

BRG – Local government elections wrap-up

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern may have laughed when asked by a reporter about “Labour getting a hiding” in the local body elections over the weekend. But the laugh was surely a nervous one as most major cities across Aotearoa New Zealand swung centre-right.

The local body elections have posed some major questions, such as:

- How do we improve voter turnout and ensure that people understand what local government does and how those decisions affect their everyday lives?
- Where does this leave Three Waters?
- How does Labour handle a diminishing popularity locally?

Voter turnout

- Just 36 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballot
- This will increase slightly once special votes are counted
- Turnout in 2019 was 42 per cent
- Turnout in rural areas fell more than in major cities
- For comparison, voter turnout in the 2020 general election was 82 per cent

Political and media reaction

PM Jacinda Ardern and National Leader Christopher Luxon have commented on the low turnout, with Ardern saying that she’s keen to work with local government on how to make voting more accessible.

Local Government Minister Nanaia Mahuta says there will be a lot to learn after the election with regard to how processes can be improved. She will be talking further to Local Government NZ about it.

ACT Party leader David Seymour said the elections showed people voting against Three Waters and housing intensification.

Several surveys conducted by media showed the overwhelming majority of candidates across the country did not support the Government’s Three Waters reform.

Several commentators say the progressive vote is disillusioned by the Ardern Government and Labour should be worried about what the results mean for a possible third term.

The Spinoff called it the ‘Great Boomer Backlash of 2022’ saying it turns out older voters in the suburbs like things the way they are and voted anti housing-intensification, anti-cycleways and anti-Three Waters.

Trends

- The elections have resulted in a large increase in centre-right mayors and councillors.
- Many Labour candidates were replaced, suggesting a desire for change. Time will tell if this is also going to be seen in the 2023 general election.
- There was also an increase in blue-greens sentiment.
- Centre-right candidates won in Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin.
- Wellington was an outlier, electing Green Party-endorsed and former Green Party chief of staff Tory Whanau in a landslide victory under STV.

Hello

From Far North Mayor to Auckland's civic leader: Wayne Brown will have his work cut out as special votes look to have cost him his majority on council. Whether he's able to build consensus to deliver for Auckland will be an enormous test. Aucklanders can rightly expect a more business-minded and robust approach when it comes to working alongside central Government.

Tory Whanau, a relative newcomer, was elected in a landslide victory in Wellington to become the city's first wahine Māori Mayor. She beat incumbent Andy Foster and Labour MP Paul Eagle on a platform of building a climate-resilient city and 20,000 new homes along the new mass rapid transit corridor.

Long-time National MP and former Minister Nick Smith is now the Mayor of Nelson. He wasted no time declaring the centre-right shift as indicative of "real anger" towards the Government and saying Three Waters was a "death wish".

Businessman Phil Mauger beat former Canterbury DHB chief executive David Meates to claim the Christchurch mayoral chains with a 'back to basics' and core services focus.

Tania Tapsell – a 30-year-old former National Party candidate - won the Rotorua mayoralty. She is the first Māori woman elected to the role in Rotorua.

Jules Radich, a one-term Dunedin councillor, unseated Green Party-endorsed incumbent Aaron Hawkins, on his "Team Dunedin" election ticket, which saw two of his running mates also elected to council. Hawkins, a one-term mayor, was the city's first Green-endorsed Mayor.

Invercargill's deputy mayor Nobby Clark finally usurped the country's longest serving (24 years!) mayor, Sir Tim Shadbolt, and beat broadcaster Marcus Lush. Clark's priorities are to reopen the Southland Museum, protect local workers and investigate alternative water supply for the city.

Former Defence Minister and New Zealand First deputy leader Ron Mark is now the Mayor of Carterton. Again. He served as Mayor from 2010 – 2014. Mark invoked his military background in a media interview, saying "battle lines are being drawn" between central and local government.

Maori have the highest ever mayoral and councillor representation. As well as Tory Whanau and Tania Tapsell. Faylene Tunui, Moko Te Pania and Gary "Puku" Petley have been voted in as mayor of Kawerau, Far North and South Waikato Districts respectively. 65 councillors have been voted on to new Maori wards.

The Anti Brigade

This year's local body elections saw a disturbing rise in the number of candidates seeking election who spread misinformation or held anti-vax, anti-government, anti-science type views.

A Stuff investigation found more than 200 people who spread mis/disinformation were seeking to be elected to public positions. Luckily, fewer than a dozen were successful.

However, two prominent Voices For Freedom were elected into local body seats.

Dairy farmer Jaspreet Boparai, who believes there is a UN agenda to enslave humanity, was elected to the Southland District Council and Gill Booth, who wants to "disrupt and rip to pieces" her local council, was elected to the Teviot Community Board in Central Otago.