Postal Voting and Voter Turnout in Local Elections: Lessons from New Zealand and Australia

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ABSTRACT The relationship between postal voting and voter turnout in local elections needs to be investigated in the context of whether postal voting helps increase voter turnout in the twenty-first century local elections. This assists to uplift the discourse about New Zealand and Australia local elections and voter turnout. This article explores the history of the postal voting method by looking into these two countries and analysing the method of political participation at the local level. It argues that postal voting no longer increases or decreases voter turnout in these countries.

KEYWORDS: • postal voting • voter turnout • local elections • participation • New Zealand

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1 Introduction

Postal voting is a method in which ballot papers are distributed to electors and returned by post. It allows voters to vote from home, which reduces the cost of voting (see page 15) for both voters and government (House of Commons, 2004) However, the postal voting method is not a novelty; it has been established since the end of the nineteenth century when it was used for voters who were not able to get to the polling booths for particular reasons such as distance, military service or illness (Qvortrup, 2008) For example, in South Australia, it was used for people who had problems with voting in 1890.[1] At present, democratic countries such as the USA, the United Kingdom and New Zealand have adopted postal voting as one way of addressing the problem of low voter turnout, particularly at the local level.[2] In New Zealand, when postal voting is used at the local level, it is usually the only voting method offered to voters. Scholars such as Kiss see postal voting as a negative element within the political system. Kiss sees in postal voting a system that contradicts her belief in the principle of 'active citizenship'. She does not give an alternative to postal voting and supports the traditional system along with compulsory voting (Kiss, 2003a).

In New Zealand, postal voting was introduced in the twentieth century. Initially, it was meant to help those voters who had no access to a polling booth. In 1992, most city councils in New Zealand started to use postal voting, which increased voter turnout in all the cities that used it. However, the postal voting system no longer strongly influences New Zealand local voter turnout: data show that in the last three local elections (1998, 2001, and 2004), voter turnout did not increase under postal voting. However, although postal voting no longer increases voter turnout, it does significantly slow the decline in voter turnout in New Zealand local elections.[3] In Australia, postal voting was part of restructuring and reforming the local government system. Universal postal voting is used at the local level in Australia. In some states, it is used as an option under both compulsory and voluntary voting.[4] Postal voting was established at the local government level in Australia in the 1990s. However, postal voting in Australia has also had the same effect as that in New Zealand (Kiss, 2003b).

This article will assess the value of postal voting in Australia, and particularly in New Zealand local government elections in terms of voter turnout. First, the article will discuss the history of postal voting elections in countries such as the United Kingdom and the USA. In particular, the article will look at the Australian case in order to compare it with New Zealand postal voting. The voter turnout figures in New Zealand and Australia will show that postal voting does not have the same effect as it used to have in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s. Second, based on the 'novelty effect' of postal voting, in which voters enjoy a new system, but gradually use it less, the article will finally raise the question about e-

voting that can be seen as a replacement for postal voting in the twenty-first century (Trechsel, 2005).

2   Postal Voting - An Historical Perspective

Voting by mail emerged from the need to provide options for those people who had legitimate reasons for not going to the polling booth. In the United Kingdom, postal voting began after World War I. The 1918 Representation of the People Act allowed soldiers who were overseas or unable to vote in person for any "reason of the nature of their occupation" to vote by post for the general elections only.[10] Subsequently, there were two other Acts, the Representation of the People Act 1945 and the Representation of the People Act 1948. The latter was extended to people who had to travel via sea or air to vote. Over the years, the last Act has been reviewed, and in 2001, it was extended to cover everyone. "it is now no longer necessary to state a reason for applying for an absent vote or to obtain attestation of illness, etc from a medical practitioner or employer" (White, 2010: 1). Subsequently, there were two other Acts, the Representation of the People Act 1945 and the Representation of the People Act 1948. The latter was extended to people who had to travel via sea or air to vote. Over the years, the last Act has been reviewed, and in 2001, it was extended to cover everyone. "it is now no longer necessary to state a reason for applying for an absent vote or to obtain attestation of illness, etc from a medical practitioner or employer" (White, 2010: 2). If a voter wants to vote by post, he/she has to apply to vote by post, and they have to be registered. In addition, a voter can choose in which elections he/she wants to use postal voting, (i.e., parliamentary or local elections).

In 2003, postal voting was used in the United Kingdom local elections as an option, and there was a significant increase in voter turnout.[5] The average voter turnout for those local elections with no postal voting was 34% as compared to 49% for the local councils that used postal voting: a difference of 15% (Houe of Commons, 2004: 15). Moreover, the MORI research examined the use of postal voting in the United Kingdom and people's attitude towards it. This survey was conducted between 2 May and 11 May 2003. There were 1500 adult participants (18+). When asked "which voting method would encourage people to vote," thirty-one percent of respondents mentioned postal voting. This was the highest percentage of all the voting methods presented in the survey (House of Commons, 2004: 10).

In the USA, postal voting has been used since the 1980s, beginning with Oregon at the local level in 1981. Eventually, in the 1990s, it was used in other elections in Oregon. The Oregon case is a good example of the system at both national and local levels (Hamilton, 1988). By the mid 1990s, Oregon had started to use postal voting for general elections for the vacant senate seat, and for presidential and local elections. According to Southwell and Burchett, the use of postal voting in

Oregon has improved voter participation. They gathered data from 48 statewide candidate elections, but examined only three of them: the December 1995 Senate primary election, the January 1996 Senate general election, and the April 1996 presidential primary election. They found voter turnout increased by 10% under postal voting (Southwell & Burchett, 2000).

Recently, an interesting survey examined the reaction of individuals to postal voting and the polling booth in Oregon (Southwell, 2004). Data were from the Oregon Annual Indicators Survey with 1,037 individuals interviewed by telephone between December 2002 and January 2003.[6] The study focused on whether voters vote more under postal voting. There were a few variables such as age, gender, income, preference of election type, education, etc.[7] The majority of individuals indicated that the level of participation remained the same under postal voting as it used to be under the polling booth system. However, 30% indicated they had voted since the adoption of postal voting. Southwell states that

> a majority of all subcategories favour vote by mail over more traditional polling place voting… the groups that reported that they vote more often under vote by mail are simply a set of individuals – women, young people, the disabled, and homemakers who have found it more convenient to vote under a system that does not require them to be physically present on the first Tuesday after the first Monday (Southwell, 2004: 92).

The Oregon case shows that postal voting has benefits in terms of cost, higher voter turnout in local elections, and greater convenience to voters (Banducci & Karp, 2000: 228, 235). According to Karp and Banducci who compared turnout by postal voting with polling booth, the differences are between 2 and 13% depending on the election level (Banducci & Karp, 2000). They have found that postal voting has the greatest impact at the local level, particularly among those people who already tend to vote. A significant impact can also be found in Australian and New Zealand local elections.

2   Australian Voter Turnout under Postal Voting

Australian States have also adopted postal voting as an alternative to the traditional system in some places. In Victoria, it was introduced in 1900. In Queensland, postal voting was introduced as an option in 1905 (Wright, 1980). In Western Australia, postal voting became an option after the Western Australia Electoral Act had been adopted in 1904 (Sawer, 2001). In New South Wales, it was introduced as an option in 1918. Apart from reasons of distance and sickness, postal voting in Australia was good for religious people. Before establishing postal voting, the first federal election in 1901 was held on Saturday when most people used to work a half day. This only applied in two states: South Australia and

Queensland. The other states had the election on Friday. However, the legislative provision for Saturday was an issue for Jews who observed the Sabbath on Saturdays.[8] One solution for Jewish people was "in the 1912 NSW Elections Act where quite elaborate provisions were made whereby a Jewish elector could have a returning officer cast his vote for him in the presence of the poll clerk and scrutineers" (Sawer, 2001: 13). Religion was one of the reasons for continuing to use postal voting in Australia.

Further consequences of postal voting in Australia emerged in the 1960s with the introduction of legislation allowing indigenous people to enrol to vote at federal elections. However, postal voting was not the best method for indigenous people who may have had problems filling in the voting paper due to low literacy levels (Sanders, 2001). This circumstance raised ethical issues when third parties took advantage of those who did not know how to read the voting paper. This led to the idea of mobile polling booths, which was a better solution for indigenous people. Mobile polling booths would go around indigenous communities and collect votes a week or two before election day. More Aboriginal people then started to participate. The government saw mobile polling as a successful method and continued with it. Mobile polling also contributed to voter education, especially in the indigenous population. More Aboriginal people could take responsibility for their voting and become independent (Sanders, 2001: 168).

In Tasmania, local elections are conducted entirely by postal voting. In Victoria, postal voting is an option, but voting is compulsory for residents, non-compulsory for non-residents. However, property owners are legitimately entitled to vote even if they are not residents. For example, in 1997, the Mayor of Melbourne City "was elected by his technique of receiving votes of Chinese citizens living in Hong Kong, but owning a property in Melbourne" (Kiss, 2003: 12). In Western Australia, there is an option of postal voting, but only a minority use it. In Queensland, postal voting is also an option, and only specific areas use it by requirement. New South Wales does not use postal voting (Russell, 2005).

Table 1:   Voting Method in Australia

| State	Voting	Voting Method
New South Wales	Compulsory for residents Non-compulsory for non-residents	Attendance
Victoria	Compulsory for residents Non-compulsory for non-residents	Attendance/Postal
Queensland	Compulsory	Attendance/Postal
South Australia	Non-compulsory	Attendance/Postal
West Australia	Non-compulsory	Attendance/Postal
Tasmania	Non-compulsory	Postal

Source: Australian Parlimentary Library 1996 (Newman, 2001)

As Table 1 shows, postal voting is not used in New South Wales. In Victoria, it is optional; however, 80% of the councils use postal voting (Kiss, 2003b). The variety in Australian local government produces a good comparative case with New Zealand local government that has had postal voting since 1992. I shall focus on three states in this section. Two of them (South Australia and West Australia) have postal voting as an option, while Tasmania uses postal voting only. All three of them have voluntary voting (Kiss, 2003b).

South Australia

Postal voting has been used in South Australia since 1999. Before this, it was attendance voting, and the initial increase in voter turnout was significant. In the 1989 local election, turnout was around 21%. After the introduction of postal voting, turnout was 40.1% in the 2000 local election. In 2003, voter turnout dropped to 32.7 % (Russell, 2004). The figure below shows the fluctuation in voter turnout in South Australian local government elections between 1983 and 2003:

Figure 1:   Voter Turnout in South Australia Local Government
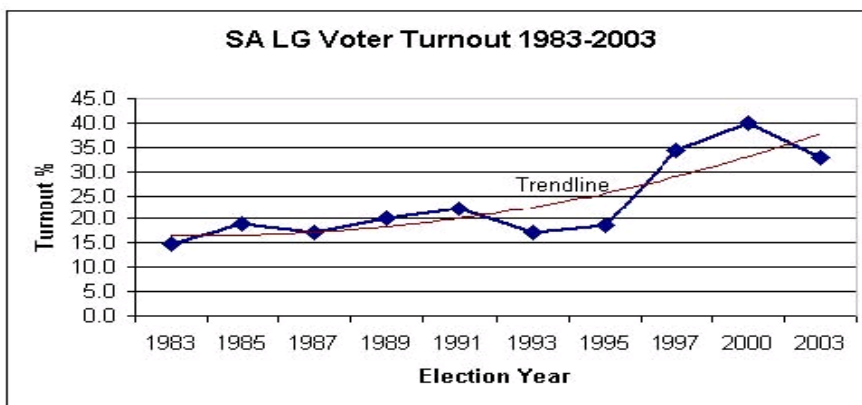
Source: Local Government Association in South Australia, 2003.

Western Australia

In Western Australia, there is an option of attendance or postal voting. Before postal voting, the average turnout was around 15%, while after the introduction of postal voting in 1995 there was an increase: the average turnout was 36% in 2001. The table below shows the average voter turnout before and after postal voting:

Table 2: Voter Turnout in Western Australian Local Government Elections 1993-2005

1993	1995	1997	2001	2003	2005
14.1%	15.8%	25%	37.998%	35%	37.34%
Attendance	Attendance	Postal Vote	Postal Vote	Postal Vote	Postal Vote

Source: Western Australian Electoral Commission, 2005.

Tasmania

The last state that I will discuss is Tasmania where figures are different. Tasmania has the highest voter turnout with voluntary voting in Australian local government elections. The Tasmanian local government introduced postal voting in 1994. Before the introduction of postal voting, voter turnout had fluctuated between 25 and 30%. There were significant changes in 1999, 2000, and 2003:

Table 3: Tasmania Local Government Elections 1999-2003

Local election	Voter turnout
1992	25%
1994	55%
1996	59.5%
1999	55%
2000	57.78%
2003	57.48%

Cource: Tasmania Electoral Commission, 2005.

Despite the changes in the figures, there is a tendency for turnout to become stabilised at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Since then, there have been no significant changes under postal voting elections in Tasmania. Some scholars, such as Kiss, are more concerned about the principle of democracy than turnout figures (Kiss, 2001). Part of democracy is the right to vote; one voter with one vote. Kiss explains that the voter has to vote physically. However, under postal voting, voters miss out on the interaction with other voters, politicians and electoral officers. As Kiss argues:

> In a democratic electoral system, based on the principles of universal adult suffrage and one person, one vote, there may be a case for the use of postal voting. I do not accept this case, mainly because of my belief in the importance of active citizenship and the need to maintain meaningful political rituals as part of the vital set of linkages between local governments, elected representatives and the people in a municipality (Kiss, 2001: 8).

In New Zealand local government, postal voting is also used. In fact, New Zealand postal voting coincided with the Australian introduction of postal voting. There were similar reasons for introducing postal voting; namely, a long distance, and soldiers who were overseas in World War One.

3   New Zealand Voter Turnout under Postal Voting

After passing the 1893 Electoral Act that allowed women to vote, the idea of postal voting was raised. Thus, women did not need to travel long distances. There were two opinions on postal voting in parliament. The opposition advocated the idea of postal voting as opposed to the Liberal government that did not favour it. The opposition saw postal voting as "an important means of safeguarding conservative interests by ensuring isolated rural women were not disadvantaged compared to their urban sisters" (Atkinson, 2003: 91). On the other hand, the Liberal government had some doubts about the secrecy of the ballot under postal voting.

At the end of WWI, the Electoral Rights Amendment Act 1919 allowed all those soldiers who were in camps or hospitals to vote in a regular way and not by postal vote. However, postal voting became available at the 1928 national elections for specific groups such as soldiers, people with disabilities, and those with illness. In the 1928 national election, there were 8,757 postal voting papers, and 7,977 votes were cast by postal voting (Atkinson, 2003: 135).[9] From then on, postal voting became an option in New Zealand national elections for specific groups who could not physically go to the polling booth. Later on, in many councils, postal voting was the only alternative offered to voters at the local level. To use the US terminology, many New Zealand local elections adopted an "all-mail" voting system.

The process of postal voting at the local level began in a few councils. In the Local Elections and Polls (Experimental Procedures) Order 1962, Part 3 lays down an 'additional provision where polls are taken by postal vote' at the local level. It says; "Poll means a poll taken by postal vote by the Returning Officer for the Franklin County Council or the Mackenzie County Council, as the case may be, pursuant to clause 3 of this order".[10] This was the beginning of the experience of postal voting at the local level, which has since been adopted in other city councils in New Zealand.

A decade after the 1962 elections, the government decided to amend the Order via the Local Elections and Polls Amendment Act 1974 (No 10):

> The Governor General may at any time, by Order in Council made on the advice of the Minister given at the request of a local authority (other than a county council), authorise the Returning Officer at any

specified election or poll to be held under this Act in the district of that local authority to conduct that election or poll by postal vote.[11]

Later, the Local Elections and Polls Act 1976 gave the opportunity to every council to use postal voting. Nevertheless, not many authorities used it at this stage. The Act (1976, No 144) states:

> Any local authority may, by resolution, determine that any specified election for a member or members of that local authority or any poll on any issue to be taken by that local authority shall be conducted by postal vote, and the Returning Officer shall conduct that election or poll by postal vote accordingly.[12]

However, since more local authorities in New Zealand have used postal voting, there were significant improvements in voter turnout. In the 1974 local elections, in counties that used postal voting, voter turnout averaged 70%, while counties which did not use postal voting had an average turnout of around 50% (Bush, 1976). Furthermore, the 1983 local election showed the impact of postal voting. Eight borough councils increased their voter turnout compared with the previous local election in 1980. The following table shows the difference between the 1980 and 1983 local elections in the eight borough councils:

Table 4: Voter Turnout in Bourough Council Elections between 1980 and 1983

| Borough	1980 (polling booth)	1983 (postal voting)
Alexandra	65%	72%
Ashburton	49%	80%
Eltham	64%	68%
Howick	47%	65%
Mount Eden	33%	50%
Pukekohe	34%	66%
Waitara	34%	68%
Westport	42%	87%

Source: Local Authority Elections Statistics, 1980, 1983.

With no exception, all the borough councils that used postal voting in the 1983 local election showed a significant increase in voter turnout of between 4 and 45%. Subsequently, other cities also decided to opt for postal voting. For example, Auckland, Christchurch, Hamilton, and Waitemata changed their method in the 1986 local elections (New Zealand Local Government Magazine, 1986). In the 1989 election, postal voting was mandatory for all local councils. However, in the next election (1992), councils were given the option of postal voting once more.[13] Most local authorities chose postal voting, except for the Lower Hutt City Council

that decided to retain the old method. This was the only council that did not use postal voting, with only 26% voter turnout compared with the others, which used postal voting, with an average of 50%.

For example, Wellington City Council is one of the councils in which postal voting influenced voter participation. Between 1983 and 2004, the Wellington City Council used postal voting six times. In the first two elections, a ballot box was used. While in the other elections, postal voting was used. The following figures show the voter turnout in Wellington City Council elections both before and after postal voting.

**Figure 2:** Voter Turnout in Wellington between 1983 and 2004
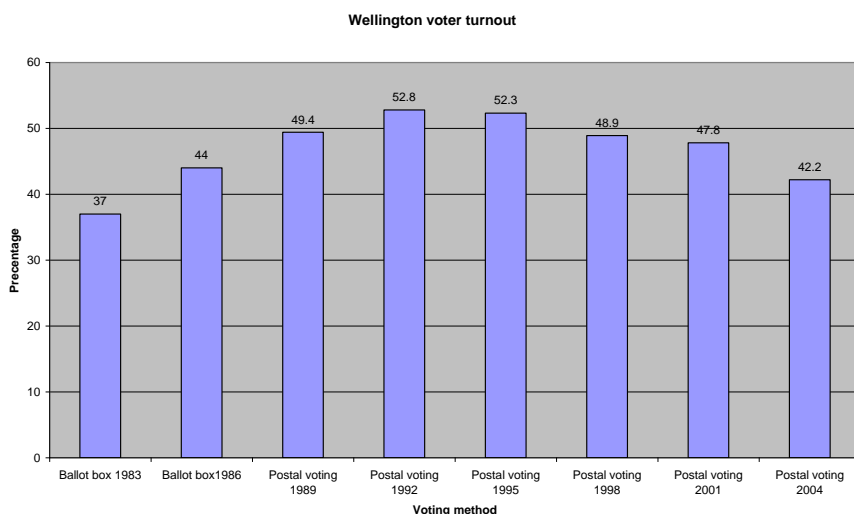
Source: Wellington City Council Reports, Strategy and Policy Committee, 2005.

The figures for Wellington City Council show that postal voting increased voter turnout. However, we can also see that in the 2004 local elections, voter turnout decreased to a level between that of 1983 and 1986. Perhaps this can be explained by Qvortrup who called it the 'novelty factor': voters are more likely to vote when trying something new (Qvortrup, 2005). After voters have tried postal voting a few times, they are not interested anymore.

After the 1992 local elections, there was no significant increase in voter turnout. The following table shows the four local authority elections between 1989 and 1998:

Figure 3: Overall Voter Turnout in New Zealand Local Authority elections between 1989 and 1998
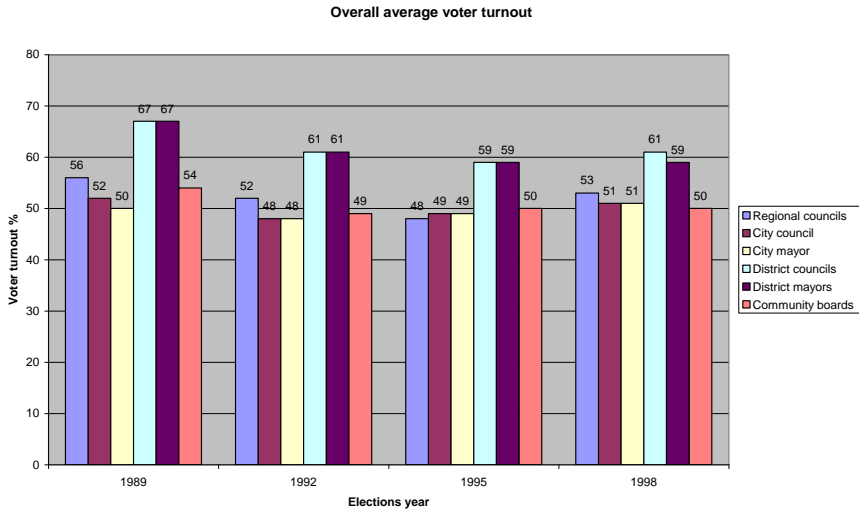
Source: Local Election Statistics, 1998.

The overall average voter turnout shows that the figures have not changed significantly after postal voting has been used for the second or third time. The most significant outcomes were in the 1980s when authorities started to use postal voting, for example, Wellington City Council where turnout rose from 37% in 1983 to 52% in the 1990s.

Another significant aspect of postal voting is the cost of conducting the system. The classic   attendance system employs more staff members than with postal voting. In the 1986 local elections, only 400 staff members were required in Auckland City Council under postal voting. Conversely, if the local government had had to use the classic method, they would have had to employ 1700 staff members (New Zealand Local Government Magazine, 1986). In a different case in New Zealand, a national referendum on compulsory retirement savings showed that the postal ballot saved a huge amount of money: "a referendum on compulsory retirement saving held entirely by mail in September of 1997 marked the country's first use of a national postal ballot and saved an estimated $US3.6 million" (Banducci & Karp, 2000: 224).

Nevertheless, postal voting also has disadvantages. First, under postal voting, voters do not have the experience of going to the polling booth, waiting in the queue, and having discussions with other voters, factors which promote enthusiasm, energy, consequentiality, and encouragement to participate in

elections.[14] Physically going to the booth develops civic education and citizens' participation (Qvortrup, 2005). Voters can physically see they have something in common with other voters who go to the polling booth. Second, by allowing voters to vote early, there is a chance they will want to change their opinion during the campaign, while gaining further knowledge about the candidates, but it may be too late. Switzerland is a good case of what can happen when voting papers are sent out between three and four weeks before election day. In the early 1990s, most cantons in the country used postal voting, and residents in most of the cantons received the voting papers between three and four weeks before the elections.[15] This procedure militated against these residents following the whole campaign and allowed them to vote before the campaign finished. The residents missed information about the elections and they could not change their preferences (Geser, 2002). This made some voters less keen to vote next time, although some of them waited until the end of the campaign. Third, there is evidence that increasing voter turnout with postal voting applies only to those people who have tertiary education and high socio-economic status (Geser, 2002). For example, a survey conducted in Oregon shows that "while turnout generally goes up as a result of the introduction of all-postal voting, this generally favours the better educated, richer, and white citizens" (Qvortrup, 2005: 417).

Fourth, fraud can occur in postal voting, although it can also happen at the polling booth. For instance, the increase of fraud in postal voting has increased; "the number of investigations into postal vote fraud in the UK has reached 25 in 19 constituencies. In the city of Bradford alone, 252 allegations of fraud have been made".[16] Fifth, the lack of assistance while filling in the voting paper: a voter does not have help if he/she needs to ask questions regarding the elections. This can put off the voter, and it can also be abused by a third party who could take advantage of the voter as in the Australian case.

Finally, the Maori population had problems with postal voting, according to the report of Te Runanga O Kirikiriroa based on the 2001 Hamilton City Council election. They summarise their findings about Maori and postal voting as follows:

> Maori are unlikely to voluntarily update their enrolment details;
> Maori are unlikely to feel connected to their current community or neighbourhood;
> Maori are unlikely to know the candidates;
> Maori are unlikely to understand the postal process (Hamilton City Council, 2002).

The Te Runanga O Kirikiriroa report concluded that Maori in Hamilton City Council did not understand the voting process and did not believe their vote would make any difference. In terms of the Maori population in the 2001 Hamilton City Council election, there were 21, 357 eligible to vote out of the total Maori

population of 114, 921, but only 40% actually participated (Hamilton City Council, 2002). In this report, there is a lack of information amongst Maori. In this case, postal voting can be advantageous only if the Maori community is interested in becoming more involved in local elections, and if the government encourages the Maori community to participate.

The report of the Justice and Electoral Committee to the House of Representatives indicates ambiguity towards postal voting from the submitters' perspective.[17] On the one hand, it shows that postal voting is a better method than others, and that there is support for retaining the method for the next election. But on the other hand, submitters to the inquiry into the 2004 local authority elections were concerned about the integrity of postal voting. Some submitters argued for a return to the booth voting method due to the integrity and the security of the votes. However, the Justice and Electoral Committee recommended to the government that:

> a clear statement be included on the voting document advising that it is an offence under sections 123 and 124 of the Act to complete another person's voting document, or to interfere with or fraudulently mark, deface or destroy a voting document;
> further work be done to ensure integrity relating to the collection of voting documents;
> options for alternative polling day facilities be explored (for example, polling booths in supermarkets) (Wellington: 14-15).

Additionally, the Justice and Electoral Committee is aware of the importance of encouraging voter turnout:

> the Government should fund a single electoral agency to be responsible for improving voter turnout and awareness in general and local elections. The Ministry of Education should be encouraged to strengthen the place of citizenship education in the curriculum and to make more teaching resources available for this purpose (Wellington: 6).

If implemented, the recommendation of the Justice and Electoral Committee to establish polling booths in supermarkets will encourage potential voters to vote. Moreover, the combination of information delivery and convenient access will boost voter turnout.

A survey that was conducted by the Otago Public Opinion Research Centre on the 2004 Dunedin Mayoral election elicited interesting responses from participants (Harris, Rudd & Parackal, 2005). Out of 224 participants, only twenty responded with regard to the postal voting method and eleven of those were unhappy with

postal voting. Nine commented on the time the papers were sent out at. The respondents' answers can be divided into two categories: first, those who were not happy with postal voting due to the security of the votes and the fraudulent papers, and second, those who felt postal voting discourages people from voting. This survey represents only a small cross section of opinions about the postal voting, but it still shows public attitudes towards this system. One of the options for replacing or complementing postal voting is electronic voting, which has been trialled in some countries such as Switzerland and Estonia. However,

> new e-voting technologies are not a panacea for the democratic process. They are positive novelties, but they are not a panacea. Either in these essays or in other previous experience in Spain (University of Barcelona) or in other countries (LGA, United Kingdom), turnout is the main challenge that e-voting, above all remote one, has to face. Therefore, the e-vote cannot be the only magical solution to overcome democratic problems like current abstention (Esteve & Vilamala, 2003: 9).

Conclusion

Postal voting assists voters who cannot reach the polling booths. This idea has provided an answer to the international problem of low voter turnout, particularly in local elections. All cases in Australasia show that until the beginning of the 1990s, the postal voting option dramatically increased voter turnout at this level. Nevertheless, South Australia and West Australia have had the option of postal voting along with polling booths, but still the turnout has declined after an initial increase. Tasmania is the only State that changed to postal voting only. However, voter turnout has either decreased or remained the same in both New Zealand and Australia over the last few years. At present, postal voting does not increase voter turnout as much as it used to.

Factors such as age and education still play a role, although some argue that in the e-voting era, these factors will be diminished. Whether a voter votes via the Internet or in the polling booth, he/she needs information about the election in order to decide how to vote. The information factor is one of the major factors to look at with other factors, such as electoral systems, when analysing low voter turnout (Fisher, Hobolt & Curtice, 2008). As more people have access to the Internet and older people begin to use it, the information factor will be valuable.

E-voting is still new and relatively unexplored in the context of local elections in New Zealand and Australia. So far, most of the research has revealed little impact on voter turnout compared with postal voting, which was shown to affect the turnout during the elections in Lower Hutt City in 1992. To implement e-voting, New Zealand local government will have to take into account social problems,

such as poverty, access of people with low socioeconomic status to the Internet, training for Internet use, and Internet security issues. As technology advances, electronic voting has been suggested as a solution to the common problem of low voter turnout. Furthermore, e-voting shares disadvantages with the postal voting system, particularly with regard to security.

Notes

[1] This was for people who were more than three miles from the polling booths, and for women who suffered from illness or health problems (Simms, 2001).

[2] There are not many cases of postal voting at local elections. Some of the countries that use postal voting in local elections are: Australia (Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania), New Zealand, (all local authorities), England (where 39 local authorities used postal voting in May 2003) (Qvortrup, 2005) Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. (For the last three countries see Dubrovnik, T. & Toplak, J. (2010) *Postal Voting: More Convenient, but Less Secret Elections* (Maribor: Faculty of Law, University of Maribor).

[3] Note that the author is aware of other factors that may influence voter turnout over the years. However, because of the huge difference in voter turnout in New Zealand local elections before and after postal voting, which in some places was 50 percent and based on other countries that showed the impact of postal voting, it can be estimated that the postal voting system made a significant contribution to voter turnout in New Zealand local elections. My statistics are based on New Zealand Local Government, Internal Affairs and Local Authority Election Statistics.

[4] Postal voting is available both nationally and locally where there is compulsory voting for various categories of voters including those who will be away or not able to get to the poll.

[5] The option to vote by mail can be used by any potential voter in the UK. Postal voting is an option in all elections.

[6] Although there were 1,037 participants in this specific study, only 695 of them were registered voters.

[7] See (Southwell, 2004) p. 91 for the table: Coding of Variables for Analysis.

[8] Polling booths opened until 8pm for Jewish people as the Sabbath ended before 8pm.

[9] Maori people were not included in postal voting in this particular election.

[10] Local Elections and Polls (Experimental Procedures) Order 1962, Amendment No 1: S.R. 1962/59.

[11] Local Elections and Polls Amendment 1974.

[12] *Local Elections and Polls Act 1976*, 144, Elections and Polls by Postal Vote (14 December 1976).

[13] Local authorities still presently have the choice to use postal voting. All local authorities used postal voting in the 2004 and 2007 elections.

[14] In New Zealand and other countries, voters get their voting paper three weeks before election day.

[15] A canton is an administrative district in Switzerland or France.

[16] Postal voting blog, "Government's postal vote proposals fall well short of the mark" (2005) available at: http://postalvoting.blogspot.com/.

[17] The Justice and Electoral Committee, "Inquiry into the 2004 Local Authority Elections," The Justice and Electoral Committee, http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/Content/Select CommitteeReports/I7C%20for%20website.pdf. Committee members were: Tim Barnett (Chairperson), Lianne Dalziel , Russell Fairbrother, Stephen Franks, Dave Hereora, Dail Jones, Moana Mackey, Hon Clem Simich, Murray Smith, Nandor Tanczos and Dr Richard Worth.

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