannot blame the candidates alone for low turnouts in elections, however. Voter turnout is affected by and related to many variables (Solijonov, 2016). There's a trend in public discussions of declining turnouts in local elections for people to jump to the conclusion that postal voting is the problem, therefore online voting is a solution, if not *the* solution. Molineaux (2019) has already put this simplistic argument in its place, however. Besides the IT security and privacy flaws that can harm electoral integrity, online voting will not solve the problem of participation. As a counterfactual, general elections in New Zealand have seen voter turnout (as a percentage of those registered) increase steadily from a low of 74.2% in 2011 up to 82.2% in 2020, even with the old-fashioned method of in-person voting. Advance voting does appear to have helped, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, but the increased turnout occurred without resort to online voting. The problem of declining turnout in local elections may not lie in the physical methods (postal or online), but in people's lack of knowledge and interest in local affairs. The decline of suburban newspapers, for example, may be a factor.

Neither local nor democratic

If local government was genuinely democratic, then we would see high rates of voter turnout, while those in communities actually affected by the council's decisions would have a high level of participation in and influence over decision-making processes. In fact, though, decisions are

increasingly being made at greater distances from communities, by the governing body in downtown Auckland, or by cabinet ministers and public servants in Wellington. Communities may be consulted through anonymous mail-outs sent from the council bureaucracy or a CCO, or sometimes by unrepresentative surveys, but the extent of bottom-up influence is limited.

There are some promising exceptions. For example, a deliberative democratic process was carried out by the Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Water in Auckland in 2022. This assembly addressed the question, 'What should be the next source of water for Auckland, post-2040?' and it delivered its recommendations to the chair of the board of Watercare (Buklijas, 2022). This was more than just a large focus-group, but its recommendations could get buried by restructuring of Watercare into one of the new regional water entities proposed by the Labour government. These entities are designed to remove control from the councils, and hence would leave communities out of the loop.

Does the phrase 'local democracy' now obscure more than it reveals, then? Local government has become, despite the rhetoric about participation and engagement, remote and undemocratic. Auckland in particular has lost its local democracy and reverted to something like the eighteenth-century version of representation: government by and for the elderly propertied class.

After the Flood

In the meantime, Auckland Council faces unpalatable choices. The mayor's budget proposal put before the governing body in December 2022 revealed a $295 million shortfall – assuming the Council continued funding the activities previously scheduled for the 2023/24 financial year within the 2021/31 Long-term Plan. Much of the previously unanticipated cost pressure came from inflation and rising interest rates. It was proposed to sell the council's shareholding in Auckland International Airport Limited in order to pay down debt and thus reduce interest payments, as that would likely outweigh the projected dividends. Further options for savings in operational and capital expenditure and in budgeting methods were identified by council staff. But this proposal was drafted before the flash-floods and Cyclone Gabrielle had hit in late January and early February 2023, all of which changed things.

For example, the proposed budget had included a reduction in stormwater reactive maintenance. Even though this was supposed not to affect service levels – and only to change the way in which the service was budgeted – the failure of stormwater systems to cope with the extreme downpour on 27 January 2023, and the subsequent physical damage, would logically lead councillors to reconsider this particular budget line more carefully.

Similarly, the mayor's proposal suggested that the Healthy Waters budget had been set above what was needed to cope with major storm events. Some creative accounting and reduced capital expenditure would, it was claimed, have no impact on service levels. The Healthy Waters asset management plan was set up to manage stormwater and its effects on the environment and on people. It's a comprehensive plan that takes account of the natural and built environment, physical assets and cultural values, within which the hard infrastructure (pipes, drains, etc.) plays only one part. Protecting people and property from the effects of flooding – and repairing flood damage – requires holistic attention to natural water systems, aquifers, coastal and marine environments and the overall built environment, including roads and pavements. The mitigating potential of parks and other features that make cities 'spongier' during floods (Lo & Chan, 2023) such as daylighting city streams (Bradbury, 2023) show that other factors of urban design should be taken into account in future. Flood-proofing the whole urban and rural environment encompassed by the Auckland Council is a complex and costly business – and doing and spending less on those matters no longer look like sound and sustainable options.

Into the middle of this, however, came the Labour government's 'affordable water' reform that restructures and amalgamates local water services and assets, including stormwater. Auckland's Watercare CCO is incorporated into a larger public water entity which has operational and financial independence (balance sheet separation) from the local territorial authorities, allowing it to invest in infrastructure and to deliver services, including stormwater. This is supposed to mitigate floods for Auckland and all of Northland.

The new water entities will have oversight through a regional partnership between local authorities and mana whenua, and their governing board members will be appointed on relevant skills. Hence the Auckland Council, represented as a minority, would have some oversight of and input into the northern water entity – but this significantly dilutes the 100% ownership and control that it had over Watercare. The Council's Healthy Waters plan thus gets bureaucratically bifurcated. That plan requires oversight and integration of natural and built environments, but one significant part (stormwater drainage and its physical assets) gets handed over to a new separate entity. There is a glaring weakness, then, in the public-water services reform regarding flood management and prevention. Extra organisational complexity is added in, so getting anything done will probably take longer, and could even get bogged down by the diverging aims of distinct organisations. There is even less scope for democratic engagement by either Māori or non-Māori communities, as co-governance oversight of the water entities occurs quite some distance from those affected, rather than closer to flax-roots level. The local marae would be no better off in this system than any homeowner of any ethnicity. No governance positions in the water entities are directly accountable through elections to the people affected, many of whom have had their homes and businesses ruined by flooding.

It's not at all self-evident (at the time of writing) that the new water entities will be more effective than the local councils were, but their board members will face no electoral accountability from those affected by their decisions. The water entities aren't designed to be democratically accountable, even though water services are inherently localised public concerns that differ physically between catchments. Instead, these entities were designed to reduce the costs of debt. Under prime minister Chris Hipkins, the Labour government sold them politically on the grounds of affordability, not democracy.

A local oligarchy

Representative government with competitive elections is not necessarily democratic, as the centuries-long history of this kind of government shows. Prior to the universalisation of the franchise (first to working men, then to women), the clergy, the nobility and the wealthy townsfolk would elect 'the best' among themselves to speak on their behalf in parliaments and ensure that the monarch's demands for taxes were for necessary or profitable purposes, especially when waging war. Elections served an aristocratic purpose, in the sense of choosing a government by 'the best'. Even John Stuart Mill, who wanted women to have the vote, worried that a widened franchise would mean that the majority might actually get their way, and hence 'ignorance' would prevail – so he wanted to ensure that the majority would elect their educated and cultured 'betters'.

Nowadays, with higher levels of literacy and wide availability of information, few people would stand for such outright elitism, if any political leader were to say it out loud – and yet not much of a fuss is made when it happens in practice. The 2022 Auckland election is a prime example. A few wealthy people funded Wayne Brown's campaign, and an elderly propertied minority voted him into office. They also shifted the political balance on the governing body rightwards. For example, Mike Lee, endorsed by the centre-right Communities and Residents ticket, regained his seat (Waitematā and Gulf ward) at the expense of the younger progressive Pippa Coom.

Indicative of the oligarchic priorities of Brown's mayoralty is the absence from his proposed budget of any plan to diversify the uses of public golf courses, let alone to sell any of the valuable land they occupy. Auckland has 13 golf courses operating on 535 hectares of council-owned or managed land with (in 2022) an estimated value of $2.9 billion. More diverse open park, recreational and sports uses and housing have been considered as alternatives, but the golf-playing lobby is strong. It successfully blocked efforts to redevelop, for example, the Chamberlain golf course in the western suburbs. It's neither feasible nor desirable simply to sell the land in the medium term, due to the expiry dates of the leases and the need to retain green spaces, but a more immediate means for raising revenue would be to increase the golf courses' fees. This would conflict with another social aim, however, which is to diversify the community who play golf, including more people who are younger and have lower incomes. Some land sales for housing development could be considered in future, but political pressures from golfers have kept this off the Council's agenda, in spite of a housing shortage.

As if to boost undemocratic attitudes, in March 2023 Mayor Brown used his casting vote on the governing body to push through a controversial decision to disengage the Auckland Council from Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ). While this may save the Council a sizeable subscription fee, it would be offset by the loss of benefits of participation in the LGNZ network. Defenders of LGNZ argued that Auckland would lose more than it saves. By means of 'Auckland exceptionalism', Mayor Brown and those councillors who voted with him on this occasion chose not to be part of a nationwide community. Hence, they asserted implicitly that they know better than the rest of the country. Brown further suggested that, to make things work more smoothly, the size of the governing body should be halved, with five regional representatives and five elected at large, which would double the already extreme representation ratio (Orsman, 2023).

Conclusion

Auckland's local government is not democratic, if by democracy we mean a system with decision-making processes in which all those affected have actual influence. A triennial election by mainly elderly property-owners (a tiny minority) doesn't make the city democratic. The trend in Auckland in particular, and in local government in general, is towards bureaucratic centralisation, and away from democratic accountability and participation. The extraordinarily high representation ratio instituted in Auckland in 2010 meant that control shifted towards unelected administrators, while changes made by central government in public health, urban planning and water services further diluted local democracy. What Aucklanders are left with is a classic oligarchy: government by a wealthy elite in the interests of property. Mayor Wayne Brown is the most visible representative and promoter of this new oligarchy.

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10. Local Government Political Agendas: Observations and political orientation

Karen Webster, Luke McLean and Charles Crothers

Introduction

A most crucial question to be asked of local authority councillors and candidates is what their political agenda is, that is what they hope to achieve during their term in office. This chapter begins to describe such agenda-sets and explores whether these seem to be embedded in wider 'political ideologies' held by candidates, or by candidates with particular characteristics. It draws evidence from a survey of candidates in the seven most populated regions of Aotearoa New Zealand, following the 2019 local government elections, which set out to understand the candidate experience of standing for local office. In the survey, we asked candidates what they hoped to achieve in their term in office and where they would place themselves on the political spectrum between left and right.

According to Kingdom (1995, cited in Birkland, 1998), agenda setting is the process by which officials, whether in local or national government, focus their attention on policy issues. The period following the triennial election in New Zealand local government is the opportunity for newly elected local representatives to influence the policy agenda for their locality. New Zealand is well known as an outlier for its limited local government, with its large number of authorities and its longstanding non-partisan nature, the latter with the exception of its largest city region, Auckland (Webster, Asquith, et al., 2019). Local government business in New Zealand traditionally focused on what was colloquially referred to as 'the three R's – roads, rates and rubbish'. The Local government Act 2002 and the 2012 amendments to the Act, both enacted by the Labour Government, attempted to expand the purpose of local government by including a power of general competence and a focus on sustainable development. This required local authorities to work towards the economic, environmental, social and cultural wellbeing of their communities (Memon & Thomas, 2006; Webster, 2013). Even so, there is an apparent tendency for political agendas to fall along a continuum between 'pothole fixing' only and community facilities, notwithstanding the need to give effect to the broader considerations of sustainable development, such as strategic infrastructure and environmental planning, region-building, and social and cultural policy initiatives. The former approach is known for its penchant for minimising the rates burden and focusing on the interests of 'ratepayers' i.e., property owners, compared to the latter, which accounts for the interests of all residents/citizens. Understanding the policy agendas of local candidates is important as not only does this have potential to influence council business but can impact on voter turnout (Goodman & Lucas, 2016).

This chapter starts by reviewing the relative paucity of international and Australasian scholarship concerning why local candidates stand and their policy priorities. It touches on agenda setting theory and how councillors reflect perceptions of sustainable development in terms of their political agendas. It then outlines the survey methodology and overviews the research cohort. The findings

are presented, first by exploring patterns within the variables; and then asking how the candidates' agenda priorities are influenced by their gender and ethnicity. Lastly, the chapter examines whether there is evidence of a relationship between candidate priorities and political ideology.

Why local candidates stand for office

The vexed question of why local candidates stand for office has received little attention internationally. Political participation has traditionally been explored from a voter turnout (McVey & Vowles, 2005) and citizen engagement perspective (Carmines & Stimson, 1986; De Vries & Hobolt, 2012; Meguid, 2008). We contend that standing for local office is a significant form of political participation that has been much overlooked, a view supported by Reid (2020, p.4) who argued that 'our local democracy will only succeed when citizens are prepared to participate in local civic life and stand for public office.'

Notwithstanding the extensive body of knowledge relating to national governments' setting and managing political agendas, there is a paucity of scholarship focusing on candidate agendas in local or provincial government, hence we know very little about why candidates stand for local office. Han et al (2021) explored candidate policy priorities in terms of their alignment with local government plans and Gavazza et al. (2019) turned their attention to use of the internet. The most pertinent recent study of local candidates is the work of Goodman and Lucas (2016) who surveyed candidates for municipal office in Ontario, Canada, following the 2014 municipal election. They explored the extent to which municipal candidates were 'policy seekers'; whether successful and unsuccessful candidates varied in the kinds of policies they believed were important; and whether policy priorities varied across different jurisdictions. They argued that the difference in voter turnout, lower at municipal than federal or provincial government, may be explained in part by the 'absence of political cues and the lesser salience of policy issues at the lower level of government, dictated by provincial, (or in New Zealand, by national) legislation. Notwithstanding this, there were reasons to suggest that in the absence of political parties that local candidates may be more policy driven than their federal or provincial counterparts, because the latter can get their policy prepackaged.

Magnussen (1983, cited in Goodman & Lucas, 2016) argued the tendency for policy agendas at the local level to be oriented around two opposing ideologies. The first being 'boosters' who advocate 'aggressive promotional techniques, relocation incentives and attractive local cultural and recreational institutions' (p.37); and the second, 'cutters' who 'wish to keep taxes and spending low'. Within this framework, Goodman and Lucas identified six main categories of policy agendas, in order of priority: (1) good governance and administration, which focused on accountability, transparency, honesty and engagement; (2) the economy, tourism and industry; (3) Finance, taxation and expenditure: (4) social and environment; (5) transportation; and (6) planning housing and land use (Goodman & Lucas, 2016).

These priorities which feature in the Canadian local government context are pertinent to the Aotearoa New Zealand landscape, as much like Canada (with the exception of Auckland and Christchurch[1]), local government is not dominated by political parties (Webster, Greaves, et al., 2019). Similarly, in New Zealand, significant functions such as health, education, policing and social housing are the prerogative of central government. Notwithstanding this, the range of local government functions is broad and spans the four well-beings (social, environmental, economic and cultural), They encompass infrastructure (water, wastewater, stormwater), place-based development, some social housing and social policy, environmental management (freshwater, land, air, coastal waters), emergency

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[1] These are New Zealand's most populous regions at approximately 1.6m and 600,000 people respectively (Stats NZ, 2018).

management and civil defence, safety and health, regional land transport and harbour navigation and safety (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011).

Reid (2018) described the philosophy underpinning the Local Government Act 2002 in New Zealand as one of 'community governance', for its emphasis on place, taking a joined-up approach to the provision of public services and for the opportunities provided for community steering. He describes the governing legislation varying in the extent to which it authorises the local authorities to focus on the interests of ratepayers, and argues that building local government capacity has been something of an historic project for the Labour Government since 'the major local government reform events, such as the creation of the Local Government Commission in 1947, new legislation in 1974 and 2002, and the consolidation of local government in 1989, were all Labour initiatives' (Reid, 2018, p.5). Soon after the 2017 election, Reid highlighted

> a number of clues indicating the new government's attitude, as local government is mentioned in other policy domains, for example: support for councils playing a more active role in social housing, a role also supported by its coalition partner New Zealand First and the Green Party (Reid, 2018, p.5).

Undertaking an inquiry into the cost pressures facing local government (such as adapting to climate change and changing demographics), became part of the governing coalition agreement. This history positions local government in New Zealand as highly political – a platform for both political parties and independent councillors to promote policy agendas that extend beyond the local.

With much media attention focused on national elections, the importance of local democracy can be overlooked. Local governance, which impacts directly on peoples' lives, is dependent on the skills, knowledge and motivation of locally elected representatives (Reid, 2020), along with their policy agendas. Just prior to the 2019 local authority elections, Local Government New Zealand (2020) asked candidates and councillors their main reason for standing. Among their respondents, the top policy agendas were to 'protect/enhance the natural environment' (14%), see Table 1, followed by 'better value for council services' and 'improve community facilities (both on 13% support).

TABLE 1: MOST COMMON REASONS FOR STANDING (11 CATEGORIES) BY ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Reason for standing	% respondents
Better value for council services	13
Address water quality	11
Address climate change	9
Improve public transport	8
Advance walking and cycling	8
Protect/enhance natural environment	8
Improve roading	7
Improve community facilities	7
Address housing shortage	7
Improve building regulations	6
Reduce rates	4

Data: LGNZ, 2020.

Most categories achieved a 6-11% support level, with 'reduce rates' ranking last with just 4% support. Men were found to rank improving building regulations, improving roading and better value council services higher than women. In contrast, women more likely to rank addressing the housing shortage,

protecting/enhancing the natural environment, improving community facilities and advancing walking and cycling. The most significant difference between men and women were in improving roading and advancing walking and cycling. Māori and the under 30's also favoured protecting/enhancing the environment. Of interest was the low concern shown for reducing rates. This could be explained by the survey respondents being given the opportunity to cite just one reason for standing, when undoubtedly most would have had more than one policy priority (Local Government New Zealand, 2020).

Methodology

Following the 2019 local government elections, candidates from seven of New Zealand's most populated regions were invited to complete a survey exploring their experience in standing for local office (Greaves et al., 2020). Invitations to participate were emailed to local authority candidates following the 2019 local government election in: Auckland, Waikato, Horizons (Palmerston North), Bay of Plenty (Tauranga), Wellington in the North Island; and Canterbury and Otago in the South Island.

This chapter draws on two key questions asked in the survey. In the first question, candidates were asked what they hoped to achieve in this term. In this question, candidates were asked to select up to five priorities of the sixteen choices offered. The second question asked candidates to place their views on the political spectrum between left and right, with a 'don't know' option. The responses were further explored to identify any relationship between the participants priority agendas and their region, gender, ethnicity and political orientation.

Preselected answers were provided for the questions, along with an option for open-ended (type in) responses for some responses. Interestingly, the open-ended field did not generate any new categories of policy agendas, rather was used to provide context for the choices made by the respondents.

We acknowledge the potential for some bias among respondents to self-selection questionnaires, and this is accounted for in the analysis and considered when results are generalised across all candidates who stand for local office.

Statistical analysis

To identify common themes among the 16 agenda responses provided to candidates, we conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis. First, a Bartlett's test of sphericity (Gorsuch, 1973) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (Kaiser, 1970) were used to confirm sampling adequacy from the survey. Next, a polychoric correlation matrix was generated from the responses of all candidates. Using the Kaiser-Guttman normalization rule (Kaiser, 1960) and inspection of the scree plots (Cattell, 1966), 5 factors were found to encapsulate most of the variation in candidates' responses. To minimize correlation between the factors, a promax rotation was utilized (Sass & Schmitt, 2010).

Linear models were then used to ask whether there were patterns in a candidate's likelihood to respond to these factors, and the candidates' demographics. Separate models were generated with each factor as the response variable, and either i) gender, ii) ethnicity, iii) age, iv) region running, or iv) political spectrum, as categorical predictor variables.

All analysis was conducted in R version 3.5.2 (R Core Team, 2019). Factor analysis was performed using tools from the psych package (Revelle, 2023). All models were generated with the MuMIn (Bartoń, 2019) and lme4 (Bates et al., 2014) packages. Model assumptions were checked with use of tools in the DHARMa package (Hartig, 2022). Normality of residuals and homogeneity of error were evaluated from residual plots of fitted models.

Sample

The survey sample for this research incorporated the regional, city and district councils, and the local and community boards and district health boards (DHB) and licensing trusts (LT) within the seven most populous regions of New Zealand. Email contact data were received for 1274 candidates. After duplicates were removed, 794 candidates were sent an invitation to participate, of which 343 completed the survey, a response rate of 43%. Of the total, 42 candidates stood solely for a DHB or LT were removed from the sample for this analysis, leaving 301 observations. The distribution of candidates across the local authorities in the seven regions and the regional population is detailed in Table 2. Note that approximately 10% of respondents did not answer some or all of the survey demographic questions.

TABLE 2: THE DISTRIBUTION OF CANDIDATES ACROSS THE SEVEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE REGIONAL POPULATION

Region	Population	Number of respondents	% respondents
Auckland	1.7m	72	23.92
Waikato	497,000	10	3.32
Bay of Plenty	132,000	17	5.65
Horizons	88,000	19	6.31
Wellington	528,000	57	18.94
Canterbury	382,000	61	20.27
Otago	129,000	34	11.3

More males (52%) responded to the survey than females (37%). Curiously, 10% of respondents did not respond to this question. The majority of respondents were of New Zealand European ethnicity (80%), 9% were Māori, 11% Pacific and 3.8% Asian. Almost ¾ of respondents were New Zealand born, with UK born candidates being the next largest group at 9%. The remaining 8% were born in other countries, including Australia, the USA, Canada, South Africa and India. Almost 10% of respondents did not declare their place of birth. With respect to age, 58% of respondents were between 51-70 years, just 15% were under 40 years of age.

The local authority types and first choice of seat that candidates stood for are shown in Table 3. In our sample 26% of respondents were candidates for a city council, 19% for a regional council, and 40% for a local board or community board as their first choice. Many respondents stood for more than one type of seat. While the sample represents a good spread across the types of local authority seats, the majority of respondents stood first for a community or local board, followed by a seat on the city council.

TABLE 3: SAMPLE BY LOCAL BODY SEAT

Local body seat	Frequency	Percent
Mayor	27	8.9
City Council	71	23.5
District Council	2	0.7
Regional Council	54	17.9
Local/Community Board	119	39.5
No response	28	9.3
Total	**301**	**100**

Forty-one percent of respondents were elected to office. Of those not elected, just 23% (69) had previously stood for local office and 67% had not previously stood. Interestingly, 34% of respondents did not answer this question. Just 15% of candidates (44) had run for a general election. The no response rate raises the question as to how many candidates had stood for local office previously and been unsuccessful. Just under a third of respondents (31%) were serving as an elected member leading into the 2019 local election. A majority (88%) of candidates were standing for the first time. Just over 10% were standing for the second time and 1% had stood 3 or more times.

Almost two thirds of respondents were educated to university level, with 60% having an undergraduate, postgraduate or higher degree and 22% having a trade or professional certificate or diploma.

Candidates were asked to place themselves on the political spectrum on a scale of one to 10, with one being left and 10 being right. Generally speaking, almost 30% of candidates positioned themselves on the left of the spectrum (score 0-3 out of 10), 40% positioned themselves in the middle (between 4-6), with just under 17% on the right of the spectrum. As the non-response rate to this question was 13%, there is a possibility that the sample was biased to a left political orientation.

Councillor agendas

When candidates were asked to list up to five priorities reflecting what they hoped to achieve in their term, the three ambitions which emerged at the top of the table (see Table 4) were infrastructure and environment related. Public transport and natural environment were the top two priorities selected by 52% and 46% of participants respectively. These were followed by community facilities and better value council services (both close to 38%). Addressing climate change and water quality were next, followed by contributing to diversity of views.

TABLE 4: AGENDA ITEMS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE RANKED

Issue	Frequency	% of respondents
Improve public transport	155	52
Protect enhance natural environment	139	46
Improve community facilities	115	38
Better value council services	113	38
Address climate change	105	35
Address water quality	97	32
Contribute to the diversity of views	89	30
Improve roading	74	25
Advance walking and cycling	71	24
Address housing shortage	58	19
Reduce rates or stop further increases	52	17
Help business	45	15
Improve building regulation and controls	32	11
Advocate for more local green spaces	28	9
Improve public health	24	8
Improve public mental health	18	6

Findings of the frequency analysis of candidate agendas

A closer analysis of the frequency of agendas by gender and ethnicity revealed some interesting priorities, Table 4 shows that improving public transport, the top priority overall, was the either a first or second priority responses in all regions except Horizons, the least populated region at just 88000 people (Stats NZ, 2023).
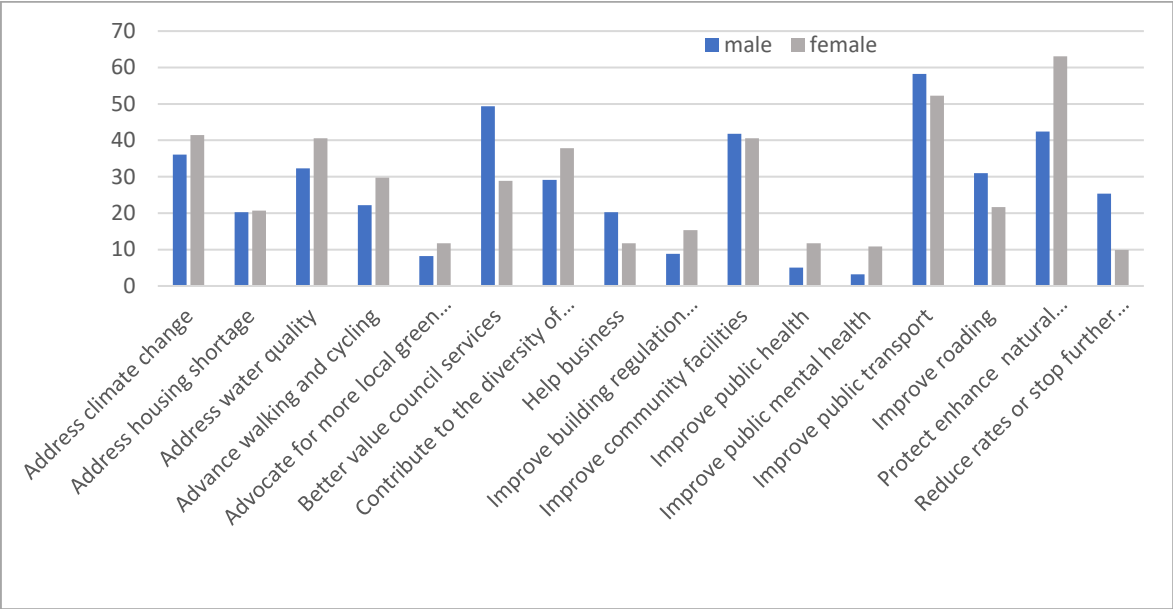

FIGURE 1: FREQUENCY (%) OF AGENDAS BY GENDER

An analysis of the frequency of agendas by gender presented an interesting picture of gender priorities. Improving public transport and protecting and enhancing the environment featured in the top three priorities for male and female participants. More males prioritised better value council service, while more females prioritised addressing climate change.

When analysed by ethnicity, two agenda items were ranked in the top 2 by candidates in all ethnicity categories: Improving public transport; and contributing to diversity of views (Table 5). The priority ranking of public transport was the top-ranking priority non- New Zealand European candidates. While the sample size of Pasifika was small at only 6 respondents, 100% ranked public transport, indicating that it can be interpreted as a major agenda for Pasifika candidates and a key motivation for them to stand. Pasifika respondents also ranked Address climate change higher than any other ethnic group, emphasising the importance of this relatively recent concern for their communities. Although local government does not have full jurisdiction over public transport and climate change action, they are clearly seen as the integral social determinants, including housing, public transport and community facilities.

For Māori the second priority by frequency was improving public health, followed by better value council services and contributing to the diversity of views, again reflecting the cultural preference of Māori and Pasifika for consensus decision making. Asian candidates equally ranked contributing to a diversity of views, better value council services and improving public transport their top priorities. Close behind the priorities of contributing to diversity of views and improving public transport, 'other' ethnicities and Pasifika were the only two groups to rank improving building regulation.

TABLE 5: FREQUENCY OF ISSUES BY ETHNICITY (%)

Issues	NZE	Māori	Pasifika	Asian	Other	NA
Address climate change	38	27	67	45	35	3
Address housing shortage	21	23	33	9	21	3
Address water quality	39	31		27	14	
Advance walking and cycling	28	15	17	18	28	
Advocate for more local green spaces	9	12		9	21	3
Better value council services	40	42	17	64	36	10
Contribute to the diversity of views	59	42	50	64	57	3
Help business	34	15	17	18	29	
Improve building regulation	42	42	50	27	43	10
Improve community facilities	7	12	33	18	7	7
Improve public health	53	46	33	36	43	3
Improve public mental health	28	27	17	9	29	3
Improve public transport	55	58	100	64	50	3
Improve roading	17	19		36	36	3
Protect enhance natural environment	12	12	17		7	7
Reduce rates or stop further increases	7	12				
N	**215**	**26**	**6**	**11**	**14**	**29**

Lastly, we address the question whether candidates' agenda priorities are influenced by political orientation. While the range functions offered by local government cover the full spectrum of concerns of the left and right of the political spectrum, the findings of this research indicated that agenda preferences for the respondents, quite distinctly, aligned with the preferences generally advanced in a national political arena. Local candidates who identify with a left political orientation prioritised agendas such as protecting and enhancing the natural environment and water quality, addressing climate change, and improving public transport and advancing walking and cycling (see Table 6). Similarly, the local candidates who identified with the political right prioritised better value council services, helping business and improving roading. The political centrists in our sample joined the left in protecting and enhancing the environment and the right in prioritising better value council services. A clear priority for the centrists was improving community facilities. Interestingly, improving public transport was prioritised by all respondents to this question.

TABLE 6: FREQUENCY (%) OF ISSUES BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Agenda	Political Spectrum			
Political orientation	Left	Centre	Right	NA
Address climate change	57	29	8	31
Address housing shortage	20	19	13	21
Address water quality	41	37	17	12
Advance walking and cycling	48	15	17	17
Advocate for more local green spaces	13	8	4	10
Better value council services	20	51	63	13
Contribute to the diversity of views	29	32	42	17
Help business	3	21	42	4
Improve building regulation	4	16	8	6
Improve community facilities	37	46	42	15
Improve public health	12	7	4	6
Improve public mental health	9	5	4	6
Improve public transport	65	53	50	27
Improve roading	7	37	42	6
Protect enhance natural environment	61	48	29	27
Reduce rates or stop further increases	61	24	46	8
N	**86**	**150**	**24**	**41**

Findings of the five-factor analysis

The factor analysis undertaken to explore themes in the priorities expressed by candidates were generally consistent with the findings of the frequency analysis presented above. Five clusters or agendas were identified: (1) Affordable infrastructure; (2) Sustainable transport; (3) Natural environment (including water quality); (4) Community facilities (including local green space); and (5) Health and housing. As shown by Figure 2, **factor 1 Affordable infrastructure** groups the priorities of roading, rates and council services. **Factor 2 Sustainable transport** groups public transport and walking and cycling. **Factor 3** is concerned with natural environment and water quality. **Factor 4** groups community facilities and local green space; and **factor 5** groups a focus on health and housing.

Unsurprisingly, when we take account of the correlation coefficients, the results suggest that Factor 1 'Affordable Infrastructure', traditionally a greater concern of the political right, is negatively correlated to Factor 2 Sustainable Transport, which is a greater priority for those candidates on the left. 'Contribute to the diversity of views' appeared to be negatively correlated to Factor 3 Natural Environment. 'Address climate change' was negatively correlated to Factor 4 Community Facilities.

Regression analysis of the factors against the candidates' demographic variables produced some noteworthy if not entirely unexpected results. The findings in terms of gender tended to mirror the negative correlation between affordable infrastructure and sustainable transport, as males were more likely than females to prioritise affordable infrastructure, as with the political right; and slightly less likely to prioritise the natural environment, as per left leaning candidates.
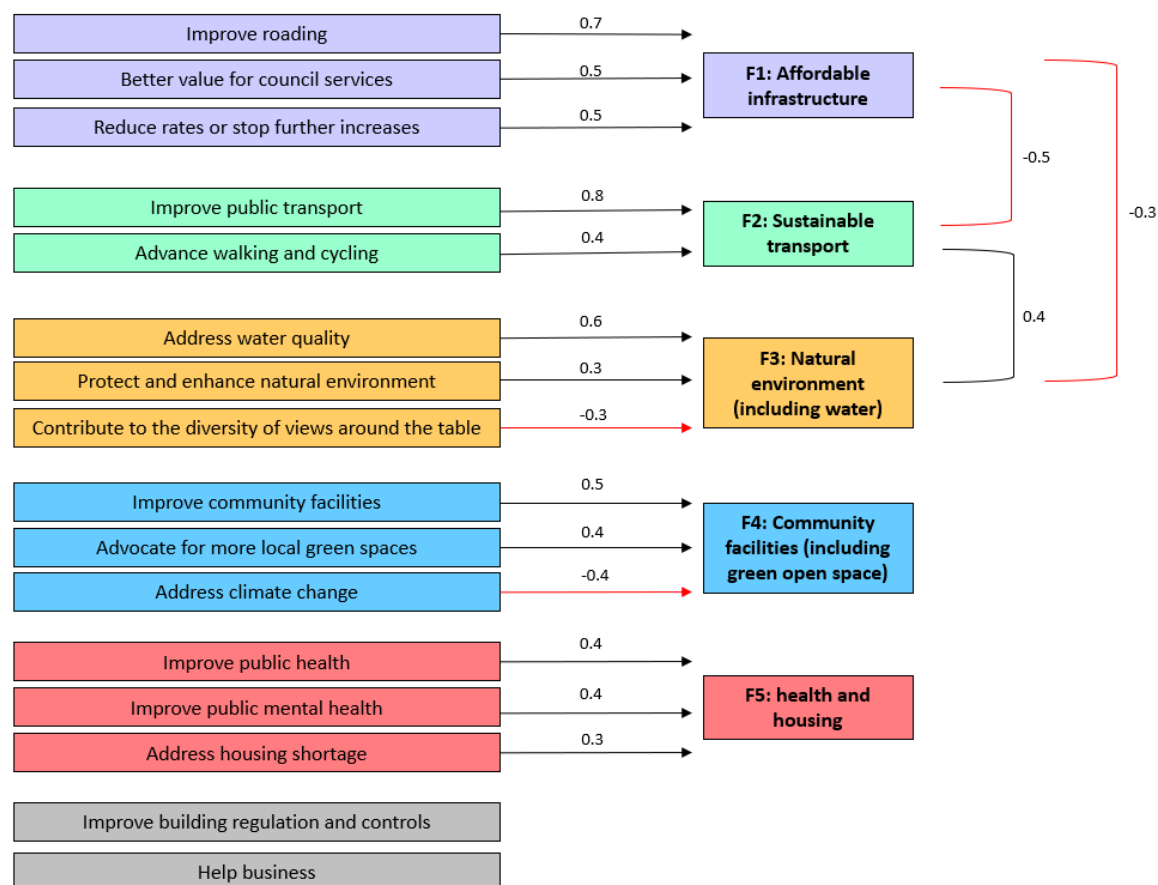
FIGURE 2: FACTOR ANALYSIS TO IDENTIFY PATTERNS WITHIN THE AGENDA ITEMS

Discussion

This enquiry into political agendas of local councillors and candidates, and what they hope to achieve during their term in office has suggested some interesting associations between the agendas themselves and the respondents' gender, ethnicity and political orientation. The policy priorities revealed by the female candidates in this study and those on the political left, align with the work of feminist scholars who have evidenced the contribution that women in local office make, by advocating for a broad range of priorities including social concerns, over the traditional focus on 'roads, rates and rubbish', prevalent amongst male representatives (Conroy, 2011; Htun, 2004; McGregor & Webster, 2017; Pini & McDonald, 2011a, 2011b; Webster, 2009). The preferences of male candidates and the political right for affordable infrastructure and its negative correlation with the preferences of women and the political left for sustainable transport and the natural environment, is supported the anecdotal evidence of political policy preferences in the New Zealand context

From a perspective of New Zealand's ethnically diverse candidates, the findings can be attributed to the prominent concerns facing the diverse communities. For Pasifika it is unsurprising that the second priority was addressing climate change and the third, contributing to views around the table. These priorities reflect the concern for families and loved ones, not just here in New Zealand, but in the Pacific Islands, who are at risk from climate change. Further, for Māori and Pasifika closing the inequity gap (Simpson, 2020) between their people and non-Māori and Pasifika in New Zealand is the paramount consideration and was prioritised by almost 60% of Māori respondents and 100% of the Pasifika respondents who prioritised public transport. The climate emergency faced by New Zealand's Pacific neighbours features as the next concern for Pacific candidates at almost 70%.

Contributing to diversity around the governance table was the most prominent concern for all ethnicities, topped by the Asian candidates who ranked this first equal with better value council services. The overarching concern for voice in local democracy is a reflection on the rapidly growing diversity of New Zealand communities (McGregor & Webster, 2017; Webster & Crothers, 2022; Webster & Fa'apoi, 2017) as the country looks to a future where the population is forecast by 2043 to reach 7.7 million and for the proportion of the population identifying as New Zealand European to fall from 70% in 2018 to 64% in 2043 (Stats NZ, 2021). Similarly, the proportion of Asian people will rise from 27% to 43%; Māori from 17% to 21%; Pasifika from 12% to 16%.

While the policy agendas of candidates who declared their political orientation largely conformed to the left-right continuum of issues anecdotally accepted as political preferences of the left and right, of note is the significant number of respondents, who did not declare their political orientation. Between 27-31% of respondents to the policy agendas with an environmental sustainability focus (addressing climate change, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and improving public transport) did not indicate their political leaning. While improving public transport had bipartisan support, the overall results may indicate a bias in the data to left-leaning concerns. Notwithstanding this, the effect of any bias is on distributions, rather than typology, and there are sufficient 'conservatives' for their views to be represented in the analysis, if not their weighting. The conformity of the data to traditional preferences of the left and right of the political spectrum strongly suggests that the political orientation of local councillors and candidates influences their preferred policy agendas.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to provide an overview of the policy priorities or agendas, of candidates standing for local office in the 2019 triennial election, across seven of New Zealand's most populous regions. In conclusion, factor analysis suggested five priority policy agendas: Affordable infrastructure; sustainable transport; Natural environment (including water quality); Community facilities (including local green spaces); and Health and housing. Regression and frequency analysis suggested patterns of priority by the variables, gender, age, ethnicity, and candidates' political orientation. In summary, local candidate and councillor agendas were evidenced to be somewhat dependent on the candidates' gender and ethnicity. Indeed, where the candidate placed themselves on the political spectrum played an important role in their priority agenda.

This chapter only begins to explore what local councillors across Aotearoa seek to achieve during their term in office. Further research will explore the contextual influence of locality and other demographic factors on local political agendas.

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11.   Conclusion

Christine Cheyne and Jeff McNeill

The triennial local elections research symposia that have taken place since the early 2000s provide an impetus for preliminary analysis of the preceding local election. Taking place within just a few months of the elections the analysis is necessarily somewhat provisional. Publishing this collection of papers from the most recent symposium was an opportunity for some further analysis following critical feedback and the symposium and in the light of editorial feedback. Dissemination of research, even provisional research, in this format was considered important as it allows and indeed encourages further research and analysis. This collection therefore is a 'first cut' at providing some insights into not just the 2022 elections but local elections more generally and trends that might be evident.

The topics covered as noted in the Introduction are necessarily constrained by the capacity of local government researchers to engage in research and analysis in the lead-up to elections and in the aftermath. The choice of research focus reflects individual researchers' particular interests, and sometimes the priority of their employing organisation. The willingness and availability of researchers to present research at a particular event is another factor that has influenced the papers collected here. The three broad areas of Perspectives on voting and electoral systems, Candidates and campaign issues, and the Represented need much more in-depth and comprehensive consideration than has been possible in this short timeframe and with such limited resources for research.

Some observations that can be made based on these papers. First, with such a small network of researchers, **networking and collaboration is vital** but also not difficult although the infrastructure or even simple mechanisms to facilitate networking and collaboration do not really exist other than the voluntary efforts of individuals using digital communications technology. Hosting a symposium is also depends on voluntary effort as there is little institutional support other than researcher time. Even online conference technology is not necessarily provided. Given government science funding priorities and university financial difficulties, perhaps future symposia need to be hosted by the Department of Internal Affairs as part of its responsibility for disseminating local elections data and analysis. While Local Government New Zealand has been proactive in engaging in research on local elections, its interests are first and foremost those of its members. Moreover, Local Government New Zealand does not have the funding base to support the research that is needed, nor are its publications always publicly accessible. Auckland Council's research budget and capability is arguably greater than that of LGNZ.

Second, the **issue of voter turnout needs now to be the focus of a systematic research programme** that ideally is a collaborative project involving independent researchers, key sector bodies and central government. There is a plethora of small studies and post-election surveys that provide some baseline data, but these have a number of limitations. Voter turnout research requires a robust methodology and must consider relevant contemporary theoretical literature. This can encompass factors previously identified such as method of voting, knowledge of local government, knowledge of elections. However, the three main strands of theory, namely, rational choice,

psychological and sociological perspectives need to be explicitly and critically considered in the research design.

Third, research on local elections in Aotearoa New Zealand should be placed in **comparative context**. This will enhance both the theoretical and methodological rigour of local research and also allow New Zealand to be located within existing models and typologies thus both informing and being informed by those models and typologies. Participating in international comparative work is ideal but this may require institutional resources. Given New Zealand's geographical distance (and small size), it can be difficult to garner interest from international or cross-national research programmes and interpersonal connections between researchers are often critical to connecting New Zealand as a case study.

There are some common themes in these papers and indeed other previous research on local elections. These include (1) the need to address representation deficits due to reduced numbers of elected members and the under-representation of Māori, young people, and key ethnicities; (2) the need to have adequate resourcing of local elections (including education and information about elections, voting and candidates) and independent oversight; and the need to have consistency in the voting method; and (3) the need to address local government's constitutional status and other rebalancing of central-local relations to ensure that the wider context in which local elections take place is one in which local government and local democracy are strong.

While the Future for Local Government review proposed some relatively 'quick fixes', such as lowering the voting age, these will only be temporary or partial responses. As noted in the introduction that review appeared to overlook a considerable amount of research. Tinkering with local electoral law is unlikely to be a satisfactory approach to improving local elections. A comprehensive approach to local electoral law reform is needed that recognises the unique characteristics of local elections (including the differences between central and local government that influence turnout).

Local Authority Elections, Voting, and Councillor and Candidate studies in Aotearoa NZ

This compilation started by the late Charles Crothers shortly before he passed away in August 2023 collates studies which have been carried out in NZ on local government related to voting, candidates, and councillors. In addition, reports concerning non-survey mechanisms of public participation are (potentially) included. Reports, chapters, and journal articles only are included.

- The main official statistics relating to local authorities are produced after each election by DIA and provide data on council electoral rolls, voting records and about candidates. National records stretch back to 1959.
- General national surveys such as NZES, GSS have questions concerning whether respondents voted at previous local authority elections.
- The electioneering period often attracts a plethora of small-n polls mainly concentrating on voting intentions and, sometimes, local issues.
- Local referenda are sometimes held, stretching back to 1860.

'For 17 years after 1977 no empirical data was collected about the characteristics of elected members as a population and their profiling stemmed from surmise, anecdotal evidence or minute (and flawed) samples' – **Graham Bush** (2005, p. 197).

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