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Social capital and voter turnout: The case of the Auckland Supercity

Abstract

The establishment of the Auckland 'Supercity', was billed as "New Zealand's bold experiment in local government" (AUT School of Social Sciences and Public Policy 2013). The high media profile nationally and locally, resulted in an Auckland voter turnout of 51 percent in the 2010 local government election. This was two per cent above the national average of 49 percent, already elevated by public interest in the Auckland reforms and Christchurch post-earthquake (Department of Internal Affairs 2013), and a further 13 percentage points up on the aggregate turnout of 37.9 per cent 3 years prior, in 2007. This apparent resurgence in local democracy was short-lived. Three years on, turnout in Auckland had resumed this pattern and dropped a further 2.5 per cent to 35.4 percent (Auckland Council 2013), in line with the trend of declining voter turnout in New Zealand, and many older democracies, since 1989. These results fuel the debate around what influences voter turnout and what constitutes effective local democracy. International scholars (Paxton 2002; Bevelander and Pendakur 2009; Abrams, Iversen et al. 2011; Ben-Bassat and Dahan 2012) have evidenced a positive correlation between social capital and democracy as a general concept and voter turnout more specifically. This paper provides an overview of research linking social capital and voter turnout; describes the governance arrangements following establishment of the Auckland supercity; examines voter turnout rates recorded in Auckland, during the 2010 and 2013 local government elections - the first two triennial elections since reforms; and poses social capital and reform-related explanations for the ongoing decline in Auckland's voter turnout (Royal Commission on Auckland Governance 2008).

Introduction

In November 2007, the New Zealand Labor-led government appointed the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance to investigate and report on the local government arrangements required in the Auckland region, to maximize: the current and future well-being of the region and its communities and the region's contribution to the wider national objectives and outcomes. The process was to be participative and cost effective. Within scope were 'the institutions, mechanisms and processes' (Royal Commission on Auckland Governance 2008, p. 1) for local government in Auckland. It was acknowledged that the Auckland region needed to perform as the growth engine for the New Zealand economy; be a transport hub for New Zealand and the South Pacific; compete internationally as a desirable place to live and do business; and respond to the economic, environmental, social and cultural challenges facing the region (Royal Commission on Auckland Governance 2007, p. 2).

The Royal Commission reported to the newly-elected National-Act Coalition government, in late March 2009. The new government's stated commitment was to implement changes in Auckland that would best achieve the goals of good regional infrastructure, sound and consistent regulation, and economic growth throughout the region. A further consideration was to ensure that communities felt appropriately represented (New Zealand Government 2008). These aspirations were not wholly aligned with the broader quadruple bottom line articulated by the original commission charter.

Notwithstanding this, the commission process had established a consensus for reform that would result in a more strategic approach to planning and decision-making, and some kind of super-city. Aspirations for local or neighborhood governance were widely acknowledged as a significant challenge for the Royal Commission (Garnier 2008; Hawkins 2008; McKinlay 2008).

A key issue to be addressed was the complexity experienced by Māori in dealing with a large number of local government entities whose boundaries did not coincide with iwi (tribal) and hapū (village) territories. Multiple iwi and hapū interests across Auckland overlapped with local authority boundaries, and responses from local authorities to Māori concerns were at best ad hoc. A number of submissions by Māori advocated power sharing

by adequate representation. While instituting Māori seats or wards to address the lack of Māori involvement in decision-making at regional and local government was seen as one solution to the problem, Māori were seeking a Treaty partnership with local government (Tahana 2008).

The March 2009 report by the Royal Commission proposed dissolving the Auckland Regional Council and seven Auckland territorial authorities and establishing in their place, a single unitary authority, six local councils and three community boards (Salmon, Bazley et al. 2009). The unitary council was to comprise – one mayor to be elected at large, 23 elected members (10 to be elected at large, 10 to be elected in wards), two Māori seats plus a third Māori councilor to be nominated by a mana whenua (indigenous people of the land) forum.

In April 2009, just one month later, the government announced its intention to similarly establish one unitary council, with one mayor elected at large for the region. However, 20 elected members were proposed - eight to be elected at large and 12 to be elected from wards (2009, p. 6). A second tier of governance was envisaged to comprise between 20-30 local boards across the region. The final number of boards and boundaries was to be determined by the Local Government Commission¹.

While no Māori representation was proposed at either the regional or local level, the proposed structure illustrated a direct relationship between community groups, residents and ratepayers, and business, and both the local boards and the governing body. Following two elections under the new structure, in 2010 and 2013, and with a dramatic reduction in voter turnout, questions are being raised as to the legitimacy of local democracy and what influences voter turnout.

¹ The Local Government Commission was an independent statutory body, whose main role was to make decisions on the structure and representation requirements of local government in New Zealand (Local Government Commission, 2009).

In this paper, I review scholarly research focused on the relationship between democracy and social capital, provide an overview of the political and executive structures of the Auckland super city and consider factors that have potential to influence voter turnout in New Zealand and further afield. Alongside recognizing the vibrant associations of civic life and generalized trust that signify healthy social capital, these studies address the normative question of the legitimacy of democratic institutions when large segments of the electorate fail to vote, and consider the distributive consequences of unequal turnout amongst different socioeconomic and population groups.

Democracy and social capital

The relationship between democratic theory and social capital is not new (Paxton 2002). French political theorist, Alexis de Tocqueville, after travels in America drew links to social capital in his 1835 and 1840 volumes *Democracy in America*, through the earlier works of Ferguson (1767) and Montesquieu (1748) cited in Paxton). More recent work (Putnam 1993) has strengthened evidence of a relationship between a vibrant associational life and social capital. Coleman (1988) describes social capital as residing, not in individuals but in the relationships between them. Social capital can include obligations within a group, trust, intergenerational closure, norms and sanctions. Paxton (2002, p.256). While social capital may be operationalized by a vibrant social life, it can be more precisely related to democracy through capturing the relationships among citizens. To distinguish these vibrant associations it is necessary to think about the content of associations.

Putnam (1993, p.256) brought the concept of social capital into macro sociological theory by suggesting that it could be aggregated to influence effective government. He proposed that social capital could be measured at multiple levels and produce goods at multiple levels i.e. at the individual, group and community level. In this way, Putnam focused on social capital as an aggregate feature of nations and considered its effect on the creation and maintenance of healthy democracies.

According to Paxton (2002, p.257), in the developing world, social capital can effect democracy in two ways. It can help create democracy in a country that is not democratic.

Alternatively, social capital can help to maintain or improve existing democracies. The transition to democracy is aided by social capital providing a space for discourse critical of a present government, and a way for active opposition to a regime to grow. In the late stages of resistance to a repressive regime, social capital can provide resources for the organization of opposition movements and large scale collective action. Trusting associations can provide a site for early opposition and support a nascent movement (Morris 1981 in Paxton 2002, p.259).

While most perspectives claimed causation from social capital to democracy, a reciprocal relationship between social capital and democracy was observed to lead to both positive and negative impacts (Paxton 2002, p.257). Certain types of associations were observed to do better in each case and others were found to be detrimental e.g. nationalist groups are likely to exacerbate social cleavages and undermine a democratic culture. NGOs, on the other hand, via funding, can foster and help stabilize an emerging democratic culture.

Democratic participation was observed to take a number of forms, including participation in political leadership, stakeholder consultation, political activism and voting. Participation in the electoral process by voting has been defined as a core responsibility in democratic societies (Bevelander and Pendakur 2009). Because citizenship acquisition is relatively rapid in settler societies the diversity of potential voters has expanded dramatically over the last half century.

Explaining fluctuations in voter turnout

The large amount of scholarly research directed towards electoral turnout poses a range of factors that have potential to influence voter turnout in New Zealand and further afield. Considerations include institutional arrangements, the nature of representative and electoral institutions, party competition, patronage and campaign tactics (Geys 2006; The Department of Internal Affairs 2010; Green, McGrath et al. 2012). Recent international research appears to focus on the characteristics of the electorate, with a lesser focus on the behavior of electoral candidates and voters.

Institutional arrangements

Institutional arrangements include the nature and scale of local elections, frequency, compulsory voting, the electoral system or voting method (Department of Internal Affairs 2010) and the style of policy making (Matsubayashi and Wu 2012). In New Zealand, local authority triennial elections over the 1989 to 2013 period have encompassed local government, district health boards, community health trusts and alcohol licensing trusts. This introduces a high level of complexity with multiple issues and long lists of candidates, which increases the level of difficulty for voters.

While the vast majority of international jurisdictions have a four or five year electoral term for national and sub-national elections, New Zealand has a three-year cycle, with parliamentary elections occurring in the year following local authority elections. This frequency raises a question around the threshold for election fatigue (Department of Internal Affairs 2010).

Compulsory voting has been assumed to increase voter turnout in some jurisdictions, with a dependency on enforcement (Department of Internal Affairs 2010). Hoffman and Lazaridis (2013) rebuff this assumption and highlight that even with the entrenchment of compulsion in enrolment and voting in Australia, more than one fifth of eligible voters failed to cast a valid vote in 2013. While resource barriers appeared to have been generally overcome, lower levels of population stability, specifically among young people, and lower levels of social cohesion were found to contribute to a decline in electoral participation (Hoffman and Lazaridis 2013).

It has been argued that proportional representation electoral systems lead to higher voter turnout. This is attributed to the perception that voters are more likely to contribute to the election of a candidate, when their votes will not be wasted. Others argue the influence of electoral factors such as competitiveness, and the incentives for parties to mobilize resources to promote voter turnout (Department of Internal Affairs 2010).

Of the two methods of voting used in New Zealand: 'first past the post' (FPP), or 'single transferable vote' (STV), which has been available since 2004 – the latter is used by

only a small and declining number of local authorities (2004:10; 2007: 8; 2010: 6). In 2004 and 2007, those local authorities electing their mayor, councilors and community board members by STV had higher levels of voter turnout than those local authorities still using FPP. The Department of Internal Affairs (2010) highlight the inappropriateness of generalizing these findings on the influence of STV on voter turnout, due to the small sample size.

Enhancements to methods of voting since 1989 have included postal ballot, spread over a number of days, rather than a one-day booth voting or mobile polling booths (Department of Internal Affairs 2010), and more recently consideration of internet voting. Zvulun (2010) concluded that postal voting provided an answer to the international problem of declining voter turnout, particularly in local elections and assisted New Zealand and Australian voters who could not reach polling booths. However, after an initial increase until the 1990s in Australia, turnout is again declining in Australia and New Zealand.

In New Zealand, postal voting was seen, overall, to have had a significant impact on local voter turnout. In Auckland City, turnout doubled from 30 to 60 per cent when postal voting was introduced in 1986. It was mandatory for all New Zealand councils in 1989. When Hutt City Council reverted to booth voting in 1992, turnout dropped from 46 percent in 1989 to just 26 per cent in 1992 (Department of Internal Affairs 2010).

Characteristics of the electorate

The characteristics of a particular electorate evidenced to influence voter turnout have included socio-economic characteristics e.g. geography, age, ethnicity, education, social connections. Dowding et al (2012) explored the geographic mobility of UK voters. They noted that those voters who had recently moved were less likely to vote. They showed that if a decision to vote was based on a cost-benefit calculation, those voters intending to move, would be less likely to vote and demonstrated that this intention was conditional on levels of social capital. Dowding et al (2012) hypothesized that the greater the number of community organizations a person belonged to, the more likely they were to

vote, even if they were intending to move. This effect was found to be stronger in the case of local elections.

Recent analysis of election studies conducted in the UK, Canada and Europe highlighted the influence of age on voter turnout (Bhatti and Hansen 2012; Blais and Rubenson 2012). Much of the decline was attributed specifically to declining rates among youth, who were found to have different values that made them less inclined to vote, and new cohorts were found to be sensitive to the competitiveness of elections. The younger generation was less likely to construe voting as a moral issue, and more skeptical about politicians responsiveness to their concerns. Bhatti and Hansen (2012) proposed that as young adults left the nest, they were less susceptible to the positive influence of parental civic participation and more susceptible to influence by their peers. Generally, people were found to be less inclined to vote when the outcome of an election was considered to be a foregone conclusion (Blais and Rubenson 2012).

Bhatti and Hansen (2012) further described the declining turnout among seniors: the demobilization of voters around the age of 65-67, the fact that women demobilize earlier than men and the importance of social networks in providing information and encouraging participation. The importance of social networks and community participation as positive influences on voter turnout was a recurring theme in the literature (Geys 2006; Abrams, Iversen et al. 2011; Bhatti and Hansen 2012; Blais and Rubenson 2012; Dowding, John et al. 2012; Hoffman and Lazaridis 2013).

A Swedish study established that education was positively correlated with voter turnout at the individual level. Persson (2012) attributed this, not so much to voters' absolute level of education, but rather to their rank position in the education hierarchy. However, this was not the case amongst Pacific peoples in New Zealand. Lusitini and Crothers (2013) found that Pacific people had a lower voter turnout at general elections than the total population. Many, due to poor socio-economic positions were socially marginalized and deprived of the cognitive resources to participate effectively in political life. This had impacted on their engagement in political life. Increasingly, the trend among

younger New Zealand-born Pacific people was for them to stay at school longer, leave with more qualifications and participate in tertiary education.

In New Zealand, the annual target for new immigration approvals was 45,000 (2010-2013). As such, electoral enrolment and participation of immigrants was recognized as important for effective democracy. Henderson (2013) reports that recent migrants were less likely to be enrolled than the total population with 11.6 per cent not enrolled after three years permanent residency, compared with 4.6 per cent. Under enrolment was more marked within the 18-29 year age cohort. Gender was not observed to be a factor, however married or partnered immigrants were more likely to be enrolled than those who were single, no longer or never married (Henderson 2013).

Other characteristics of the electorate found to influence voter turnout included the nature and character of the area, and population size (Geys 2006; Department of Internal Affairs 2010). Turnover was generally higher when the population was smaller, and when the population was more stable (Geys 2006). In New Zealand, voter turnout in rural areas was generally higher than urban areas, though declined between 1989 and 2010. Over the same period, larger populations were observed to have lower turnout than smaller populations (<20,000: 71 percent to 53 per cent; >50,000: 52 percent to 46 per cent).

Bevelander and Pendakur (2009, p.1408) reviewed the determinants of voting behavior for immigrant and ethnic minorities across Canada, North America, and Europe (including Denmark, Sweden, Holland and Germany and found the results to be wide ranging. Collective mobilization through a proportional election system in Denmark resulted in higher voting participation for immigrants. In Sweden, higher concentrations of immigrant groups led to collective demobilization and rather low voting participation (Togby 1999 in Bevelander and Pendakur 2009, p.1408). In Amsterdam, civic engagement and trust were found to be powerful determinants of voter participation (Fennema and Tillie 1999 in Bevelander and Pendakur 2009). It was argued that low trust in government could lead to low voting, and subsequent legitimacy problems. Differences in political participation were linked to differences in the level of civic community (i.e. the amount of

within group social capital, measured by participation in ethnic associations) (Jacobs and Tillie in Bevelander and Pendakur 2009).

In Germany, a positive relationship existed between mainstream organizations and integration, however this did not translate to increased involvement in German politics (Galonska and Koopsman 2004 in Bevelander and Pendakur 2009). In Denmark in 2004, Togeby found that participation in ethnic associations had a strong effect on informal political participation among Pakistanis, but not on voting. In Belgium, Turks scored highly on indicators of ethnic civil community. Moroccans scored higher on political involvement, with no apparent relationship to membership in ethnic associations. In a number of European countries, obtaining citizenship and the number of years spent in the host country were positively related to higher rates of electoral participation. Different immigrant groups showed differential voting rates related to differential rates of alienation and apathy (Messina 2006 in Bevelander and Pendakur 2009).

Research in Canada and the US was concentrated on the relationship between human capital and voting. Abrams et al (2011, p.237-8) highlighted the significant role of informal social networks in voter turnout. Income, education and religious attendance were found to be positively correlated with voter turnout (Bevelander and Pendakur 2009; Abrams, Iversen et al. 2011). Students were reported to have relatively low rates. While age increased turnout, among older people, turnout dropped as their networks broke down due to illness and death (Abrams, Iversen et al. 2011).

Nonetheless, minorities were less likely to vote in elections, compared with native-born majority. Further, when language proficiency, duration of stay, ethnic residential concentration and political socialization are taken into account, the pattern of voting was found to vary by ethnic group. Being an immigrant from a repressive regime was found to have a negative impact on voter participation (Bevelander and Pendakur 2009). While immigrants did participate less, their offspring had the same participation rates as native-born Canadians.

Formal social capital variables, such as volunteering, political participation and community 'rootedness' or belonging (Putnam 1993; Putnam 2000) were found to be

associated with higher voting probabilities. Bevelander and Pendakur (2009, p.1420-1) operationalized social capital broadly, examining issues of trust, sense of belonging and civic awareness (reading or watching the news). After socioeconomic and social capital attributes were accounted for, they found few differences between majority and minority members and their odds of voting. The size of the city of residence was significant – the larger the city, the lower the odds of voting. Immigrants who arrived in their 40s were less likely to vote than those who arrived at an earlier age. People who accessed the news were also more likely to vote than those who did not. Bonding activity such as talking with friends had no impact, whereas a bridging activity such as being a member of a recreational group or volunteering were associated with higher odds of voting. In conclusion, it appeared that socio-demographic and social capital attributes mattered most for voting, the combination of which largely overrode the impact of immigration and ethnicity.

Abrams et al (2011, p.256) advocated the informal social networks model over the standard rational choice model as an explanation for voter turnout and emphasized that participation was often seen as quasi irrational. They argued that voting and political knowledge are anchored in group interests and can be understood as an investment in desirable outcomes. Sociological network theory highlights the objective for individuals is not the outcome of the election but to maintain and improve their standing within the networks they belong to.

Electoral behavior

The behavior of electors and candidates, and the style of policy making (the degree to which distributive politics is employed) were shown to affect voter turnout. Geys (2006) found that campaign expenditure was positively correlated to voter turnout rates. Campaigns increased information and awareness levels within an electorate. ‘Get-out-the-vote’ campaigns directly encouraged participation and resulted in increased turnout. Counter to this effect was negative or attack campaigns that are not expected to increase participation. Green et al (2012) investigated campaign tactics, including direct mail,

commercial and live phone calls and text messaging, along with message content. Mail was found to have weak but detectable positive effects. While phone banks had no positive effects, live calls seemed more effective. Given the weak results of these methods, it was surprising to find that text messages sent to cell phones raised turnout. Green et al hypothesized that voters participated out of an 'internalized sense of civic duty' or out of a 'sense of group solidarity'.

Geys found that voting was habit-forming, and those who had voted before were more likely to participate in future elections. The closeness of the contest was also found to positively impact on turnout, with the percentage vote gap between the first and second candidate being a standard measure of closeness.

In the US, distributive policies were found to affect peoples' decisions to vote, and their choice of candidate (Matsubayashi and Wu 2012). Distributive grants were able to be used for 'turnout buying', whether or not the grants were strong enough to shift peoples' choices. Matsubayashi and Wu confirmed the importance of policy feedback on political choices. Distributive policies that targeted a group of actors in a particular geographic unit could impact on individuals' decisions to participate in politics.

In New Zealand elector knowledge about elections and candidates has been important in influencing voter turnout at local elections (Department of Internal Affairs 2010). This was demonstrated by the consistent difference in turnout across local and general elections, and the results of a 2008 Local Government Commission survey which reported a lack of information about local elections generally, and about candidates. This aligns with international and local research that found incumbent candidates and high profile new candidates tended to do better.

In addition to lack of information, the 2008 survey highlighted elector apathy and lack of effort, and electors being too busy/running out of time to vote, as frequently cited factors. Institutional arrangements, nature and scale of elections and resulting complexity were cited as barriers to voting. Another factor was the timing of elections with respect to school holidays and the length of the election period, with three weeks being seen as too long.

In summary

Institutional arrangements, characteristics of the electorate and electoral behavior were evidenced to influence the likelihood of individual or group participation in local democracy. Changes in institutional arrangements, such as postal voting were shown to increase voter participation in the short term, while proportional representation tended to have a more sustained influence. Socio-economic factors (such as age, ethnicity and education) and social capital (volunteerism, social connections, civic awareness, trust and a sense of belonging) were observed to increase the likelihood of voter participation, over migrant status within a population. Correspondingly, rural populations and small centers had higher voter participation than larger urban centers. A decrease in the tendency to vote was reported among young people as they 'left the nest', and among seniors, particularly women, as they demobilized and their social connections decreased. Not surprisingly, increased electoral activity (campaigning) generally increased awareness and voter likelihood to participate. However, negative and attack campaigns were observed to reverse this trend. It was acknowledged that voting was habit forming and that previous voting increased the likelihood of participation, as did close campaigns and distributive grants.

The Auckland local government context

In 2010, Aucklanders went from voting in 8 local authorities to one large council with strengthened local governance bodies, along with the numerous licensing and health boards. The reforms were enacted by the Local Government Act (Auckland Council) 2009. Section 7 introduced the two-tier shared governance model of local government comprising the governing body and 21 local boards. Section 15 referred to the governing body responsibilities as decision making relating to; regulatory activities (Resource Management Act 1991, Health Act 1956, Building Act 2004 and Civil Defense and Emergency Management Act 2002); non-regulatory decisions that are Auckland-wide in

nature; services and facilities; governance of its CCOs; the council's long term plan and annual plan (s 101); and reaching agreements with each local board.

Local boards were allocated responsibility for 'local place making', described in sections 14-20 as; determining 'local wishes and priorities; adopting a local board plan by 31 October following a triennial election; developing and delivering a local board agreement to the governing body.

On 1 November 2010, immediately following transition, the governance structure of the new council comprised: the council, 'committees of the whole', standing committees, forums, and advisory boards (see Figure 1). While the role of committees was to undertake the business of council, forums and advisory panels were to provide a mechanism to engage communities of interest in local governance and provide advice to the governing body. Further, the forums were delegated decision making powers by the council to govern within their specified areas of concern. Local governance was by way of 21 local boards organized in a ward system.

Following the 2013 election, the structure was revised, to bring about a change in emphasis at the committee level. The role of some forums was formalized by replacing them with standing committees, Additional advisory panels were added. The local boards were unchanged. See Figure 2.

The political structure was supported by an executive comprising: the chief executive office, human resources, planning and operations divisions and a governance office. Alongside this structure and reporting in to the council chief executive, were seven council controlled-organizations (CCOs): Auckland Transport, Watercare Services, Waterfront Auckland, Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development, Auckland Council Property and Regional Facilities Auckland. The CCOs were each led by a chief executive, and governed by a private sector-style board of directors. See Figure 3.

Figure 1. Elements of the governing body of the Auckland Council established November 2010



Further an Independent Māori Statutory Board (IMSB) was established to ensure a voice for Māori in the governance of Auckland, and to assist the council to make informed decisions and meeting its statutory obligations in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi. While the council has existing obligations to engage with Māori and to enable Māori participation in council decision-making, it has additional duties to work with the IMSB. The IMSB is completely independent of Auckland Council.

Figure 2. Elements of the governing body of the Auckland Council established November 2013.

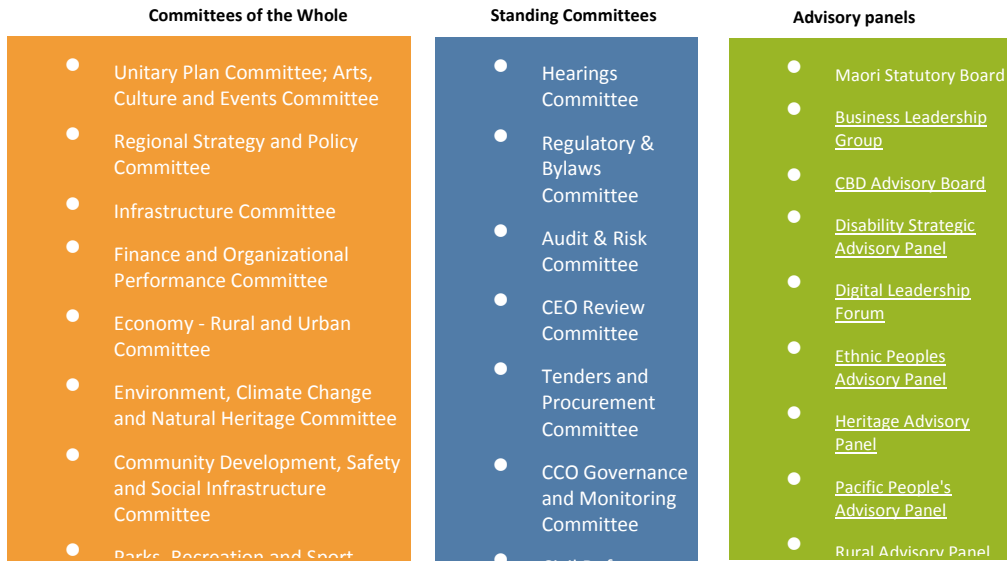


Figure 3. Overview of the Auckland Council executive structure implemented November 2010.

Chief Executive Office		HR Division
Civil Defense Emergency Management	Risk and Assurance General Counsel	Led by HR Director
Communications and Public Affairs		
Finance Division	Operations Division	
Led by Chief Finance Officer	Led by Chief Operations Officer	
Accounting Services	Building Control	
CCO Governance and Monitoring	Community Development, Arts and Culture	
City Parks Services	Customer Services	
Finance	Infrastructure and Environmental Services	
Information Services	Libraries and Information	
Property	Licensing and Compliance	
Treasury	Parks, Sports and Recreation	

	Resource Consents
Planning Division	Governance Office
Led by Chief Planning Officer	Led by Governance Director
Economic Development	Local Board Services
Environmental Strategy and Policy	Democracy Services
Regional and Local Planning	Maori Strategy and Relations
Regional Strategy, Community and Cultural Policy	

Public participation during the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance

The Royal Commission was indeed a participative process and Aucklanders were highly engaged. Expert contributions were invited from New Zealand and international academics, consultants and practitioners. In all, over 3,500 written and 550 oral submissions were received by the commission. Most proposed some form of change to existing Auckland local government arrangements. The commission reported that the suggestions were wide ranging, and related to: “the number and sizes of councils, mayoral powers, representation and participation arrangements, council administration, urban design, social and environmental responsibilities, and the role of council entities such as Watercare Services Ltd ("Watercare") or the Auckland Regional Transport Authority ("ARTA") (Salmon, Shand et al. 2009).

Voter turnout in Auckland between 1989 to 2010, 2010 and 2013

According to Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) (2013), prior to the 2010 local elections, voter turnout declined nationally in each subsequent year since 1989, with the exception of 1998 (see figure 4). Aggregate statistics on voter turnout for the eight local authorities in the Auckland region preceding amalgamation similarly showed a decline

over the two elections preceding amalgamation - 41.5 per cent in 2004 and 37.9 per cent in 2007.

The first super city election in 2010, with its high media profile and high level of citizen engagement achieved a 51 per cent voter turnout (measured as a ratio of eligible voters). Between 2010 and 2013, voter turnout in Auckland’s local election declined a massive 16 per cent to 35.44 per cent in 2013. Figure 5 shows that in 2013 voting got off to a much slower start and tapered off after day 14. The average daily turnover in 2013 was 20,744 compared with 30,488 in 2010. The peak daily voting turnout in 2013 was 50,931 on day 14, compared with 66,031 on day 12 in 2010.

Figure 4. Voter turnout, nationally 1989 to 2010

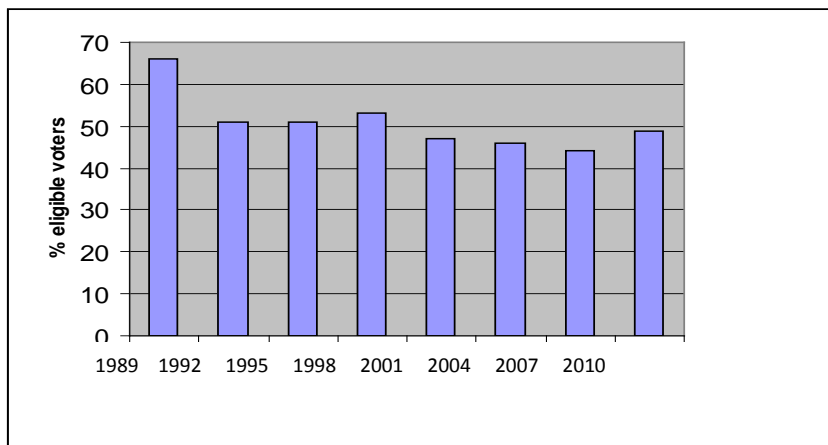


Figure 6 shows the total per cent of eligible voters who voted each day. Figure 7 emphasizes a spurt in the daily turnout of voters, as a percentage of all eligible voters in the last five days of the voting period. Almost 50 per cent of voters in 2010 and 2013 (approximately 180,000 and 260,000 respectively) voting during this period.

Figure 5. Daily voting returns 2010 and 2013 - number of eligible voters per day

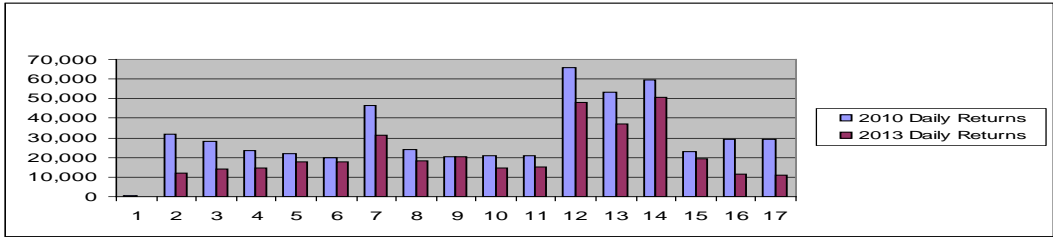


Figure 6. Daily voter turnout 2010 and 2013 - per cent of total eligible voters per day

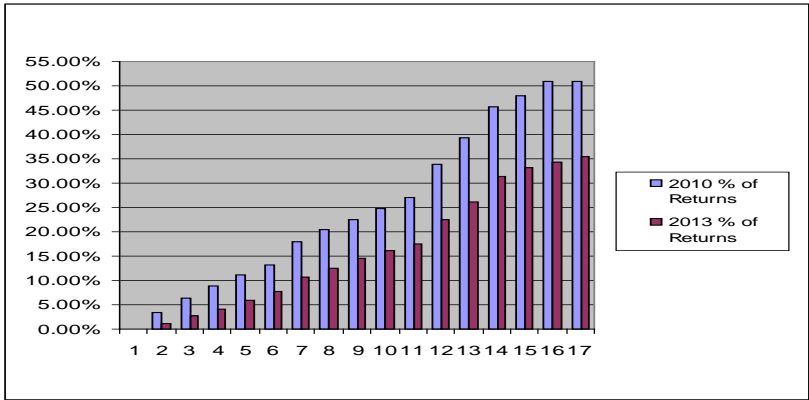
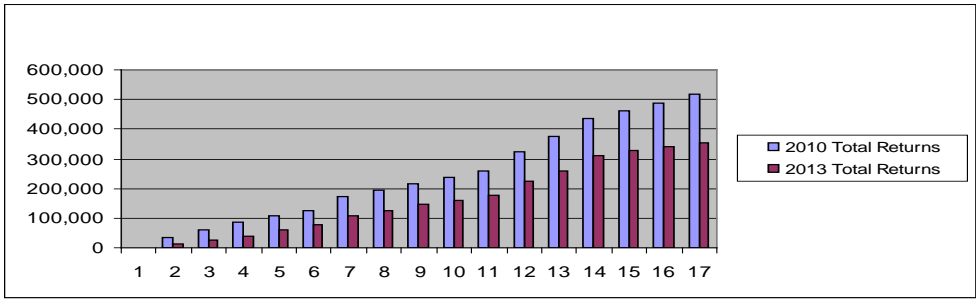


Figure 7. Daily voter turnout 2010 and 2013 - number of total eligible voters per day



Conclusion and further research

The transition to new governance arrangements for the Auckland region, with it’s higher than usual media profile invigorated local electoral participation for just the first Auckland Council election. While the reforms may in some quarters be seen to offer potential in lifting Auckland’s performance, economically and as a transport hub for the South Pacific, there are still reservations as to the capacity of the new governance entity to

address the social and cultural challenges facing the region. Anecdotally, voters have been unenthused with the changes and have expressed frustration at prevailing local issues. The increased voter turnout in the 2010 local election appears to have been replaced by returning voter apathy.

While no research has yet sought to explain voter behavior following amalgamation of the Auckland councils, sociological network theory provides a possible explanation. Coupled with the high media profile and raised awareness of local government surrounding the Royal Commission prior to the 2010 election, the profile of local government as a subject for debate amongst informal social networks this cannot be discounted. This, together with the range of factors contributing to the decline of voter turnout internationally – institutional and electorate characteristics, and elector and candidate behavior – may go some way to explaining the massive 16 per cent decline to 35.4 per cent voter turnout in 2013.

The prevailing low voter turnout in Auckland has, to some degree, been attributed to dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of information available on candidates and confusion over the different voting mechanisms and complexity of multiple elections alongside the local authority election. Institutional factors, characteristics of the electorate and electoral behavior as discussed are likely to have influenced local democratic participation of individuals and groups in the Auckland community. Changes to institutional arrangements such as the radical reforms in Auckland local governance in 2010, and the change to postal voting in 1989, which resulted in a two-fold increase in voter turnout have tended only to influence voter turnout in the short term. While early results suggest that proportional representation has a more sustained influence, the complexity of multiple issues and multiple method voting papers is an area of concern.

In the Auckland context, research is required to evidence the influence of socio-economic factors (such as age, ethnicity and education) and social capital (volunteerism, social connections, civic awareness, trust and a sense of belonging) on voter participation, over migrant status, specifically with respect to Pacific and other populations in Auckland. With almost 40 per cent of Auckland's population is under 25 and 14 per cent between 14

and 25 years (Auckland Council 2012) influences on youth participation such as 'leaving the nest', civic awareness and trust are of significance. Correspondingly, with approximately 14 per cent of the population over 65 years, the influence of demobilization and loss of social connections among the elderly is an area for future attention.

In conclusion, this overview of voter turnout raises a number of questions, and makes the case for more detailed and qualitative research with respect to what influences voter turnout and more broadly, participation in Auckland local governance. An investigation of local and regional issues influencing the super city, the sociological, socio economic, institutional and electoral factors and the policy positions taken by elected members at both the regional and local levels would provide useful insights to explain the results presented here.

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