

Analysis of Post Local Body Election Survey Results by TouchPoll

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Background

This survey was conducted in late November 2007 by a mix of council and TouchPoll staff. The main focus was to identify issues associated with non-voting in local and national body elections, in particular across Waitakere's four wards over a four-day period.

The findings will assist with strategic communications and election officers in future campaigns to achieve a higher level of voter participation. Some of the observations are from personal experience as survey conductors in the Henderson CBD area.

Demographics

Gender surveyed: Female 58% Male 42%

Age surveyed: 18-29 = 28%; 30-49 = 38%; 50-60+ = 33%

Voting by wards Massey 31%, Henderson 27%, Waitakere 21% New Lynn 21%

Employment status: Full-time 41%; Part-time 18%; Retired 17%; Student 11%

The above demographics show that a broad cross section of age, gender and ward cover was achieved. [403 valid responses, with a confidence level of 95% based on a population of 194,700]

Voting in local election

Gender: Female 53% Male 47%

Age: 60+years (86%); 50-59 (63%); 40-49 (49%); 30-39 (51%); 20-29 (27%); 18-19 (28%).

The marked difference in participation levels based on age should provide the council with an opportunity to target specific age groups. It is clear that money would be wasted if the older age groups were specifically targeted. In particular the 19-29 year age group requires some advanced strategies (e.g. social marketing/behaviour change campaigns using either incentives or disincentives).

Reasons for non voting

The four main reasons for not voting in order of total responses are:

1. **'Other reasons'** (18%)
2. **'I don't know any of the candidates'** (15%)
3. **'It's not relevant to me'** (8.4%)
4. **'It will be the same whatever councillors get in'** (7%)
'Too hard to sort out the differences between the candidates' (7%)

1. Other Reasons

Out of 46 **'other'** reasons for non voting – some 30% said they were too busy or didn't have time. From the council's perspective it would make sense to target busy people in appropriate ways that assist them with making voting quicker and easier.

Research showed that 46% of the 18-39 year old age group said that the council doesn't involve its people enough in its decisions. This shows that the council needs

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to continue a face-to-face presence with its younger residents and to find ways for them to interact in a meaningful way (e.g. more focus groups, especially ongoing focus groups used across a range of topics/issues).

The 34% of those surveyed who either **Forgot to Post** the form back or said they had a **Time Constraint** should not be 'written off' from a communications perspective as possibly not interested. Rather we should treat them as people that might be engaged if they knew it would make a difference and were excited or engaged with what the council hopes to achieve. Again this is a group that could be more involved and / or offered alternative voting methods (e.g. house-to-house prompting and pickups, led by R&R groups, Community Boards etc, call centre campaign, helpline assistance for pickup and queries, etc).

Targeting specific groups with new methods for engagement and voter education could turn around a significant number of the 73% of non-voters who said that they were **not interested** in voting (50%), followed by those who said they **don't know why** they didn't vote (23%). Does this come back to the fact that much of what the council is planning for the future isn't clear to the average person. For example, the Annual Plan and LTCCP could be seen as far too complex for the average person.

2. I don't know any of the candidates

This response must be seen as an opportunity to look at ways in which the ordinary person in the street can meet and mingle with the candidates standing for his or her ward. Such an exchange, if it is meaningful, could also help dispel or address some of the other concerns that scored around 4 – 5.5% of the total responses (i.e. **'The candidates don't get involved in meeting ordinary people'** and **'I don't feel represented by any of the candidates'**).

In response to Tony Stones-Havas' suggesting that some answers (i.e. "I don't know the candidates") may be an excuse to cover for being seen as socially undesirable because they did not vote – obscures that fact that TouchPoll, by its very nature, gives the respondent a high level of anonymity – the tablet is held away from the surveyor so that he or she can't see the respondent's answers.

3. It's not relevant to me

Engagement opportunities exist with retailers and other local businesses that could be targeted. From personal experience during TouchPoll surveying of Henderson CBD retailers, many did not feel connected to the council and/or its initiatives. Language barriers exist and could be addressed (at least three retailers did not have good English and had to get help from staff to complete the survey). However, the personal touch seems to be the most fruitful approach, judging from comments, so from a community engagement and communications perspective, this digital technique is more useful than 'one-way' translated material.

In general people haven't got time to look at everything that is going on in Waitakere. They would, however, be interested in what matters to them personally, i.e. in their ward or local community, or to their particular age group (e.g. youth facility). Again targeting special groups by age or inclination seems to be one way of reaching those who might not otherwise feel that there is any relevance to them.

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It is apparent from TouchPoll surveys undertaken in Waitakere that people are in fact interested in what the council is doing if approached. And many take the time to present their own views and situations on a range of city or neighbourhood issues.

**4. It will be the same whatever councillors get in
Too hard to sort out the differences between the candidates**

There are two issues here, one of respondents feeling that their votes don't count – to counter this sentiment we need an active social marketing campaign with a key message that each person's vote really matters.

Regular updates of what the councillors and community boards are achieving on behalf of their wards, as mooted in the annual plan, could be showcased more in Waitakere News and other media.

Introduction of a **scorecard** approach to reporting on the council's achievements could also help address the above.

Holding media conferences and familiarisation tours, amongst other familiarisation techniques, is another way of addressing the deficit of understanding of the council's key strategies and milestones.

The second issue - of it being too hard to sort out the differences between candidates – could be countered through education and communication. To counter this sentiment we need better reporting on what each candidate has achieved in the past, particularly in his or her community, before it gets to the candidate's catalogue. A meet the candidates' event (probably ward by ward) would help address this deficit.

This TouchPoll survey backs up anecdotal comments from the last annual plan consultation round (May 2007). No major concerns over council's general direction were identified, rather respondents welcomed the opportunity for either an update on council activities planned for their ward, and/or wanted to vent about more general issues of a personal nature, such as boy-racers.

Executive Summary

Voter Patterns

Males and females are equal voters in the local election (2007), with older people voting in greater numbers, with civic duty being a key reason.

Non voters were characterised by apathy, confusion through too much choice, and generally a lack of knowledge of the candidates and personal motivation/time.

There is a strong indication that people don't know the candidates one from each other or enough about them to make an informed choice.

In addition language can be a barrier, but this is more keenly felt where there is also a perceived lack of personal contact with the council. Unitec interpretation courses, the council's language line and civic ceremonies play a part in addressing this issue (e.g. providing a sense of belonging and civic pride).

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The overall non-voting trend shows a very mixed response, which one would expect from a complex, culturally diverse city, such as Waitakere.

Fresh insight can be gained from this broad cross-section of age, gender and location. Particularly of interest are the opportunities for the council to address - provided by analysing the main reasons for non-voting – many of which took the time to type their response (46) rather than just push a button for a quick response.

TouchPoll Technology

As council's strategic communicators, we suggest that face-to-face interaction involving council staff allows people to discuss council issues (i.e. to both have their say and to feel that they are being heard). This is not necessarily the case with a telephone survey, for example the interaction is one-way only and more structured.

On a recent indicative poll taken on liquor bans, utilising both TouchPoll and telephone techniques, the findings were similar. This shows that the surveying techniques produce similar results at times, so can be utilised as part of a campaign involving several surveying techniques (i.e web, paper-based, etc) or TouchPoll, which is now available inhouse, can be utilised for standalone purposes.

Young people are often the hardest to reach and young men in particular. The TouchPoll digital format is particularly attractive to young people and equally between the sexes. Some 50% of those surveyed were in the 18 to 39 age bracket, compared to 22% of those 60 plus.

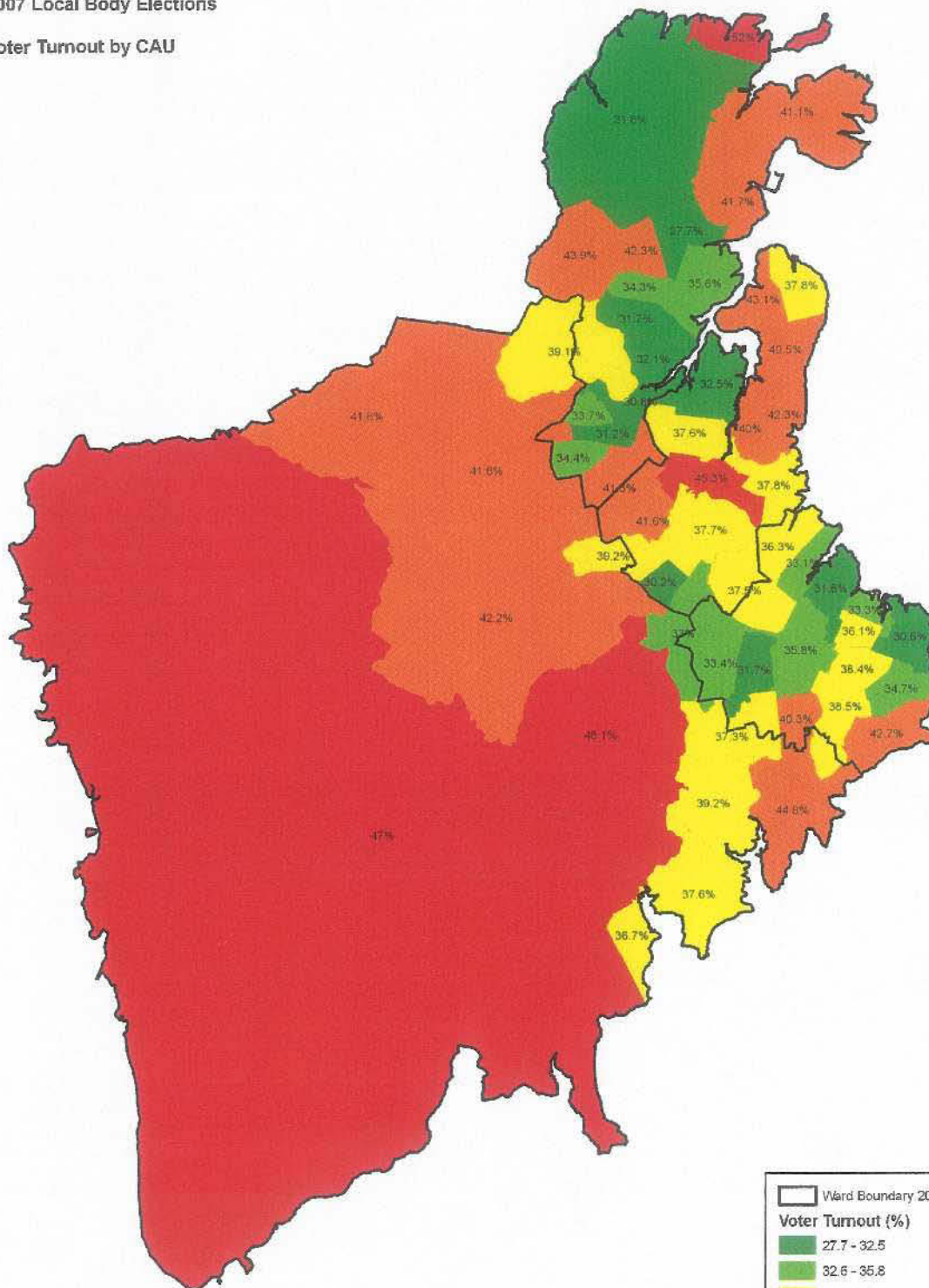
TouchPoll is a flexible system, it is easy to master and therefore staff can be used where interaction and a council presence is highly desirable. On the other hand, where impartiality is more important, TouchPoll staff can be used at a reasonable cost. For example, provision of two TouchPoll staff to survey for six hours, \$440.

Purchase of TouchPoll survey equipment by the council, as part of the Public Affairs/Mobile Library public participation pilot, requires widespread council support to maximise its return on investment.

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2007 Local Body Elections

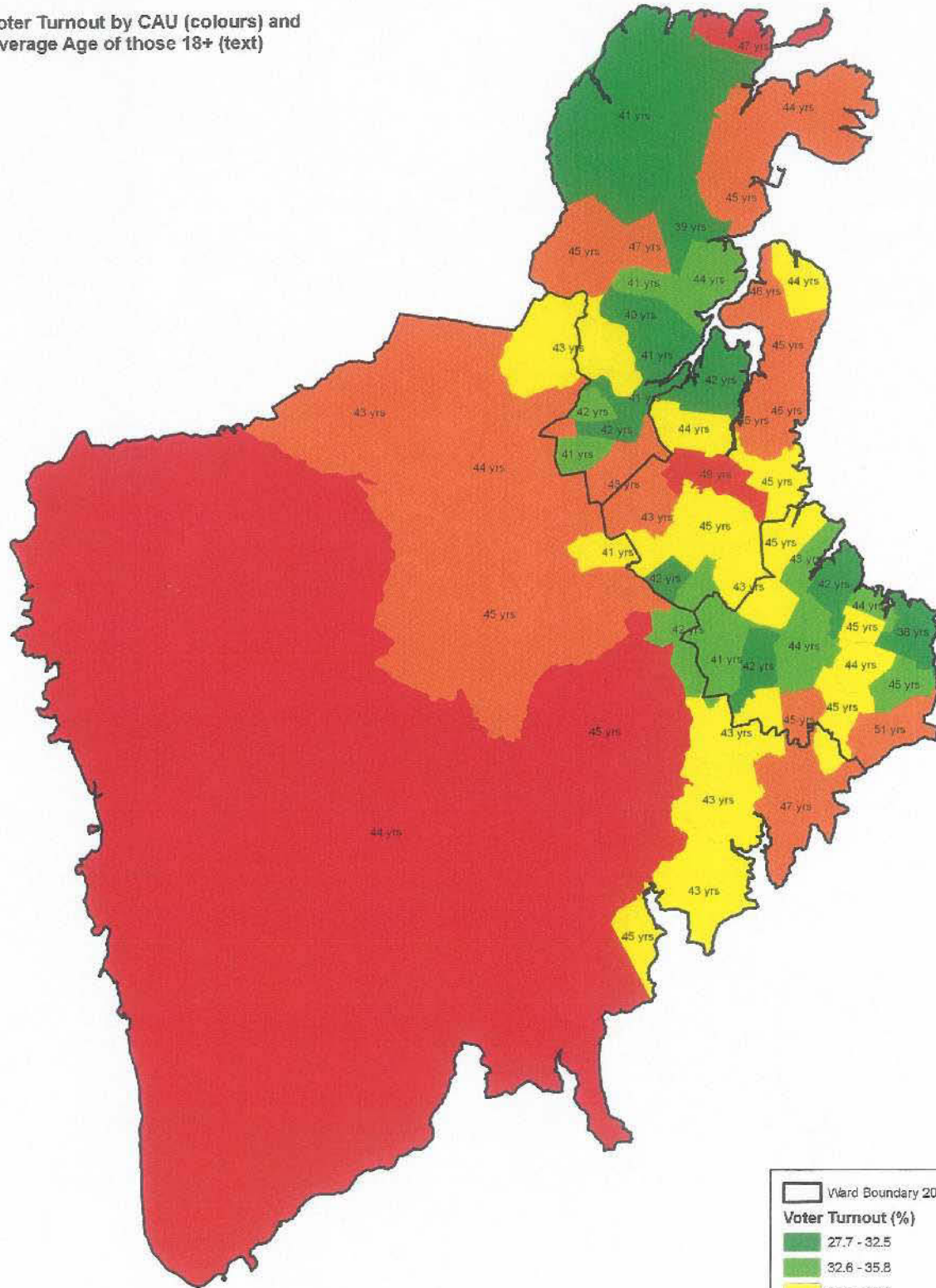
Voter Turnout by CAU



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2007 Local Body Elections

Voter Turnout by CAU (colours) and
Average Age of those 18+ (text)



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The Effects of Arranging Candidate Names In Two Columns On Vote Distribution

In the 2007 local body elections, most DHB elections and several council elections had too many candidates for them all to be listed in a single column. This paper examines how the arrangement of candidate names in these elections into two columns may have affected how voters voted, and the impact that may have had on election results.

Ballot examinations were conducted in four councils to gain data.

Waitakere City Council ballots were of interest because Henderson Ward had a high informal rate of 2.60% and all the candidates who won were listed in the left list of candidates. The candidates' names were arranged in alphabetical order in Waitakere.

Blenheim Ward ballots from Marlborough Council also had two columns of candidates' names but the names were arranged randomly, varying between ballots. Christchurch City Council and Marlborough District Council also used random ordering of names. These elections provide counter-examples to the Henderson ballot and are be used to analyse the effect of having two columns in the DHB vote with any impact arising from popular candidates happening to have surnames in the same part of the alphabet removed.

Henderson Ward – Waitakeke City Council

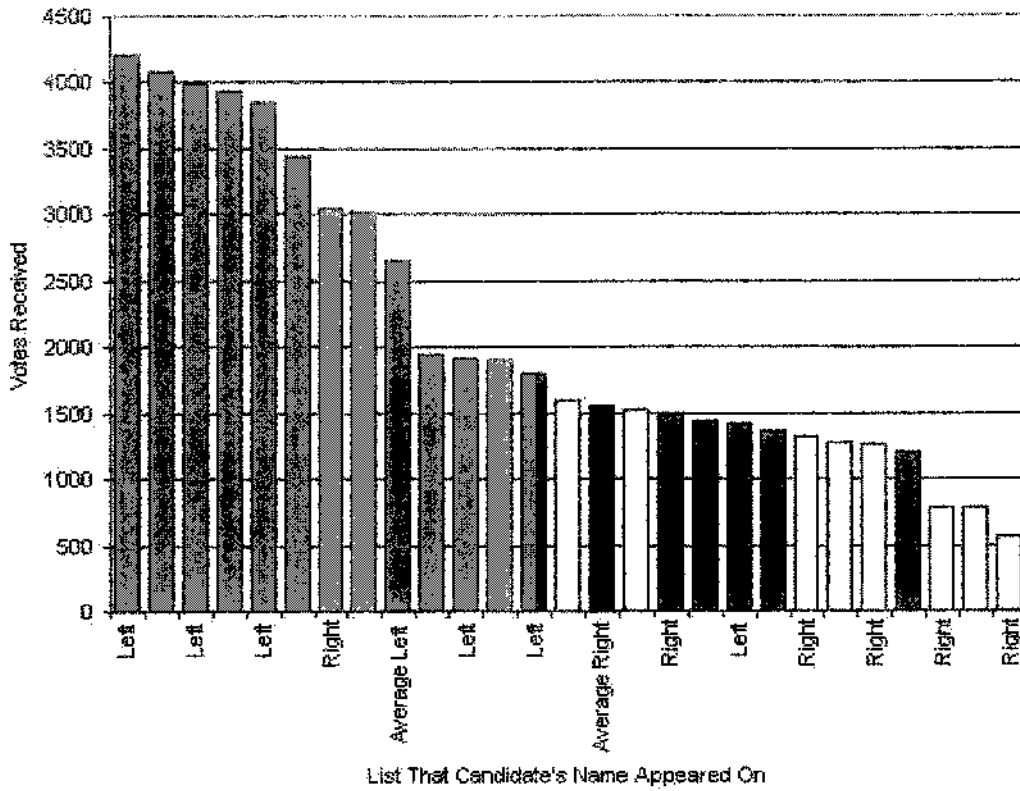
With 25 candidates for four positions, Henderson ward was one of the most heavily contested contests in the country. The format of local body voting papers in 2007 meant it was not possible to fit more than 20 names in a single column, so the Henderson candidates' names were split into two columns, as in most DHB elections that also had large numbers of candidates. There were 13 candidates listed in the left column and 12 in the right column.

Candidate names were arranged alphabetically. This meant that any effect created by the existence of two columns of names that tended to result in voters casting more votes in one column than they otherwise would have could effect the outcome of the election.

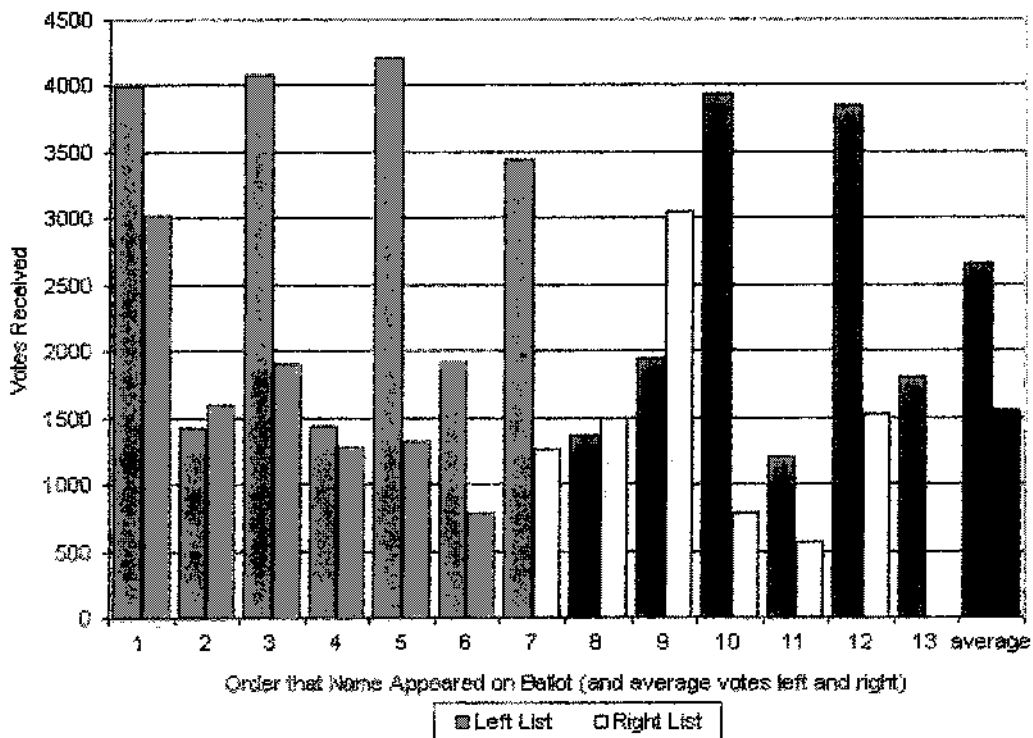
An examination of results in the Henderson ward shows that all successful candidates were listed in the left column and the six top ranking candidates were in the left column. If rankings were randomly distributed between the two columns, the probability of all the winning candidates being in the same column was less than 6% and the probability of all six top ranked candidates appearing in the same column was less than 2%.

The following graph shows that most candidates in the left column received more votes than most candidates in the right column. The average votes received by candidates in the left column was 2661, 70% higher than the 1548 average in the right column.

Votes Received by Whether Candidate's Name was on Left or Right List

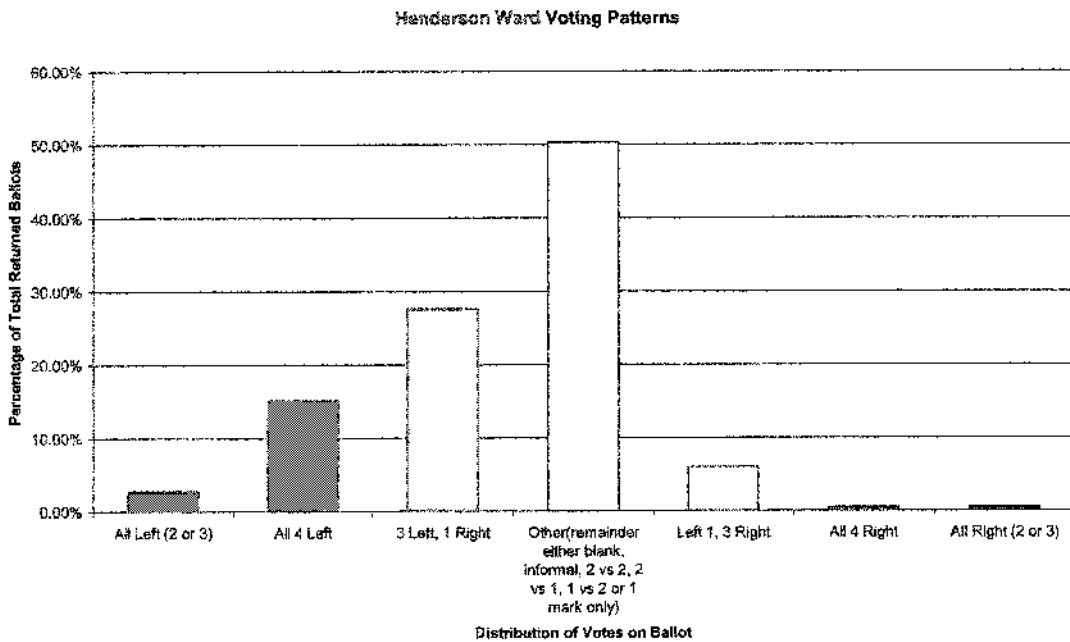


Votes Received by Order Name Appeared on Ballot, Left and Right Lists



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The candidate on the left column received more votes than the candidate directly beside them on the right column in nine of the 12 match-ups. In a random distribution the expected result would be six. There is less than a 7.5% chance of so many left candidates beating their opposite numbers on the right column. This suggests that the effect is not likely to be a result of the random concentration of popular candidates on the left column.



Half of voters did not vote in a strongly biased way. That is, they did not give two more of their votes to candidates in one column than they did to candidates in the other column (they either voted 2 in the left column, 2 in the right column; 2 left, 1 right; 1,2; 1,0; 0,1; cast a blank vote or voted informally). Of the nearly 50% of voters that voted in a strongly biased way (by voting one of 4,0; 0,4; 3,1; 1,3; 3,0; 0,3; 2,0; 0,2) over 86% had a left bias; in a random distribution the expected result is 50%, 86% is a very significant deviation indicating the distribution here was not random but subject to some influence.

Of particular note is that 15% of voters gave all four of their votes to candidates in the left column, compared to 0.4% who gave them all to candidates on the right. The chance of four randomly allocated votes all falling in one column is 5%, so the result for the left column is markedly higher than would be expected, and the result for the right markedly lower.

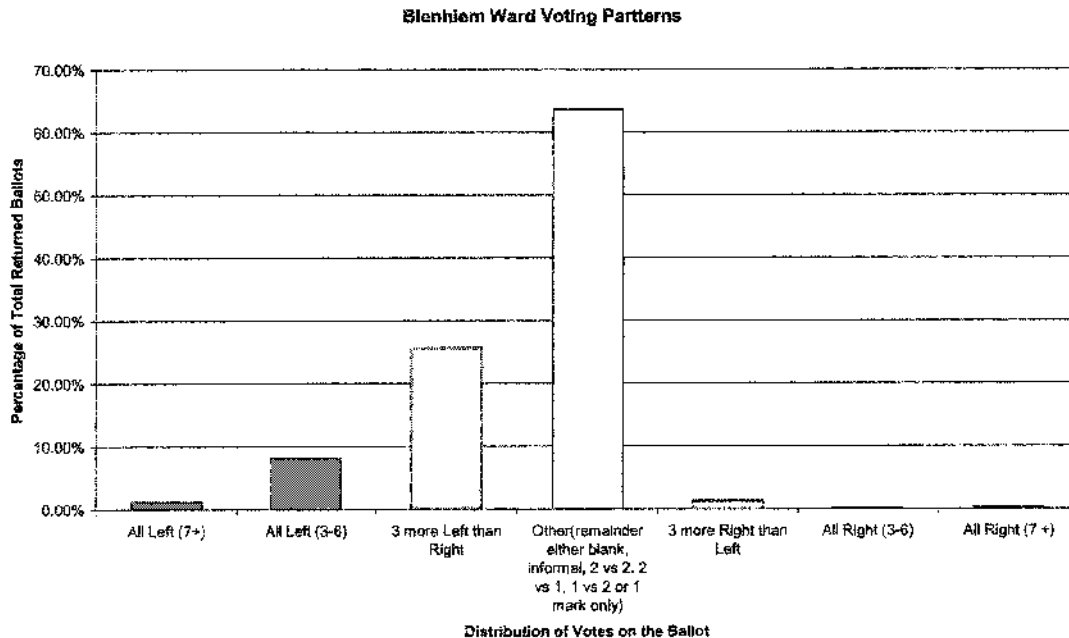
It was observable in a number of cases that voters had allocated all their votes to the left column before realising the right column also applied to the same election. They had deleted their fourth vote in the left column and, instead, made a vote in the right column. It is probable that many voters allocated all their votes in the left column before reaching the right column but did not bother to make such changes.

It is clear that in Henderson there was a statistically significant tendency for voters to strongly favour voting in the left column, and this led to candidates in the left column

gaining a larger share of the votes than their counterparts in the right column. That most candidates in the left column received more votes than most candidates in the right column, and most left column candidates received more votes than their opposite in the right column indicates that there was a bias toward the left column candidates in general and it is less likely the higher vote for the left was the result of the more popular candidates happening to have surnames that appear early in the alphabet.

Blenheim Ward – Marlborough City Council

Blenheim Ward also had two columns of candidates but, unlike Henderson, the candidates' names were randomly, not alphabetically ordered. As in Henderson, there was a pattern of voters allocating most of their votes to the left-hand column, although the phenomenon appears weaker.



That both Henderson and Blenheim ward ballots displayed a strong tendency for voting candidates' whose names appeared in the left column, despite that fact that in Blenheim this could not have been because of the individual popularity of candidates with names early in the alphabet. This strongly suggests that it is the nature of the arrangement of candidates' names in two columns itself that leads to voters biasing in favour of the left column.

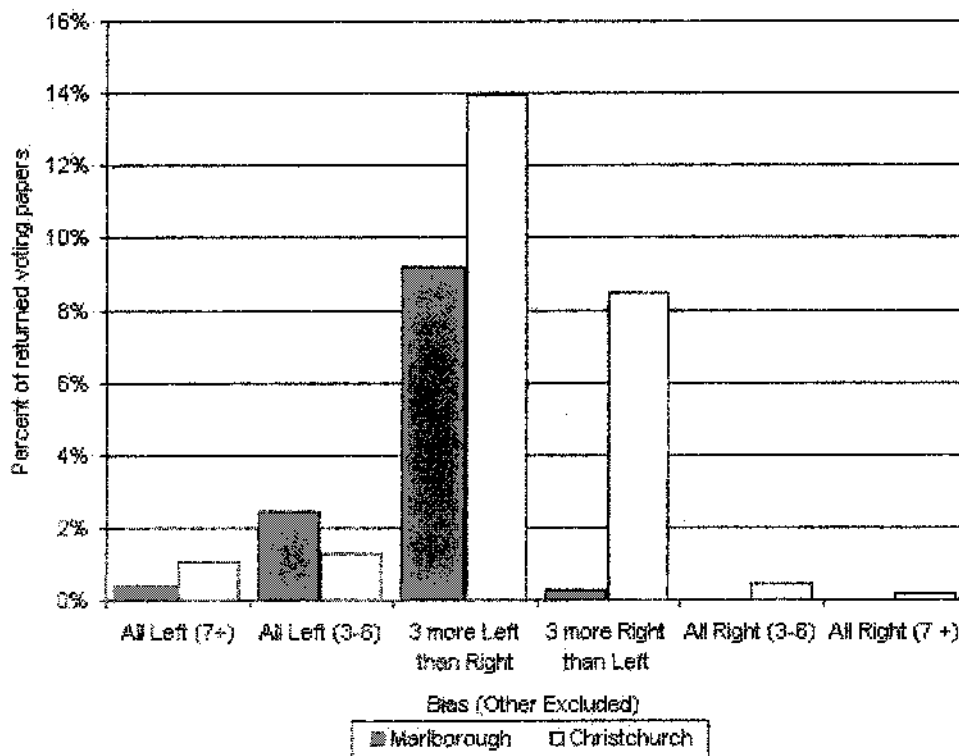
In Henderson, this phenomenon may have materially affected the results of the election. In Blenheim, however, random ordering meant this tendency to favour the left column could not advantage any particular candidates (candidates' names were as likely to appear in the left column as the right column on any given ballot).

Canterbury and Nelson/Marlborough DHBs

Further evidence that the arrangement of candidate names in to two columns affects voting patterns can be found by analysing results from other votes that had two columns of candidates' names. The results for DHB elections Canterbury DHB taken from Christchurch City Council ballots and Nelson-Marlborough DHB taken from Marlborough District Council ballots have been used for this comparative purpose. These two samples have the further advantage that the candidates names are not listed alphabetically, as on the Henderson Ward ballot, but randomly, thus removing any effect from popular candidates' surnames being clumped at one end of the alphabet. The fact that these two votes are for DHB elections and the Henderson ballots were for a council election does not significantly impact their comparability for these purposes: any affect from displaying candidate names in two columns should not be impacted by what positions the election is for.

In the two DHB elections voters again were more likely to give the bulk of their votes to candidates whose names appeared on the left column on their individual ballot papers than they were to strongly favour candidates whose names were on the right column. (Because of the different number of votes that could be cast in the DHB elections opposed to the Henderson Ward election, different measures of bias are used, but the basic pattern is comparable).

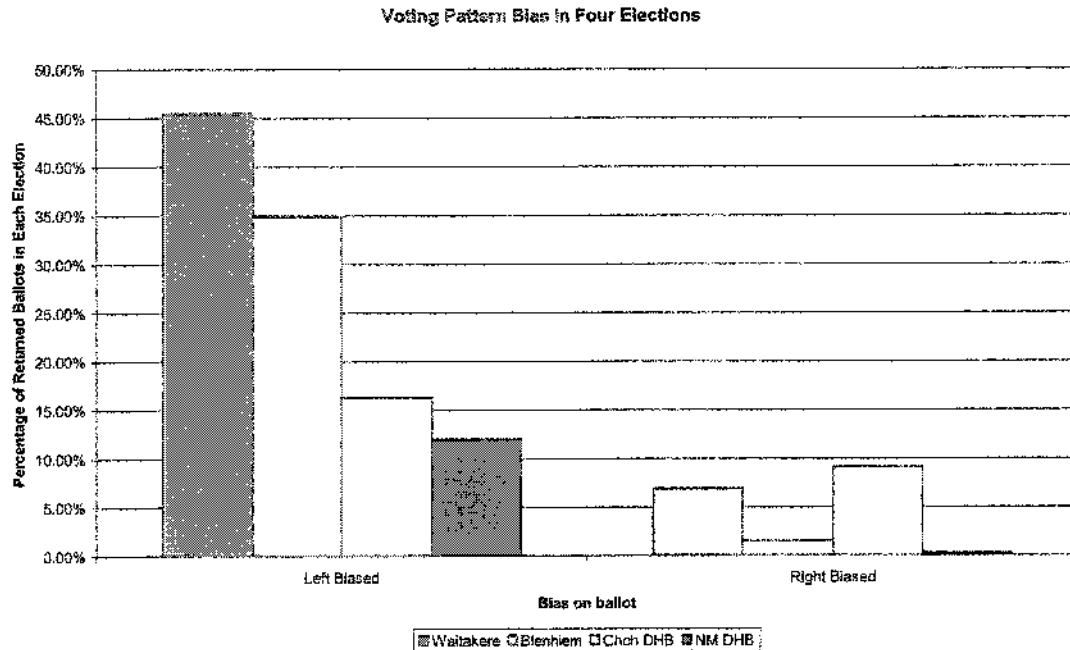
Voting Patterns in DHB Elections



As in the Henderson results, voters were significantly more likely to allocate a large majority of their votes to candidates whose names appeared in the left column than they were to allocate such a majority to candidates names who appeared in the right

column. This, despite the fact that individual candidates' names were allocated randomly and so appeared as often on the left column as they did the right column.

None of the elections examined had more right bias than left bias in any of the categories. As further illustrated below, all four elections had more ballots that were biased left than right.



The bias was most extreme in Henderson, however. This may mean that part of the reason candidates on the left column in the Henderson contest received more votes than those on the right was they happened to be the more popular ones but it seems certain that this is not the sole cause of the left bias. Given that all three elections show a clear left bias and Henderson candidates on the left column outperformed those on the right by such a statistically unlikely degree, it is fair to conclude that the arrangement of candidates' names into two columns does significantly affect voting patterns. In an election such as Henderson Ward where candidate names are not rotated, this would result in candidates on the left column polling better relative to those on the right column than they would otherwise have done.

Impact of Two Columns On Informal Voting

A further issue is that displaying the candidates' names in two columns appears to have increased the informal voting rate in Henderson Ward. Henderson Ward had 2.6% informal votes. Of the 114 Council elections examined for a study of informal voting only three had a higher informal percentage than Henderson and the average was 0.62%. The examination of Henderson ballots found that all examined ballots which had an informal Council vote were informal because too many ticks had been made on the ballot (ie. more than four ticks). In contrast, the other wards in Waitakere City Council (Massey, New Lynn, and Waitakere) had only 0.62% informality and the examination showed only 25% of those informals were due to voters making too many ticks.

Most commonly, Henderson voters who cast an informal vote in the Council election had ticked boxes beside four candidate names on both the left and right columns, apparently not understanding that the maximum of four votes applied to both columns jointly. This type of mistake is not possible if there is only one column of candidate names.

Waitakere Informal Vote, by Type

