# Standing for Local Office Survey – New Zealand Local Elections 2019 Preliminary report

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# Method

Following the 2019 Local Government Elections we invited participants from New Zealand's most populated centres to participate in a survey considering their candidate experience. This survey explored candidate decision-making around the campaign, and provided an opportunity for suggestions as to how the candidate experience might be improved in future.

The survey was distributed by email in October 2019 along with two reminders in November and December. Participants were sourced from regional and local council, district health board (DHB) and licencing trust candidates in Auckland, Waikato, Tauranga, Palmerston North, Wellington, Canterbury, and Otago.

We received contact data for 1,280 candidates, 245 of these were duplicates (i.e. people who ran for more than one position) and were therefore removed from the count. We were not supplied an email address for 241 candidates.

Subsequently, we sent emails to 794 potential participants. We then received 23 bounced emails, meaning people had either provided an invalid email address or had closed their account since the election. In addition, 11 people refused to complete the survey and 14 attempts at answering the survey were removed as they either answered no questions or less than the first page of questions. In the end, we had 328 participants complete the survey, or a response rate of 42.5%. A prize draw for one of four $100 grocery vouchers was offered, and we contacted and posted out prizes to the winners in January 2020.

There are a few other important notes as background for this report. Firstly, there were no compulsory questions, so the number of answers to each question may vary slightly. Secondly, there were a number of options for participants to give open-ended (type in) responses, and we would like to thank the candidates who spent time providing detailed answers. We are in the process of analysing these for later work. We are also further processing results on the basis of demographic markers and other characteristics.

Lastly, though we were delighted with the overall response rate, there will inevitably be some biases in who responded, meaning there are some limitations when generalising the results to everyone who stood for local office (especially since we only used email to recruit participants).

In the following pages of this preliminary report we summarise the response to the questions (note that when you see a number in brackets, it represents the number of people who selected an option), results are reported under the headings:

- Political Histories
- Local Election 2019
- Standing for Local Office
- The Campaign
- Demographics of the Sample.

We hope you find this report of interest. Over the next year we will explore a deeper analysis of the findings and seek to publish the results in more detail. Finally, we would like to sincerely thank the participants for spending their time on this survey.

## Political Histories

We asked a range of questions about people's political history:

*In the lead up to the 2019 local government elections, were you an elected member?*

Around a third (31.5%; 103) of those surveyed were already elected members prior to the election (meaning 68.5% or 224 were not).

*Have you ever run in a local body election before 2019?*

We only asked this question of those who were not already an elected member. About a third (33.5%; 75) of those who answered this question had run before unsuccessfully. This means that, in total, 45.4% (149) of our participants ran for local office for the first time in 2019.

*Have you ever run in a general election?*

14.4% (47) of those surveyed had run in a general election before (meaning 85.6% or 280 people had not).

## Local Election 2019

We asked a number of questions around people's decision making before running.

*Which of the following best describes when you decided to stand for the 2019 local government elections?*

The question also included the following text: "Recall, nominations closed on the 16th of August 2019". The results are presented in Figure 1.
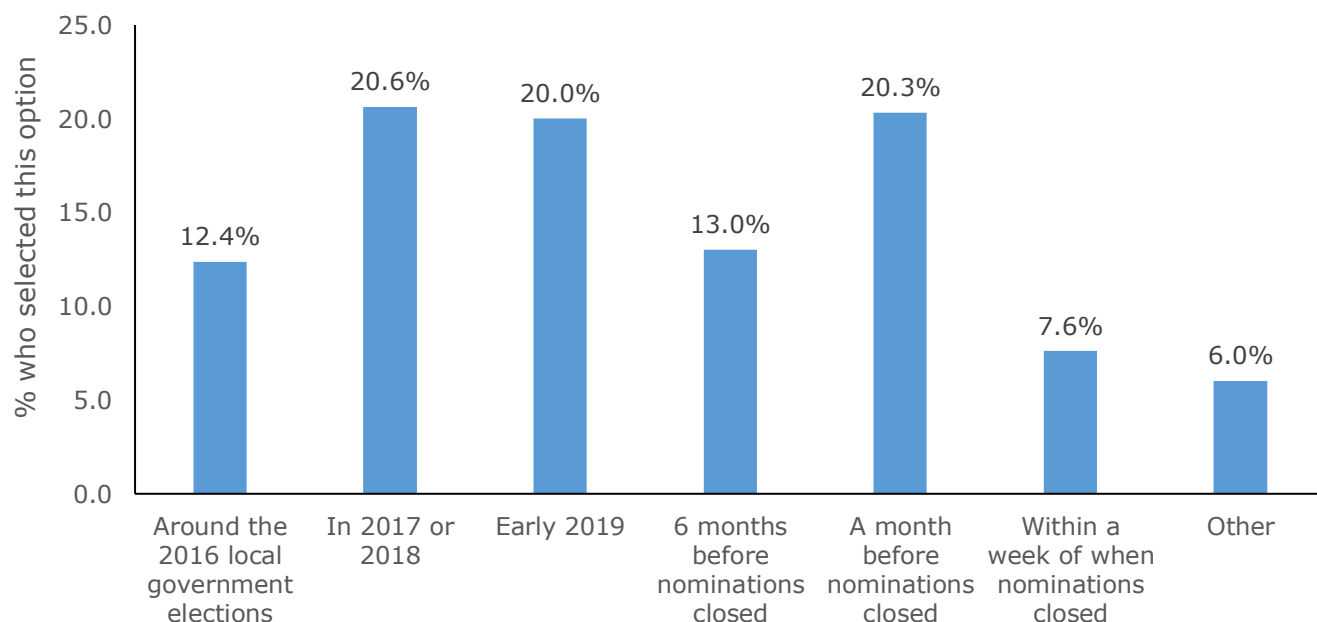


*Figure 1. When participants decided to stand for local election. The left side of this graph shows the earliest possible option, with the right side showing the later options.*

A third of candidates chose to stand before 2019 (33%). The majority of candidates said they decided to stand at some point in 2019: 'Early 2019' (20.0%); '6 months before nominations closed' (13.0%); and 'A month before nominations closed' (20.3%). A small number decided to run in the last week (7.6%).

## Which of the following did you run for?

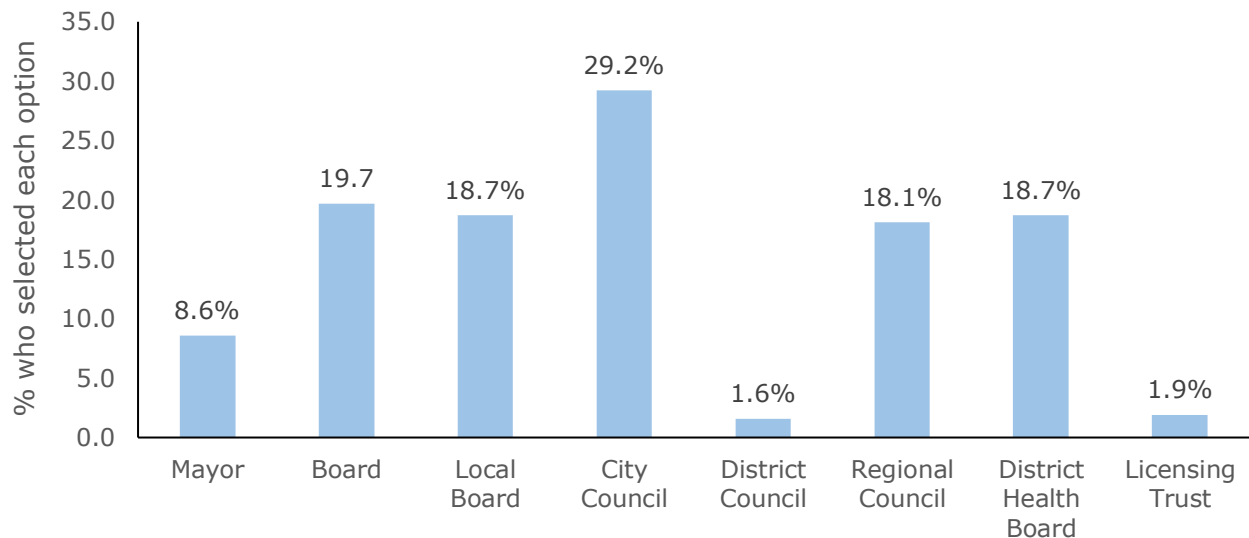The results for this question are displayed below in Figure 2.



*Figure 2. The different roles that participants ran for. Note that the graph does not add up to 100% because people ran for multiple roles.*

It is interesting to note that the number of candidates in our sample standing for DHBs and regional councils is similar. The small number of licensing trusts that remain nationwide reflect in the small number of candidates overall, however, these positions were also well contested.

## How did you describe your status on the nomination form?

When filling out the nomination form there were a number of common options that candidates chose. The results are shown in figure 3 below.
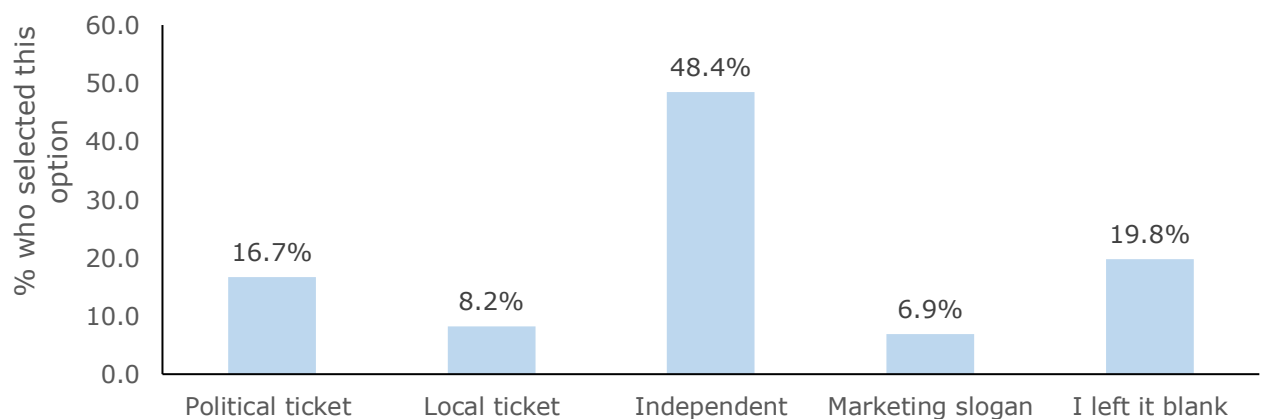


*Figure 3. How candidates described their status on the nomination form.*

Most of the survey participants had described themselves as independent (48.4%).

## How much money did you spend on your campaign?

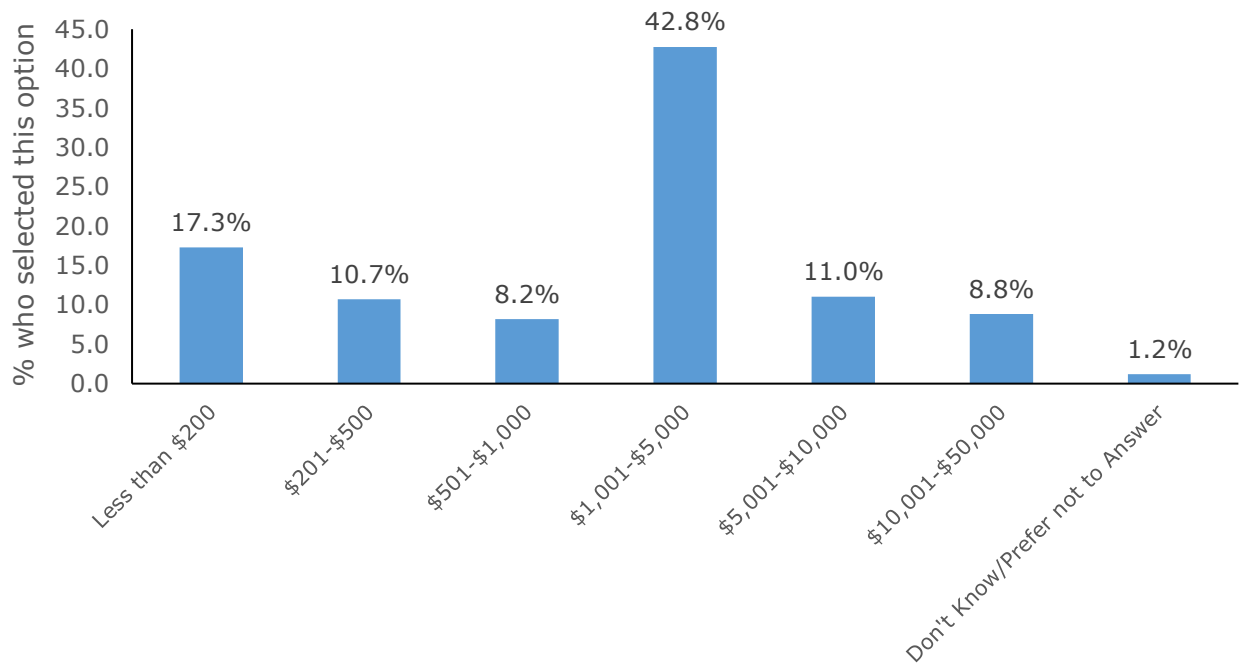As shown on figure 4, the majority of participants (42.8%) spent between $1,001 - $5,000 on their campaign.



*Figure 4. How much money candidates said that they spent on their campaign.*

## Were you elected?

We asked participants if they were elected - 45% of the sample said yes (meaning 55% of the sample were not elected).

# Standing for Local Office

## Motivations for Standing

Participants were given a list of potential reasons for standing for local office and asked to rank these as: not important; somewhat important; or very important. They could also add other reasons for standing.



Key: ■ Not Important  ■ Somewhat Important  ■ Very Important

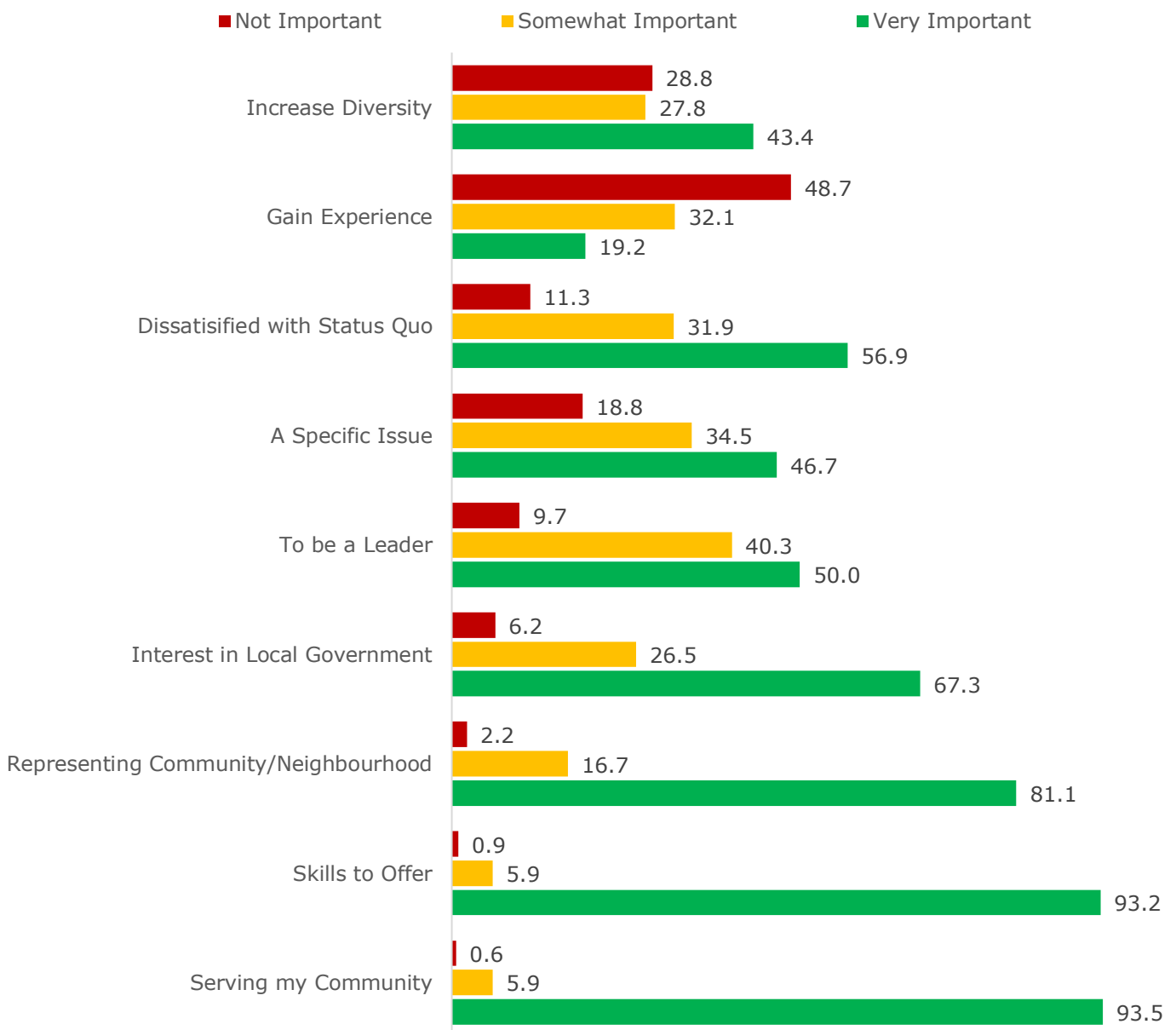| Motivation | Not Important | Somewhat Important | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|
| Increase Diversity | 28.8 | 27.8 | 43.4 |
| Gain Experience | 48.7 | 32.1 | 19.2 |
| Dissatisified with Status Quo | 11.3 | 31.9 | 56.9 |
| A Specific Issue | 18.8 | 34.5 | 46.7 |
| To be a Leader | 9.7 | 40.3 | 50.0 |
| Interest in Local Government | 6.2 | 26.5 | 67.3 |
| Representing Community/Neighbourhood | 2.2 | 16.7 | 81.1 |
| Skills to Offer | 0.9 | 5.9 | 93.2 |
| Serving my Community | 0.6 | 5.9 | 93.5 |

*Figure 5. Motivations for standing for local office. The numbers at the end of each bar represent the percent who selected an option. See the key at the top of the graph for what the colours represent.*

As shown in Figure 5, serving one's community and having skills to offer were the most popular motivations. Representing one's community/neighbourhood and having an interest in local government were also highly rated. Increasingly diversity and gaining experience were least popular reasons for standing.

## Barriers to Standing

We asked about the barriers to standing for local office. Participants were given a list of potential barriers to standing for office, and asked to rate them as: not a barrier; somewhat of a barrier; or a significant barrier.
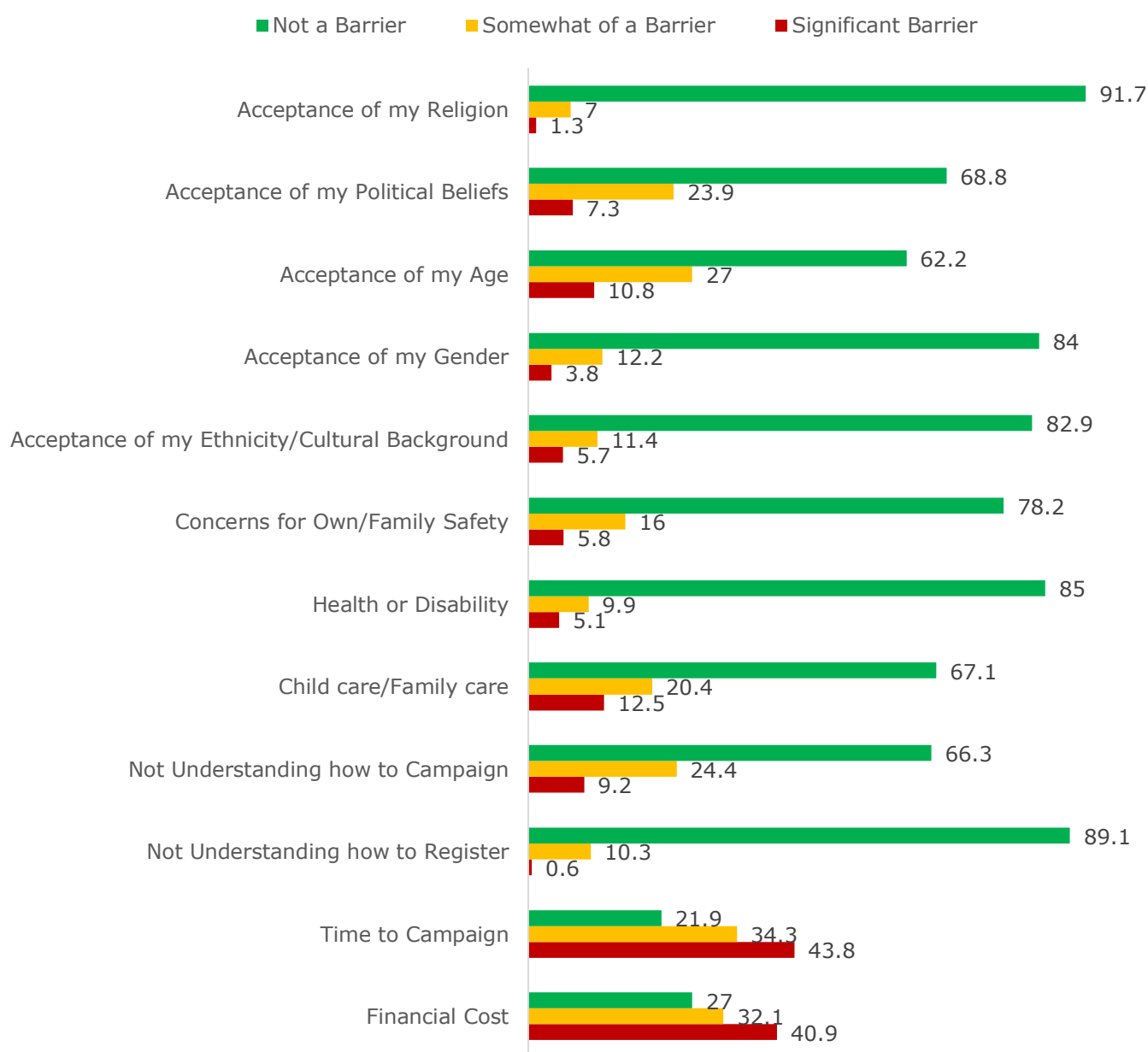


Figure 6. Barriers to standing for local office. The numbers at the end of each bar represent the percent who selected an option. See the key at the top of the graph for what the colours represent.

The most highly rated barriers were the financial cost, and the time to campaign. We anticipate that further analysis will show that barriers vary across demographic groups (e.g. candidates with child or family care responsibilities, or different social characteristics).

## What did you/do you hope to achieve this term?

We asked participants what they hoped to achieve in order to get an idea of their goals if elected. We restricted the maximum number of choices to five, so participants had to choose their five most important priorities.
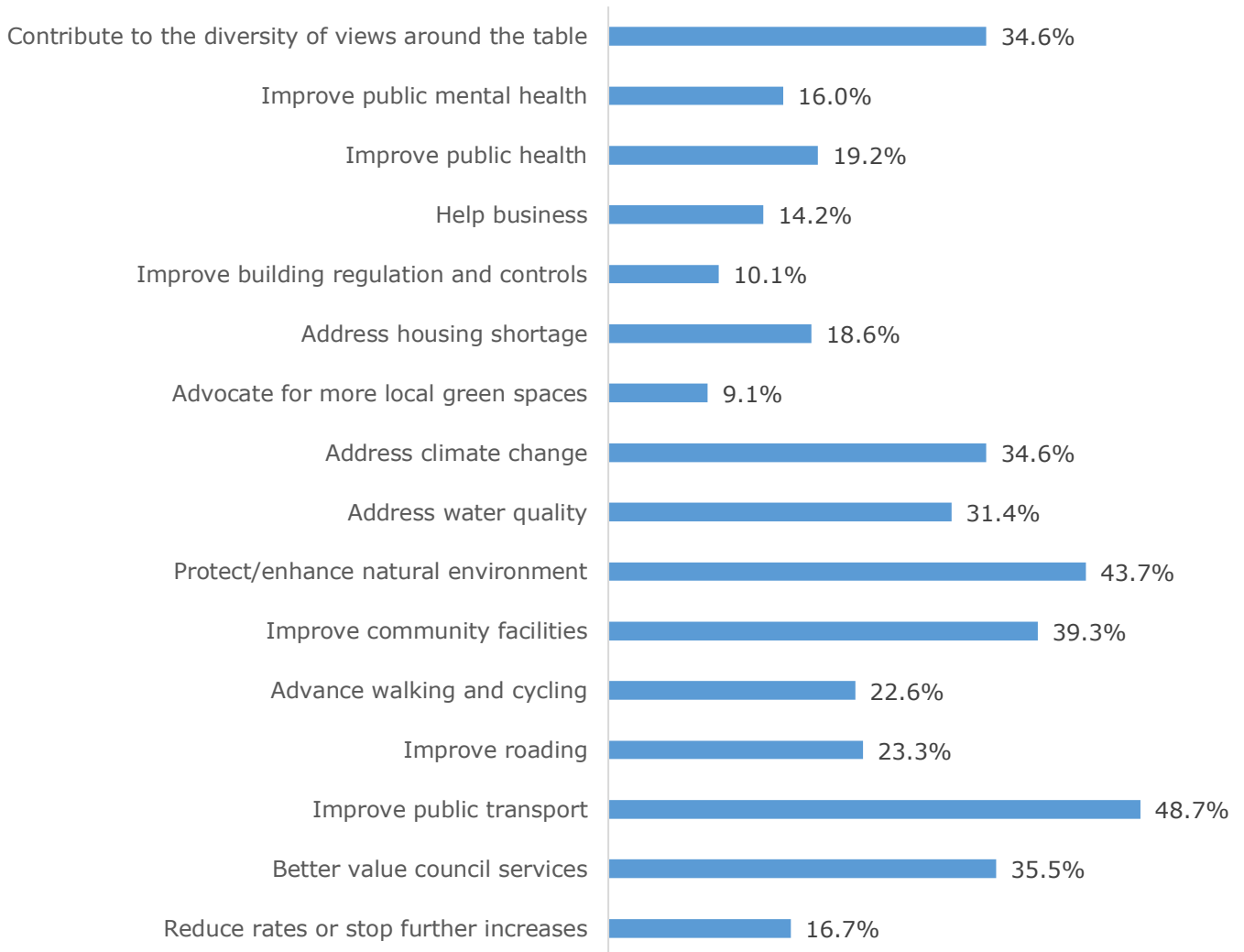


*Figure 6. Candidate policy priorities. Remember, participants could only select a maximum of 5 options.*

The three most popular priorities were: (1) improving public transport (48.7%); (2) protecting or enhancing the environment (43.7%); and (3) improving community facilities (39.3%). The least popular choices were: advocating for more local green spaces (9.1%); improving building regulation and controls (10.1%); and helping business (14.2%).

## Political Views

Participants were asked to rate their political views on a scale from left to right. This question is used across range of surveys for a measure of "political orientation", including the New Zealand Election Study.
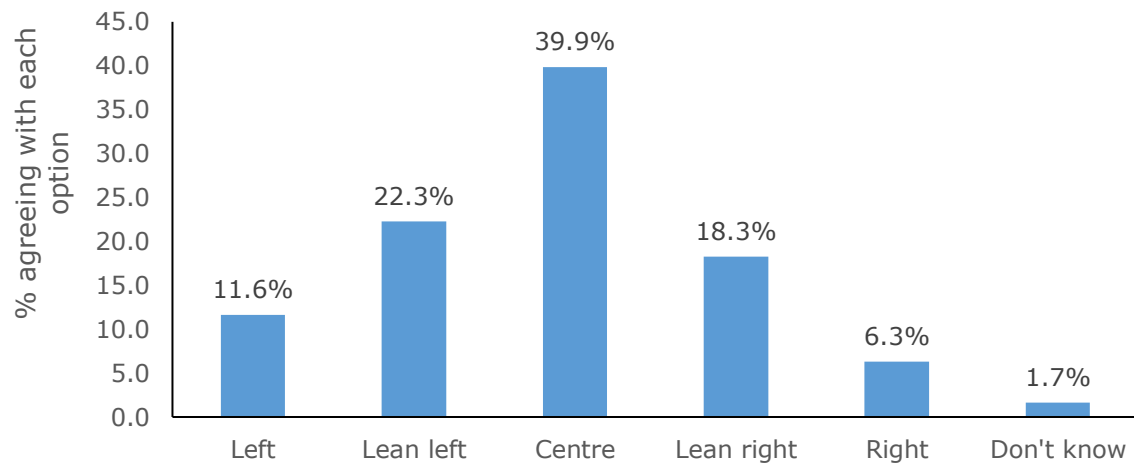


*Figure 7. Participant's ratings of their own political views on a left to right scale.*

As shown on the graph above, almost 40% candidates in the sample described their politics as centrist. Relatively more of the participants said they were left or lean left (33.9%) than right or lean right (24.6%).

## The Campaign

### Methods used to Campaign

We are interested in the different methods that candidates used to campaign, especially as campaigns move into the digital age. This question provided a list of commonly used campaign methods. Participants were asked to indicate which methods they used.
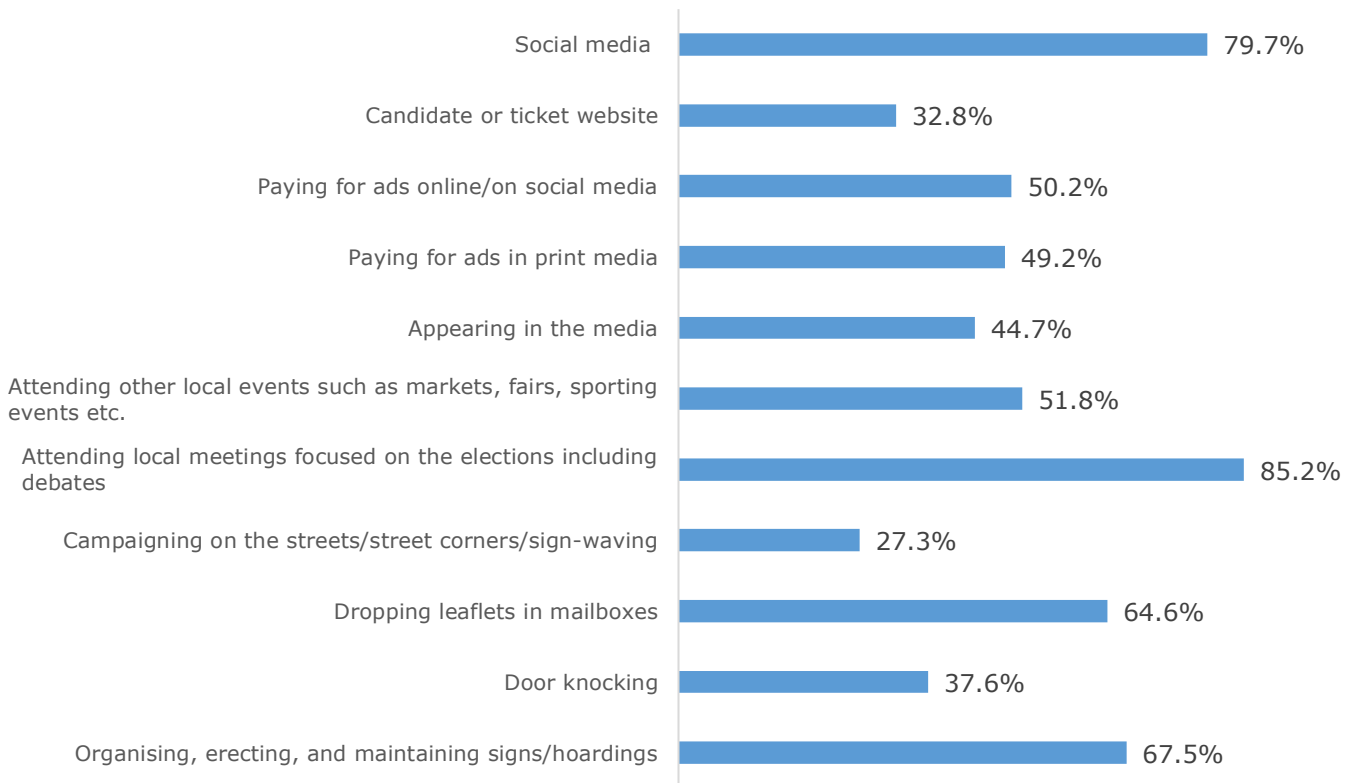


*Figure 8. Campaign methods used by survey participants.*

While attending local meetings was the top selected method at 85.2%, campaigning through social media came a close second at 79.7%, ahead of signs and hoardings (67.5%).

### Which Social Media Platforms did you use to Campaign?

We were curious as to which social media platforms that candidates campaigned on. Those who had selected 'social media' in the previous question (79.7% of the sample), were asked which social media platforms that they used for the campaign.
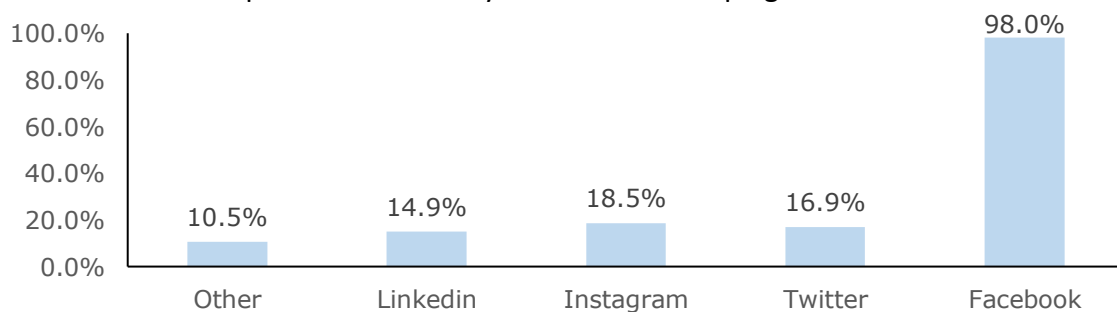


*Figure 8. Social media platforms used by participants.*

The vast majority of candidates used Facebook to campaign (98%), with less than 20% using each of the other platforms. A number of participants also selected 'other' and specified platforms; the main answer under 'other' was Neighbourly or people specifying that they had a website.

## Barriers to Campaigning

Past research has identified many barriers to campaigning. Participants were presented with a list of potential barriers and were asked whether they were barriers for them, with a view to seeking changes that would make it easier for future candidates. Participants could select multiple barriers.
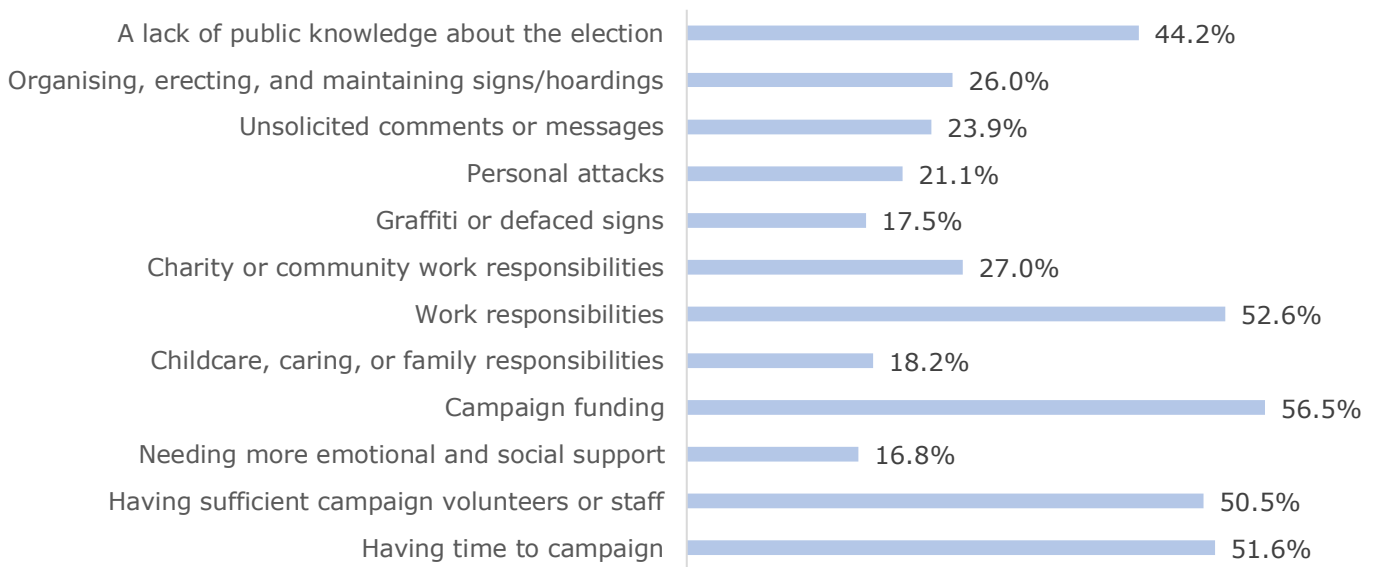


| | |
|---|---|
| A lack of public knowledge about the election | 44.2% |
| Organising, erecting, and maintaining signs/hoardings | 26.0% |
| Unsolicited comments or messages | 23.9% |
| Personal attacks | 21.1% |
| Graffiti or defaced signs | 17.5% |
| Charity or community work responsibilities | 27.0% |
| Work responsibilities | 52.6% |
| Childcare, caring, or family responsibilities | 18.2% |
| Campaign funding | 56.5% |
| Needing more emotional and social support | 16.8% |
| Having sufficient campaign volunteers or staff | 50.5% |
| Having time to campaign | 51.6% |

*Figure 9. Barriers to campaigning selected by participants.*

Four barriers were selected by more than half of participants. The most common was campaign funding (56.5%), followed by work responsibilities (52.6%). Related to this, having the time to campaign was selected by 51.6% of participants, and 'having sufficient campaign volunteers and staff' by 50.5%

More people found that unsolicited comments or messages (23.9%) or personal attacks (21.1%) were a barrier than the, perhaps more traditional, defacing of signs (17.5%).The other least selected items overall were caring responsibilities (18.2%) and needing more social or emotional support (16.8%).

## Increasing Voter Turnout

Low voter turnout in local government is acknowledged in academic research and the media as of significant concern. Of the sample, 44.2% identified a lack of public knowledge about the election as an issue during their campaign. Candidates were asked what should be done to improve it. Participants were presented with a list of possible solutions and asked to select as many options as they wished.
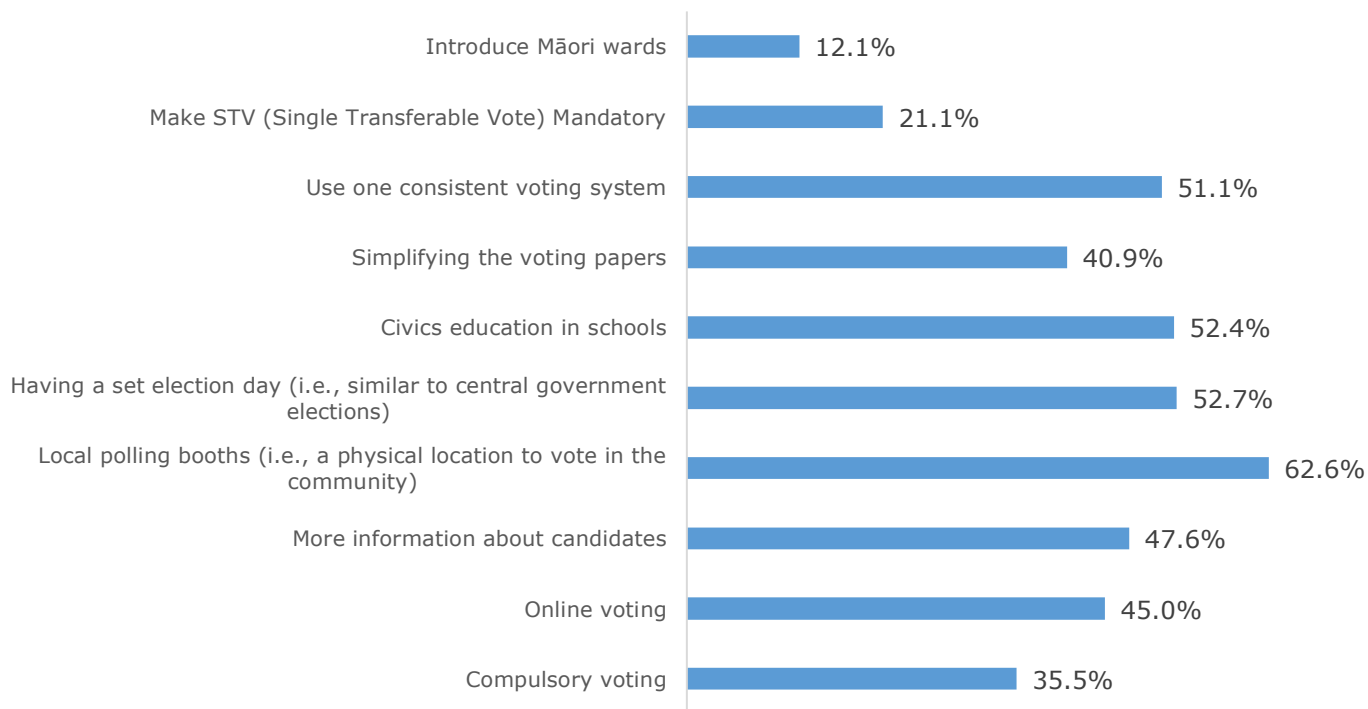
*Figure 10. Participant agreement with possible solutions to address low voter turnout.*

Participants saw value in all the options presented. The most popular option was to implement local polling booths which was selected by 62.6% of participants.

Three other options were selected by more than half of the participants. They were: (1) having a set election day like general elections (52.7%), (2) implementing civics education in schools (52.4%), and (3) using one consistent voting system (51.1%).

The least popular options for increasing voter turnout were implementing Māori wards (12.1%) and making STV mandatory (21.1%).

# Demographics

Finally, we asked a range of demographic questions in order to be able to see who responded to our survey. We plan to break down a lot of the questions by these demographics in future analyses.
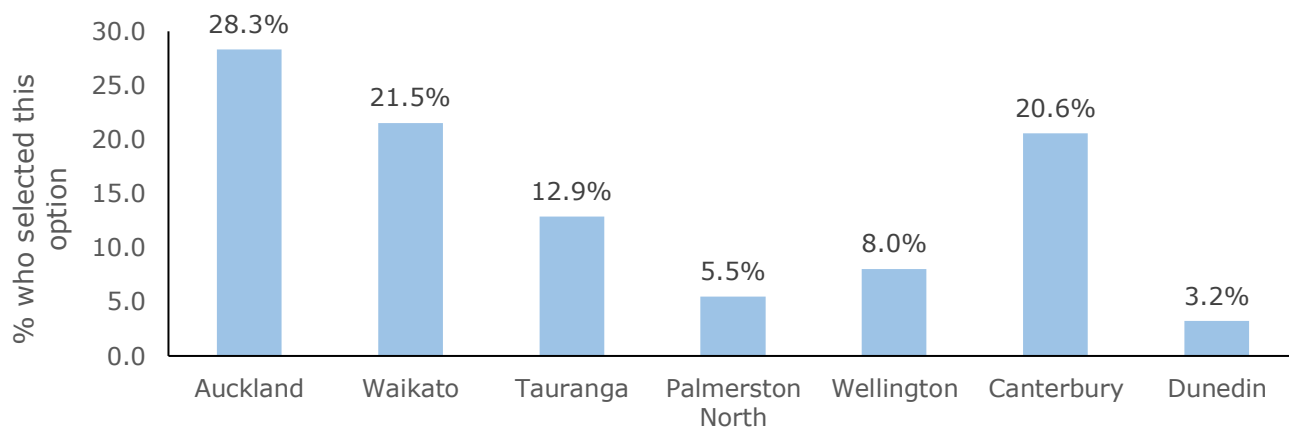
## *Region*



*Figure 11. Region where participants stood.*

Just under half (49.7%) of participants come from New Zealand's three largest population centres: Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington. More than two-fifths of respondents were from Waikato and Canterbury.
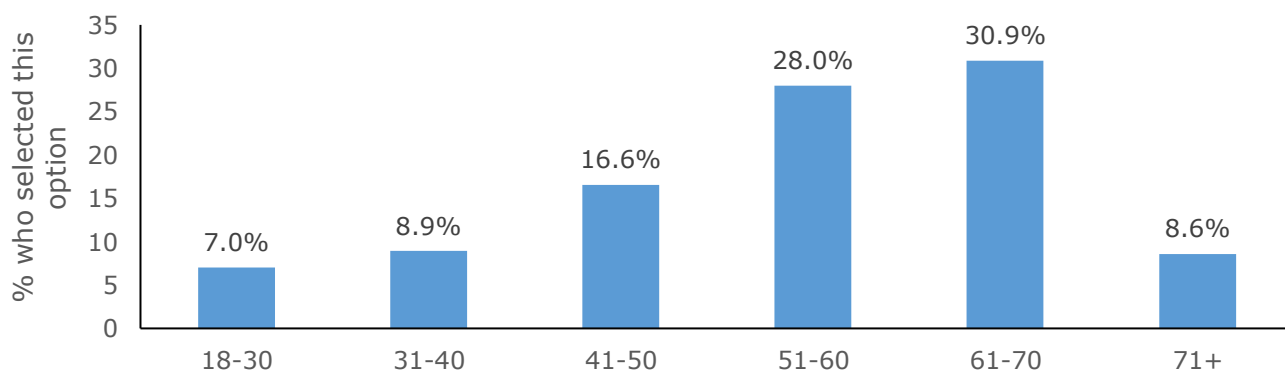
## *Age Group*



*Figure 12. Age of survey participants.*

As shown on the graph, more than two thirds of the participants are over 50 years of age.

## *Gender and Family*

We asked the participants to indicate their gender: 43.1% (177) were women; 56.5% (177) were men; one person identified with a "gender diverse" term, and 15 did not answer.

Almost a quarter (24%) of participants indicated that they had children under age 18.

## Ethnicity and Country of Birth

Participants were asked their ethnicity as per the standard Census question (participants could identify with more than one ethnicity).

The results were: 8.8% (29) identified as Māori; 85.1% (279) identified as New Zealand European or similar; 4.0% (13) identified with an Asian ethnicity; 3.0% with a Pacific ethnicity (10); 4.3% (14) with a European or British ethnicity, and 2.4% (8) with some other ethnicity e.g. Middle Eastern.

We asked participants for their country of birth. The majority (81.5%) were born in New Zealand, followed by 9.9% who were born in the United Kingdom, 3.0% in North America, 2.5% in Asia, 1.9% in Africa or the Middle East, and 1.0% in Australia.

## Education and Employment

We asked candidates about their education and employment. Almost three quarters of the respondents had a university qualification.

The percentages were as follows: 3.2% had no formal qualification; 6.4% had not finished secondary schooling; 7.6% had finished secondary school and not gone further; 8.3% had a trade or professional certification; 14% had a diploma; 21% had an undergraduate degree; and 39.5% had postgraduate degree.

More than half the respondents were employed. Most candidates (57.0%) were employed full-time before the election, 26.6% were employed part-time, 1% were unemployed, 1.3% were out of the paid workforce due to an illness or disability, 3.2% were students, 1.6% were looking after the home, and 9.4% were retired.