



A Survival Guide to New Zealand’s Local Elections: For First Time Voters

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The New Zealand Local Body Elections. Full to the gills with local body politicians who nobody’s heard of, with their uniformed mediocrity, heinous graphic design, and shameless social climbing. Total snore-fest, some might say. Thing is, these local elections could affect your quality of life on a day-to-day level, so what’s the harm in giving a damn?

Besides, New Zealand’s mayoral hall of fame has some pretty notable faces. The world’s first openly transgender mayor, [Georgina Beyer](#), took office in 1995. Then there’s the country’s longest-running mayor Tim Shadbolt, the [weed-loving](#), [reality-TV star](#) who is hoping to smash a tenth mayoral term this year (two in the Waitemata and so far seven in Invercargill). In Christchurch, there’s activist John Minto—famous for leading the 1981 Springbok Tour Protests and stirring things up with various unions and the Mana Movement. And we’re all sad [“former racist” Andrew Judd decided](#) against running again in New Plymouth, especially after he brought to light some of New Zealand’s racist undertones and tried—unsuccessfully—to address Maori under-representation. Wellington’s a bit ho-hum, frankly, since bike-loving, green-wearing [Celia Wade-Brown](#) also decided against running again. And although the same could be said for Auckland and Len Brown (who could forget the [unfortunate sex saga concerning a certain Princess of Chaos](#)), bright young thing [Chlöe Swarbrick](#) is giving the old baby boomers a run for their money in her plight to get this young lot to vote.

It’s little surprise that rates and debt are plaguing the middle-aged home-owners across the country. But for their kids it’s the inevitability of never owning a home in all of the major cities, and pissing off indefinitely as a result—student loans-in-tow. Transport infrastructure, or lack thereof, is a major issue for all—whether it’s your Dunedites wanting even the slightest form of public transportation at all (seriously, there’s practically none), Aucklanders demanding more of everything because it’s currently all a big fat joke, and Wellingtonians [bickering](#) over what type of cycle lanes they should use. And although homelessness is a problem that’s affecting more and more people, for many hubs the issue has been fobbed off to the government.

For a lot of you, who’ve never mattered or bothered before, you’re now about to lose your voting virginity. So we’ve put together a rough guide to surviving the election.



Tim Shadbolt, Mayor of Invercargill, holds the record for New Zealand’s longest-serving mayor and he’s bothering to give it another shot. Image [via](#) Wikimedia Commons.

REGISTER TO VOTE, OTHERWISE THIS ARTICLE, AND IN FACT YOUR ENTIRE EXISTENCE IS REDUNDANT.

To the insufferable assholes who declare they’re too impartial to vote. We don’t believe it for a second. You’re a person who’s been conditioned to swing one way or another, whether you front up or not. Declare those biases. Go on.

Sure, if you’re fundamentally opposed to our version of democracy as it’s a cesspit of middle-aged white dudes who are influenced by lobbyists and who ultimately DGAF about you or the planet, I get it. But equally, if you decide against voting because you can’t be assed, sorry mate, in all of these scenarios you’ve forfeited your right to have an opinion on anything. Forever.

Enrolling is super easy. [You can do so online or via post](#). Basically, if you find yourself on an internet page with a weird orange dude blob thing, you’re in the right place.

But guys, as you’ve got to have your voting papers in by October 8, you’re cutting it fine on the enrolling front. Best bet is to ring your local council, or the electoral office, and go from there.

VOTING: YOU’VE GOT THIS

Suppose you’re not like every apathetic millennial who’d prefer to mull over Brangelina’s divorce in favour to, I don’t know, Syria or the New York bombings, you’ve got this. Unlike general elections, which require you to wake up from your hangover to walk about a kilometre to your local library/church/community hall/educational facility and liaise with cup-of-tea loving geriatrics who tell you exactly where your “secret” booth is and how you do it, local elections are done by post. The actual act requires the form that showed up in your mailbox and a pen of some kind. Lipstick will suffice.

You’ll have to decide your councillor for your ward, your mayor, your local board, and your district health board. Your ward is your place of residence or backyard. Your mayor is the big man/woman/they on campus. Your local board runs your ward, and your district health board is responsible for looking after the hospital peeps who might one day have to nurse you from alcohol poisoning. You’ll either have to decide which candidate you’d like, otherwise you’ll have to decide on a preferential scale who should be your district health board. If you CBF ranking the candidates from one to who cares, don’t be alarmed. Count from one to ten. Take a breather. Do your best. From there, use that freepost envelope and walk to your nearest post box so your said vote can go yonder into the abyss. Congratulations. Less effort than a one night stand.

Adam Holland of the Aotea Cannabis Party yells “Allahu Akbur” during a mayoral candidate debate at University of Auckland bar Shadows, in a screen grab from an AUSA video.

BUT WHO TO VOTE FOR?

Ah the age old question. You have this power little grasshopper so it’s a good idea to use it wisely. Get informed. Why not. There are plenty of useful resources, like I don’t know, the news. Sure, it may be boring and clickbait but the more you read, watch and listen to, the better you’ll be able to weigh up who’s trying to sell you their bullshit. It’s even become hip to be informed so you’ll find techy [advocacy groups](#) trying to spoon feed the most stubborn of us with online tools. The question of the importance of politics is akin to say, the meaning of your existence or where your next vodka soda is coming from. It is important. It does affect you. It is worth discussing with friends IRL.

What’s more, politics can also be salacious and absurd—whether it’s [throwing dildos at politicians](#), or those utterly wacky and hilarious flag submissions from the public for [last year’s flag referendum](#), for example. Just last week lower-ranked Auckland mayoral candidates [had a ho-down](#) at Auckland University. Candidates were seen assaulting each other to the side of the stage. Meanwhile, we can only assume candidate Adam Holland—of the Legalise Cannabis Party—was drunk AF when he grabbed the microphone and screamed “Vote for me...Vote for me...Ooooh I can feel a brawl!” and “Allahu Akbar”.

BEWARE OF PERSONALITY POLITICS

While Ms So-and-so might have a lovely derrière (ew gross)and her Mr Counterpart seems like a really nice guy, this is definitively the worst way to vote. It’s ridiculous to assume a person [might be too young](#), too old, too female, too black, and too poor to adequately represent you. Key signifiers such as “the facts speak for themselves”, “that’s an issue for central government”, “I’m not racist but”, “cycling/diversity [anything that is progressive] is bad for business”, or “I know what New Zealanders want” are all harmful terms that mightn’t mean anything, and in fact the opposite. Also, just because someone may say they’ve come from a single earning household living in state housing yet they’ve “made it” in later life, this model doesn’t apply to everyone. Anecdotal evidence isn’t evidence. It’s personality politics. Just because a politician features in a banger of a meme or they’re into the odd “selfie”, this means shit when you’re having to pay \$50 for an Uber ride because the city infrastructure is at full capacity.

What you’ve got to decipher is what each politician stands for and whether their policies align with your values. They might and probably won’t be the people your parents vote for (hell, you’ve got very different interests to those parasites we know as the baby boomers), but they’re there to represent you.

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