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Conservatives compared: New Zealand First, ACT and the Conservatives

Across the left–right dimension, New Zealand Election Study (NZES) respondents agree with most political analysts and commentators: from the left, the New Zealand party system runs from the MANA Party, the Greens and Labour, through the centre to the Māori Party, New Zealand First and United Future, and to the right through National, the Conservative Party and ACT. Party policies and the opinions of each group of voters are largely consistent with this ideological continuum in their positions on the role of the state, the role of the market and what to do about inequality.

Continuing our discussion from the previous chapter on the Green Party, and as discussed in earlier chapters, we also observe that there is a second dimension on which the parties can be aligned. This dimension runs from libertarianism to authoritarianism, and has become increasingly important when explaining voting behaviour in advanced post-industrial democracies over recent decades. As earlier chapters have argued, political arguments across the authoritarian–libertarian dimension may act as ‘wedge’ issues, moving attention away from left–right debates that highlight the various dimensions of inequality.

In this chapter, we focus on three broadly defined ‘conservative’ parties that were in contention for votes in the 2014 election, not just with other parties but among themselves: New Zealand First, ACT New Zealand

and the Conservative Party.¹ We expect preferences for these parties to be most strongly associated with the authoritarian–libertarian dimension, and with the potential to mobilise ‘wedge’ issues. On the other hand, their positions on the left–right dimension, and those of their voters, also need to be taken into account. New Zealand First, in particular, attracts more egalitarian voters than ACT or the Conservatives. If in a centre left–leaning government or supporting one, New Zealand First would be more likely than the two other conservative parties to agree to at least some policies to promote greater equality.

Gaining 8.7 per cent of the votes and 11 seats in parliament, New Zealand First has consistently been the most successful party in this group since its formation in 1993. The Conservative Party, established in 2011, and led and funded by property developer Colin Craig, received almost 4 per cent of the vote in 2014, up from 2.7 in 2011. Because the Conservative Party failed to gain the necessary 5 per cent of the party votes, it won no seats in parliament. While the ACT Party only received 0.7 per cent of the votes in the 2014 election, with the encouragement of the National Party it won the electorate seat of Epsom, thereby crossing the threshold for representation and ensuring its presence in parliament.

This chapter briefly outlines the histories of these parties, examines where voters position them and provides profiles of their voters. It pays particular attention to two key policy areas: abortion and immigration, two main issues on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension, while also continuing our inquiries into the salience of Treaty opinions and attitudes to inequality.

Histories and positions

International analysts tend to define New Zealand First as a ‘radical’ right populist party (Betz 2005). This is because New Zealand First tends to take socially and culturally conservative policy positions and advocates reduction of current levels of immigration into New Zealand. It is often argued that the party should be seen as more centrist than ‘radical’

1 The United Future Party led by Peter Dunne is not included in this analysis for several reasons. It is not a conservative party and is usually defined as a centrist liberal party. More to the point, while Dunne won his electorate seat in 2014, the party gained only 0.2 per cent of the party vote. Only seven respondents to the 2014 NZES reported voting for the party. In 2013, United Future briefly lost its status as a registered party as its records could not confirm that it had the required 500 members (Trevett 2013).

or ‘right’, because it occupies a pivotal position that has enabled it to enter governing arrangements with both the centre-left and centre-right major parties at different times: with National between 1996 and 1998, and Labour from 2005 to 2008 (Joiner 2015). In the aftermath of New Zealand First’s support of Labour, in 2008 and 2011 National Party leader John Key explicitly ruled out working with New Zealand First (Trevett 2011b). In January 2014, National moderated its position. John Key indicated that a post-election working relationship was very unlikely with New Zealand First, but would not rule out the possibility (Davison 2014b). As the 2017 election was approaching, the National leadership was again not ruling out an accommodation with New Zealand First.

The leader of New Zealand First, Winston Peters, has long been one of the most recognisable party leaders in New Zealand politics by reason of his long and often colourful political career. Winston Peters is of Māori and Scottish descent. Elected to parliament for the first time in 1978 as a National Party electorate MP, Peters’ career reflects a mix of ‘old’ and ‘new’ politics. He has been a consistent opponent of neo-liberal economic policies but also a defender of social and cultural conservatism. He was appointed to the National Government Cabinet in 1990, but after consistently criticising government policies was sacked by prime minister Jim Bolger in 1992. He continued to criticise the government’s neo-liberal direction from the backbenches. After the National Party excluded him from the candidate selection process for his electorate for the 1993 election, he resigned from the party and from parliament, causing a by-election at which he stood again and won as an Independent.

Winston Peters created New Zealand First to fight the 1993 election. New Zealand First has won seats at all subsequent elections except for that of 2008. Peters lost his Tauranga electorate seat in 2005 but was returned as a list MP in 2005, 2011 and 2014. In 2015, Peters won the safe National seat of Northland in a by-election, robbing the National–ACT combination of a majority in parliament, and thus requiring the government to require the support of either United Future or the Māori Party to pass legislation. Since then, New Zealand First poll ratings have continued to remain relatively strong (Keall 2016), enough to lead many commentators to anticipate that New Zealand First will be able to take a ‘kingmaker’ role after the 2017 election. Peters is one of the few politicians whose ‘brand’ is so strong that he is often referred to simply by his first name (Levine and Roberts 2015: 336). Indeed, six months out from the 2014 election, one headline read ‘The first major poll of the

election year can be summed up in one word—Winston’ (Gower 2014b). In 2014, 32 per cent of NZES respondents found Winston Peters likeable, compared with Labour leader David Cunliffe at 22 per cent.

The contrast between New Zealand First and the ACT Party is conspicuous and considerable. ACT leans well to the right on the economic dimension, with a strong ideological emphasis on neo-liberal free market principles, but has varied its positions on social and cultural issues, normally leaning towards social conservatism (Edwards 2015: 266). More recent ACT leaders such as Don Brash and Jamie Whyte have taken more libertarian positions, sometimes to the discomfort of other party members. The ACT Party was formed in 1995, from an earlier brief incarnation in 1994 as the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers, from which the party’s name is derived. Former Labour finance minister Roger Douglas and former National Party minister Derek Quigley led the formation of the party. ACT has been able to capture the economic, social and libertarian right, leaving National to focus on winning over moderate median voters to the right of centre. ACT leader Rodney Hide (2004–2011) won the formerly safe National electorate of Epsom in 2005, aided by strategic voting by National Party supporters that has become increasingly orchestrated at more recent elections, and at which successive ACT candidates have retained the seat. A National candidate stands, but does not actively campaign, except for the National party vote (Robson 2014). This process guarantees National at least one partner in government. Ironically, had National won the Epsom electorate in 2014 it would have gained an extra list seat from the party vote count and won majority government on its own (Farrar 2014a).

ACT has been a support partner for National-led governments since 2008, rewarded by a ministerial position outside Cabinet for Rodney Hide (2008–2011), an associate minister position for his successor John Banks (2011–2014) and a parliamentary under-secretary role for its current Epsom MP and leader of the party since 2014, David Seymour. ACT reached its highest vote in 2002 at just over 7 per cent. In 2014, its vote fell to 0.7 per cent, its lowest-ever share. Its leader Jamie Whyte was not elected to parliament. ACT’s strongest showing coincided with National’s disastrous party vote collapse to just under 21 per cent in 2002. Indeed, it is evident that the National and ACT party votes are closely aligned: as one waxes, the other wanes. At its first election in 1996, ACT carved out a niche of voters who had the characteristics of heartland National Party voters (Aimer 1998; Vowles 2002b). By 2014, most of them had returned to National (Aimer 2014).

The remaining significant conservative party in the New Zealand party system is the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party takes strong conservative stances on cultural and social issues, and emphasises a traditional model of the family (Edwards 2015: 267). Established, led and funded by property developer Colin Craig, the party looked like it might reach the threshold of 5 per cent in 2014. John Key acknowledged that the Conservative Party could have been a potential support partner, but without great enthusiasm (Davison 2014b). The Conservative and National parties toyed with the idea of an electorate seat deal that might have given Craig a seat, but National backed off. In the dying days of the election campaign things began to go awry for the Conservatives. Craig became increasingly erratic, offering strange answers to straightforward questions, missing media appearances and running a billboard campaign that some called ‘creepy’. When his female press secretary with whom he had formed an apparently close relationship resigned two days before the election under mysterious circumstances, Craig’s image began to unravel. Doubts began to emerge that he was really a ‘wholesome, out-there sort of a bloke, that’s all encompassing ... the sort of person we should be looking up to’ (Dogan 2014). Had Craig’s reputation not been tarnished by these events, it is possible that the Conservative Party might have received more votes, perhaps even enough to have surmounted the 5 per cent threshold.

The three conservative parties in New Zealand—New Zealand First, ACT and the Conservative Party—can be found at different locations across the libertarian–authoritarian cleavage as well as on the economic left–right dimension. On the left–right dimension, respondents to the NZES place ACT and the Conservatives closely together: ACT at 7.4, the Conservatives at 7.2, with National not far away on 7.1. New Zealand First is more distinct, only a little to the right of centre at 5.5 (see Chapter 7, Figure 7.1).

Figure 8.1 displays the average positions of each group of party voters on a standardised version of the authoritarian–libertarian scale.² Compared with the economic left–right differences, we would expect smaller gaps between the parties and between their voters on these cultural or social values. This is because New Zealand political parties have a practice

2 Because of the direction of the ‘agree–disagree’ statements from which it is constructed, the unmodified scale is biased towards authoritarianism (with a mean of 5.9 when maximum authoritarianism is 10, and libertarianism is 0). By standardising and thereby putting the mean at 0, we can partly correct for this. The standardisation also amplifies the differences between the parties, meaning that on the unstandardised scale they would be much closer.

of allowing their MPs ‘conscience votes’ on the kind of issues that are included in this libertarian–authoritarian dimension: abortion law reform, legal recognition of sexual orientation, marriage equality, control of alcohol and gambling and the disciplining of children (for data and more information on the practice of conscience voting in New Zealand, see PCVD 2016; Lindsey 2006, 2008, 2011). One could assume that because parliamentary parties allow for differences of opinions on these matters, party vote choice is largely unaffected by the positions taken by MPs. But parties at the two ends of the libertarian–authoritarian dimension do tend to take clear stances on these issues. Voters for these parties may be expected to occupy the more distinct positions on these issues those for Labour and National.

Figure 8.1 confirms that voters for the Greens are the most libertarian. Internet-MANA voters also fall on the libertarian side, but their small number in the sample make the confidence intervals very wide. Labour and National voters are both close to the average. Non-voters, New Zealand First and Māori Party voters tend to cluster on the authoritarian side of the average. Unsurprisingly, New Zealand First voters form the most consistently socially conservative cluster.

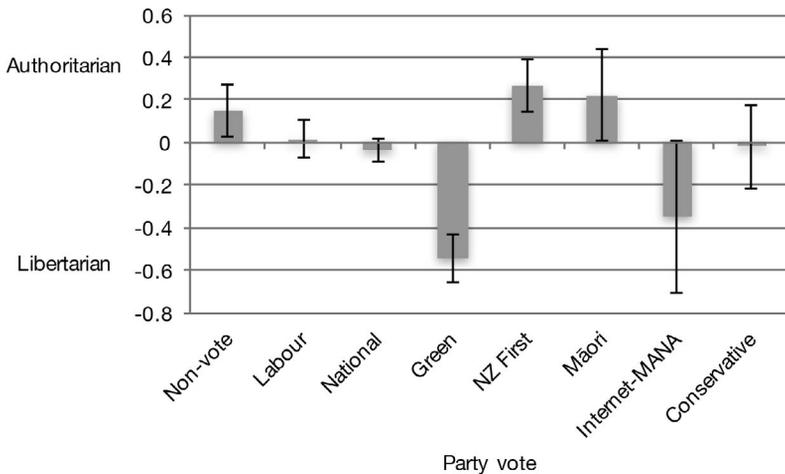


Figure 8.1: Authoritarian–libertarian attitudes by party voting groups (standardised scale)³

Source: New Zealand Election Study 2014.

3 Given the small number of ACT NZ respondents in the NZES, and thus the unreliability of these data, this party is not included in the figure.

While the Conservative Party took conservative positions on various cultural and social issues during the 2014 campaign and supported traditional family values, its voters tend to be close to the average on the libertarian–authoritarian scale. This location of the average Conservative voter compared with those for other parties on the right merits further investigation. The number of Conservative voters in our sample is small, and the confidence intervals are wide and go either side of the average on the scale. This means sampling errors or other kinds of bias might explain our finding. We can re-examine the influence of the small Conservative cell size on the results by drawing on other questions. Rather than simply relying on party choice we can investigate the likes and dislikes of political parties that all respondents were asked to record. Taking this analytical strategy also allows us to examine the potential support for other parties with only a small percentage of the vote, such as ACT and United Future.

Table 8.1 both confirms and modifies our earlier findings. When we take into account the libertarian–authoritarian positions of all New Zealanders and correlate them with party ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’, Labour, Green, National and New Zealand First remain in more or less the same relative positions. The Māori Party moves to the libertarian side. This is probably because many non-Māori people of a liberal disposition like the Māori Party even though they do not give it their vote. Liking or disliking the Conservative Party has the second strongest relationship with libertarian–authoritarian attitudes. It is liked by authoritarian-leaning voters of other parties, and disliked by liberals who are very unlikely to vote Conservative. Those who do vote for the Conservative Party are somewhat less authoritarian than we might have expected.

Table 8.1: Correlations: Standardised libertarian–authoritarian scale by likes and dislikes of political parties

	r	significance
Green	−0.17	**
Māori	−0.14	**
Labour	−0.04	*
National	−0.04	
United Future	−0.01	
NZ First	0.11	**
ACT	0.11	**
Conservative	0.15	**

Notes: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: New Zealand Election Study 2014.

Figure 8.2 identifies the significant correlates of authoritarian and libertarian values in social structure (see the Appendix, Table 8.A1). The index of authoritarianism and libertarianism used here is the standardised scale applied earlier.

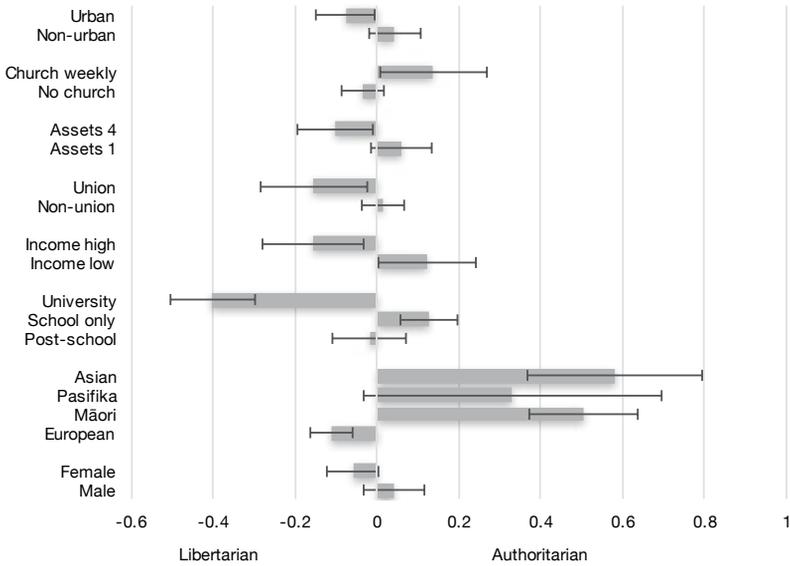


Figure 8.2: Correlates of authoritarianism–libertarianism by socio-demographic groups

Source: Appendix, Table 8.A1.

All else being equal, ethnic minority voters are somewhat more likely than the European majority to lean to authoritarianism. Māori voters are likely to be just over one point higher on the scale than European voters. While receiving benefits does not significantly relate to libertarian–authoritarian attitudes, income does matter. People on the lowest incomes are appreciably more likely to be authoritarian than those on the highest incomes. Similarly, the more assets one owns, the more libertarian one is. Church attendance is positively associated with authoritarianism. Men are marginally more likely to be authoritarian than women. Employment-related variables have no effect, but union households are less likely to exhibit authoritarian leanings. As expected, education has a significant and negative effect. The relationship with education is consistent with findings from international literature (for example, Bornschieer 2010; Flanagan and Lee 2003; Inglehart 1984; Houtman 2003; Van der Waal, Achterberg and Houtman 2007). Those who embrace social liberalism tend to have ample cultural capital and high levels of education.

Higher education tends to instill democratic values, increases cognitive skills, undermines a belief in such things as a ‘natural’ social order and fosters greater openness and tolerance towards nonconformity and unconventional cultural patterns. Education is a cultural resource that deeply affects people’s world views and has been found to be strongly related to the social liberalism–conservatism dimension (Van der Waal, Achterberg and Houtman 2007).

In Chapter 5 (Figure 5.9), we have already displayed the extent to which the various parties are liked or disliked by NZES respondents. Parties are scored on a scale where 0 represents strongly disliking a party and 10 strongly liking that party. Among the three conservative parties studied in this chapter, New Zealand First had the highest average favourability score with 4.3 (the fourth most liked party after National, Labour and the Green Party). The Conservatives were lower at 3.5, placed seventh most liked and ACT at 3.3 as eighth.

In terms of policy and campaign rhetoric, the three conservative parties profiled in this chapter tend to aim for the same group of socially conservative voters. We therefore expect to see some clustering among their voters, with those liking one of the conservative parties tending to also like the other conservative parties, though New Zealand First is likely to be a possible outlier given its more left-leaning position on economic issues compared with the other conservative parties.

A correlation matrix displayed in Table 8.2 indicates how party likes and dislikes among voters are distributed across the various parties. The correlation between liking/disliking the Conservative Party and liking/disliking ACT is particularly strong ($r=0.53$). The correlations between New Zealand First and ACT ($r=0.11$), and the New Zealand First and Conservative Party ($r=0.16$) are appreciably less strong. Liking New Zealand First relates positively with liking Labour ($r=0.28$), whereas it is related a little less strongly to disliking National ($r=-0.17$). Liking ACT and the Conservative Party relate positively with liking National ($r=0.35$ and $r=0.23$, respectively), but correlated negatively with Labour ($r=-0.10$ and -0.16 , respectively). Respondents tend to consistently like or dislike ACT and the Conservative Party. Liking ACT or the Conservatives also tends to mean liking National and disliking Labour. This is all as expected given party histories and policies. New Zealand First is again distinct from ACT and the Conservatives in its closer proximity to the left; the correlation between likes/dislikes of New Zealand First and of the Green Party is 0.28, not that far behind that with Labour.

Table 8.2: Correlations between liking and disliking political parties in New Zealand, 2014 election

	NZ First	ACT	Conservative	Labour	National	Green	United Future	Māori	MANA
ACT	0.11								
Conservative	0.16	0.53							
Labour	0.28	-0.10	-0.16						
National	-0.17	0.35	0.23	-0.50					
Green	0.24	-0.05	-0.16	0.52	-0.42				
United Future	0.12	0.69	0.47	-0.06	0.30	0.01			
Māori	0.18	0.26	0.19	0.18	-0.03	0.28	0.40		
MANA	0.24	0.16	0.14	0.33	-0.32	0.43	0.19	0.47	
Internet	0.21	0.22	0.21	0.24	-0.28	0.32	0.22	0.29	0.67

Source: New Zealand Election Study 2014.

‘New politics’ attitudes: Immigration and abortion

The NZES gauges opinions on two examples of public opinion that fall into the new politics or libertarian–authoritarian dimension: immigration and abortion. Immigration is a highly salient issue in New Zealand. It does not have the same force as in countries that find it more difficult to control their borders such as European countries or, closer to New Zealand, Australia, with its longer coastline and closer proximity to sources of illegal entrants. The distance of New Zealand from other land masses strongly discourages uncontrolled passage by sea. Nonetheless, prior to the 2014 election, New Zealand was experiencing high levels of inward immigration. While New Zealand’s uneven economic growth record tends to create fluctuations in the number of immigrants, the difference in numbers between arrivals and departures in the year to October 2014 was nearly 50,000: equivalent just over 1 per cent of the New Zealand population of 4.5 million, and the highest level since 2003 (Dixon 2014).

Since the 1990s, increasing numbers of immigrants to New Zealand have come from non-western countries, and New Zealand society has become more ethnically diverse. Māori are New Zealand’s indigenous people, having migrated to New Zealand during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Europeans followed from the early nineteenth century, and settled in larger numbers, with Pasifika and Asian immigrants entering the country in significant numbers from the mid to late twentieth century onwards. In 2013, about 75 per cent of the population identified within the broad category of European, 12 per cent as Asian, 8 per cent as from a Pacific Island country, and 16 per cent as Māori. Observant readers will note that these numbers add up to more than 100 per cent: 11 per cent report more than one ethnic identification (Statistics New Zealand 2016c). According to the 2013 census, in Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city of 1.4 million people, 56 per cent identified as European, 22 per cent Asian, 14 per cent Pasifika and 10 per cent Māori (Statistics New Zealand 2016d). Since New Zealand is one of the few countries that allows non-citizens to vote after they have been accepted as permanent residents and have lived in the country for a year, many of the newly arrived immigrants have the right to vote.

Figure 8.3 presents voters' attitudes towards the presence of immigrants, an issue not subject to conscience votes, by the groups of party voters. New Zealand First voters form the first column: 70 per cent of them would like to see less immigration. This finding is entirely expected. Since its formation in 1993, New Zealand First has been the party most critical of New Zealand's relatively liberal immigration policies. The party is committed to what it describes as a rigorous and strictly applied immigration policy that serves New Zealand's interests and prioritises jobs for New Zealanders.

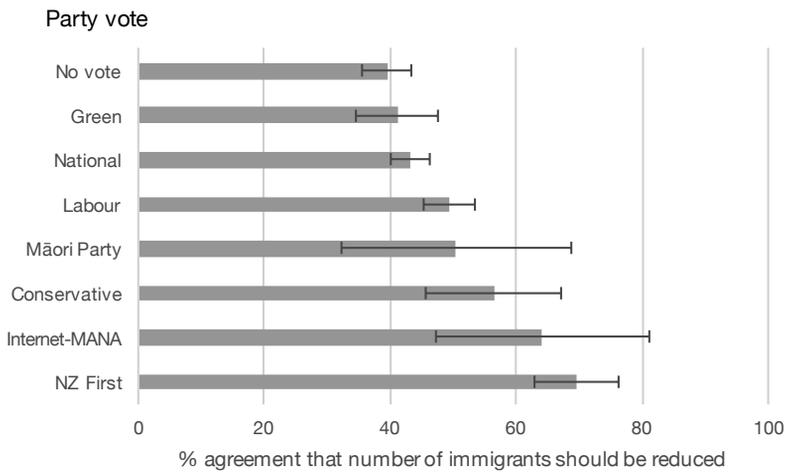


Figure 8.3: Attitudes towards the number of immigrants by party vote (in percentage)

Note: The question was: 'Do you think the number of immigrants allowed into New Zealand nowadays should be increased a lot (1), be increased a little (2), be about the same as now (3), reduced a little (4), reduced a lot (5), or don't know? (9)' The percentage of agreement presented in the figure combines the answers 'reduced a lot' and 'reduced a little'.

Source: New Zealand Election Study 2014.

Criticism of current levels of immigration and attempts to draw attention to some negative consequences often attracts the accusation of 'racism'. But there are evidence-based arguments against high levels of immigration approaching those recently experienced in New Zealand. Large numbers of children for whom English is a second language or who may need to learn it from the beginning can put pressure on schools for which there is little or no recognition in terms of extra funding or support (for example, Duff 2014). While fears that immigration may depress wages are exaggerated, small effects are possible and may be larger on those

local workers who compete for jobs with recent immigrants (Poot and Cochrane 2005). Importing skilled immigrants reduces the incentives for New Zealand employers to train New Zealand workers. Short-term effects may increase unemployment (Armstrong and McDonald 2016). A high volume of immigration drives up house prices, particularly where there is undersupply of housing in the areas where immigrants tend to settle (McDonald 2013; Fry 2014: 37). In Auckland, in particular, former National Party finance minister and current Prime Minister Bill English recognised in 2015 that house prices had reached levels that put home ownership out of reach for many people on low and middle incomes, with long-term implications for inequality (Edwards 2015b). Economic analysis finds that the effects of immigration enhance growth, but not necessarily per capita growth. In other words, a country may get richer, but wealth and income per person may not increase because there are more people to share that wealth and income (Rutherford 2015). Those with lower socio-economic status are often less likely to support high levels of immigration, and immigration policy has a strong potential to act as a ‘wedge’ in electoral politics and thus disrupt voting patterns, particularly if centre-left parties fail to listen to those who feel they are adversely affected.

Figure 8.4 shows the relationship between attitudes towards the presence of immigrants and opinions about economic inequality. Immigration attitudes are estimated on a scale of 1 to 5. The threshold for being more for or more against immigration is therefore a score of 2.5. If egalitarian attitudes are driven by values of fairness, we might expect egalitarians to support immigration. On the other hand, if egalitarians are concerned entirely about income differences, and are worried about some of the distributional effects of immigration explained above, we might expect the opposite. As the questions measuring attitudes to inequality focus on income differences, the latter hypothesis is more likely to be confirmed. And it is. Based on a simple regression of the inequality attitude scale against the immigration attitude scale, Figure 8.4 shows egalitarians are slightly but significantly more likely to oppose immigration.

A BARK BUT NO BITE

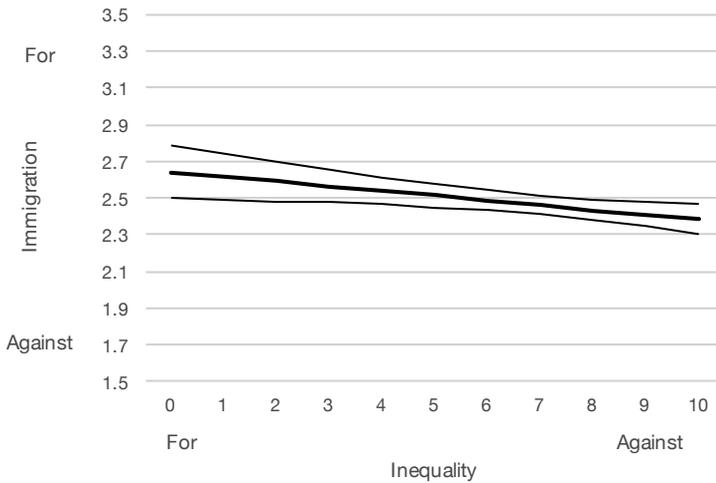


Figure 8.4: Inequality attitudes and immigration attitudes

Source: New Zealand Election Study 2014.

However, we might expect the relationship of inequality and immigration to ‘wash out’ when controlling for people who are in positions that could make them fear the consequences of high immigration. Figure 8.5 displays the significant correlates of attitudes about immigration in social structure and attitudes in the form of predicted probabilities, derived from a regression model in the Appendix, Table 8.A2.⁴ We find that economic concerns do seem to drive much opposition to immigration. Those lacking aspirations for a better standard of living in 10 years tend to be opposed to immigration. Confidence in finding a job and a positive assessment of the economy over the last year tends to make people in favour of an increase in the number of immigrants, while those fearing job loss and who are not so confident about the economy tend to be opposed to greater immigration. Left–right and authoritarian–libertarian positions also matter: the left favouring immigration, the right being more likely to oppose it, as are authoritarians. Attitudes to inequality are not significant in this model; they are accounted for entirely by low or frustrated aspirations, low job security and low economic confidence.

⁴ An initial model without controls for aspirations, security and the economy (not shown) found young people more opposed to immigration than the old; when the aspirations and security variables are added, their stronger effects on the young shift age into non-significance. Employment variables and assets have no effects, even in the stripped-down model, casting some doubt on claims and the expectation that competition for jobs or investment opportunities might affect attitudes to immigration. However, income does have significant effects. Compared with Europeans, Māori tend to be significantly more opposed to immigration, while Asian New Zealanders are more in favour.

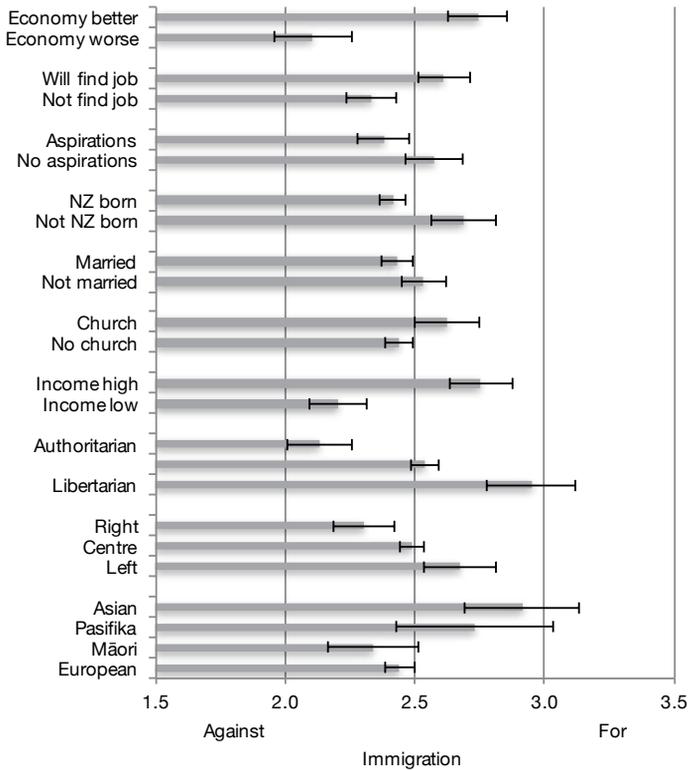


Figure 8.5: Correlates of immigration attitudes by social groups, aspirations and security

Note: The question was that shown for Figure 8.3. Don't know responses were re-coded to 3. Income, aspiration, job security and economy variable effects are estimated comparing the bottom and top of their five-point scales categories.

Source: Appendix, Table 8.A2.

In contrast to immigration, abortion is traditionally a conscience issue. While most political parties do not take positions, votes in parliament on such issues do tend to cluster on partisan dimensions. Indeed, although immigration is a matter of party policy and abortion is not, when using party vote as a predictor of positions on these issues, both have about the same effect, in both cases a pseudo R-squared of about 0.03. New Zealand's abortion law is conservative in principle, controlling the practice under the Crimes Act, but liberal in practice with two doctors required for approval on mental health grounds that are almost never refused. Early in 2017, there were indications that this compromise between conservative and liberal positions was increasingly unacceptable to liberals, foreshadowing future reform efforts in the case of a change of government. The abortion

issue has been debated twice in the last 15 years. In an amendment to the *Care of Children Act 2004*, anti-abortionists sought to insert a provision that would require parental consent to abortion for those under the age of 16. In that parliament, Labour and Green MPs voted overwhelmingly against that principle. Despite positioning itself as a libertarian party, ACT's nine MPs split evenly, reflecting the party's appeal to social conservatism at that time. New Zealand First MPs voted 11 to 2 for the principles of parental consent, as did Māori Party MP Tariana Turia. National MPs were also divided, voting 19 to 8 in favour of the principle (PCVD 2016).

The issue of abortion was raised again in April 2011 by way of an amendment to a government resolution. Māori Party MP Tariana Turia sought to appoint a conservative on abortion issues to the Abortion Supervisory Committee, the administrative body responsible for supervising the process. Labour and Green MPs unanimously opposed the amendment; National MPs were close to evenly split and the four ACT MPs voted against. New Zealand First had no parliamentary representation at the time.

The question asked in the 2014 NZES sought agreement or disagreement across a five-point scale on a hardline anti-abortion position: 'Abortion is always wrong'. Figure 8.6 shows that Conservative Party voters were significantly more likely than those of all other parties other than the Māori Party to oppose abortion in all circumstances. New Zealand First and Labour voters do not look very different from each other, and have similar attitudes as those who do not vote. National Party voters tend to be slightly more liberal than this group, while Green voters are the most liberal of all.

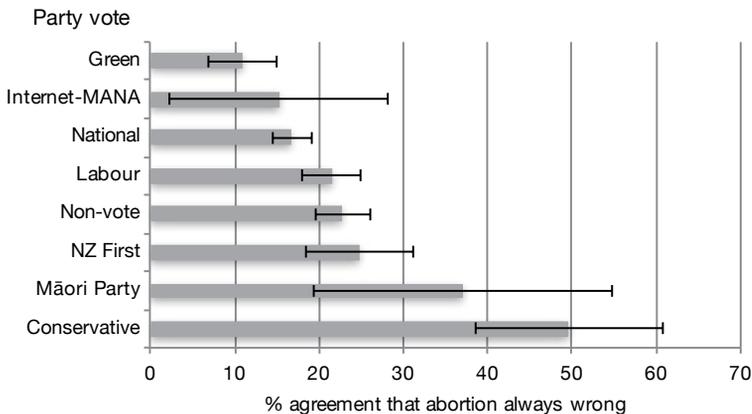


Figure 8.6: Abortion is always wrong by party vote, 2014

Source: New Zealand Election Study 2014.

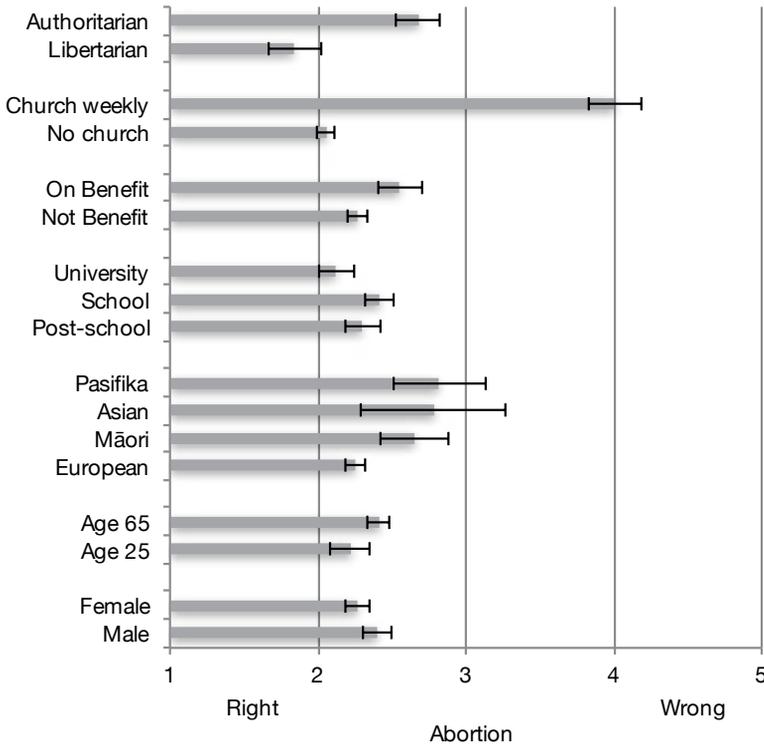


Figure 8.7: Attitudes towards abortion by social groups and the authoritarian-libertarian dimension

Source: Appendix, Table 8.A3.

Opposition to inequality could be associated with opposition to abortion if socially conservative Christians followed Christian values into social and economic policy preferences as does, for example, Catholic social teaching. But there is no significant relationship between these two sets of preferences. Figure 8.7 shows predicted probabilities from the regression model in the Appendix, Table 8.A3. As one would expect, the correlates of abortion attitudes in social structure highlight the importance of church attendance. Someone who attends church more than once a week is likely to be nearly two points higher on the 1–5 abortion attitude scale than someone who never attends at all. Women are less likely to be opposed to abortion, but the difference between women and men is only 0.15 on the five-point scale. Age also has a significant effect. A person who is 65 is more opposed than a person of 25, while those who are highly educated are less likely to be opposed. Those on benefits are somewhat more opposed to abortion than those not. Authoritarianism also leads

people to oppose abortion, but there is no relationship between abortion attitudes and left–right position. Finally, there are significant differences in attitudes towards abortion between various ethnic groups. Europeans are less likely to oppose abortion compared with ethnic minorities, who, along with those on benefits, are more opposed to abortion.

Another issue of high salience for the conservative parties is that of the Treaty of Waitangi. As Figure 6.8 in Chapter 6 shows, New Zealand First and Conservative voters have much in common on this issue, and share their positions with that of National Party voters, tending to agree with the statement: ‘The Treaty of Waitangi should not be part of the law’. New Zealand First has always had a conservative position on Treaty issues despite its leader, Winston Peters, being of Māori and Scottish descent. New Zealand First emphasises the principle of Article 3 in the Treaty, that of equal citizenship. Consequently, New Zealand First opposes any legal recognition of Māori rights as such, and would, if it had its way, remove all references to the principles of the Treaty from the law (New Zealand Parliament 2006). Like National and the Conservative Party, New Zealand First would abolish the Māori electorates, and no longer runs candidates in them. Analysis of the attitudes to the Treaty by social groups can also be found in Figures 6.9 and 6.10 in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 6, we examined how voters line up on the two scales that represent attitudes to social expenditure: universal versus targeted benefits (Figures 6.2 and 6.3). New Zealand First voters are closer to Labour in their relatively strong preferences for expenditure on universal benefits. Conservatives, if anything, are less keen on increasing expenditures than National voters, but the average voter for all parties on this dimension tends towards ‘more’, even amongst the small number of ACT voters. As far as targeted benefits are concerned, there is considerably more difference. The average Conservative lines up with National and ACT, while the average New Zealand First voter is closer to Labour or the Greens, although definitely still on the ‘less’ side of the scale. We can thus confirm that New Zealand First voters tend to be economically left of those who voted ACT or the Conservative Party. New Zealand First voters are more supportive of government spending on social issues such as welfare, unemployment, education and health compared with those supporting ACT and the Conservative Party. These latter two parties align quite closely with the National Party on those issues.

Summary models

To clarify further the social and ideological bases of New Zealand First and Conservative Party voting, we construct regression models on vote choice for these two parties (Figures 8.8 and 8.9). There are insufficient ACT voters in our sample, so we model on the like/dislike scale for ACT (Figures 8.10 and 8.11). Tables reporting coefficients and standard errors for all variables included are in the Appendix, Tables 8.A4–8.A6.

Beginning with New Zealand First, after controlling for the baseline social structure variables already discussed in Chapter 4, Figure 8.8 reveals that Treaty and immigration attitudes come through as strong predictors for the New Zealand First vote in the expected directions, with aspirations and fear of income loss retaining some potency but largely within confidence intervals. This does not refute earlier findings that left–right, libertarian–authoritarian, social policy and inequality are associated to varying degrees with the New Zealand First vote. Their effects are simply absorbed by other variables that have a closer proximity to vote choice. Opposition to inequality also fails to be significant in the full New Zealand First vote model. Correlated and regressed alone on vote or not for New Zealand First, opposition to inequality remains associated with the New Zealand First vote. Social spending attitudes and attitudes to abortion do not relate significantly to voting for New Zealand First.

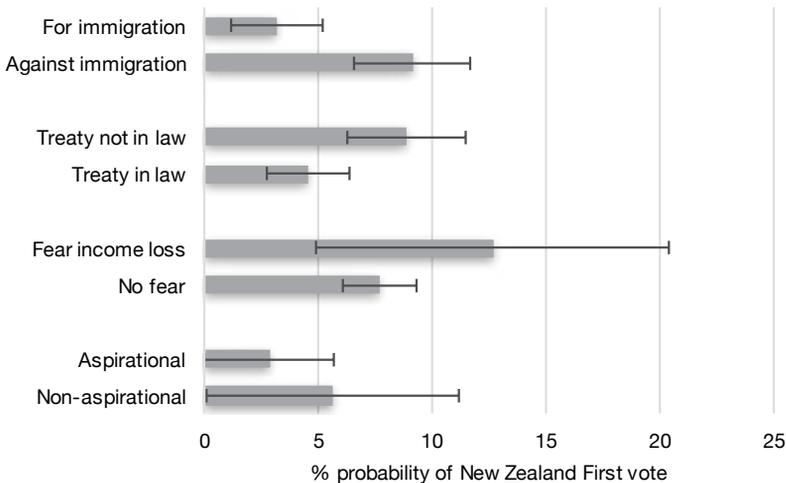


Figure 8.8: Vote choice for New Zealand First or not

Source: Appendix, Table 8.A4.

A BARK BUT NO BITE

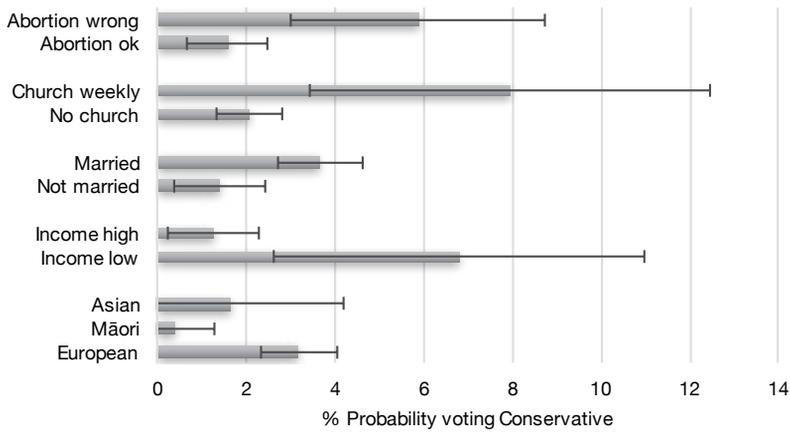


Figure 8.9: Vote choice for the Conservatives or not

Source: Appendix, Table 8.A5.

The ideological and socio-cultural values added here have the strongest effects in raising the explanatory power of the New Zealand First vote model up to 12 per cent. This confirms findings of research on populist ‘radical right’ voting that consistently shows a major impact of cultural attitudes on supporting such parties (for example, Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers 2002; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005; Rydgren 2007; Van den Berg and Coffé 2012; Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie 2000). At the same time, perceptions of economic insecurity and pessimism also help drive the vote for New Zealand First, but not as strongly.

As for the Conservatives (Figure 8.9), Māori and Pasifika people are significantly less likely to vote for the party than Europeans. Indeed, there were no Pasifika voting for the Conservatives in our sample, so no estimate is possible. People on low incomes are more likely to vote Conservative than those on higher incomes. Church attendance is a major predictor of the Conservative vote. A person attending church once or more than once a week is about 10 per cent more likely to vote Conservative than someone who never attends. The Conservative Party has a strong base among church attenders. According to New Zealand census data, the percentage of those affiliating as Christian decreased by 6 percentage points between 2006 and 2013, but evangelical Christians increased as a proportion of the total (Statistics New Zealand 2013). A person who is married was 3 per cent more likely to vote Conservative than someone who was not. Opposition to abortion also comes through very strongly. A baseline social structure model produces the same results as the

expanded model for those variables. Gender, age, education, occupation, sector of the economy, union membership, whether or not New Zealand born, assets and benefits either wash out of the baseline model or had little or no relationship to begin with. In Model II, left–right is non-significant, although only marginally; Conservatives do line up on the right. Libertarian–authoritarian, social spending attitudes, immigration, the Treaty and opinions on inequality are all non-significant. We ran an exploratory model that included the security and aspirational variables, both simply on top of the Model I variables, and in Model III. None were statistically significant, and added only very marginally to the variable explained. Economic insecurity and low aspirations mattered for the New Zealand First vote but not apparently for the Conservative vote.

Analysing liking or disliking the ACT Party, we discuss two models here: a baseline containing social structure and group variables, and another adding aspirations/security and ideological and policy opinion variables (see Appendix, Table 8.A6). The most obvious inference from our analysis confirms ACT’s relative unpopularity; all the probability estimates are on the ‘dislike’ side of the 10-point scale. From the baseline model (Figure 8.10), the most unexpected finding is that women are more likely to like ACT than men, although the effect is a small one. The effect actually rises to about 4 per cent in the full model. Younger voters, Pasifika and Asians tend to like ACT more than older voters, or Europeans or Māori. ACT appeals to those on higher incomes and with assets, but not to public sector workers, union members or those with university degrees.

Figure 8.11 reports the findings when the aspirational/security and socio-cultural and attitudinal variables are added. The social structure variables included in the baseline remain as controls. Those who like ACT tend to be aspirational, those who dislike ACT do not; if anything, they are pessimistic about their futures. The more right wing a person, the more likely they will like the ACT party. Those who like the ACT party tend to be against the Treaty, those who dislike it tend to be in favour. Those who like the ACT party are quite strongly against universal benefits. People who like ACT are also in favour of immigration.

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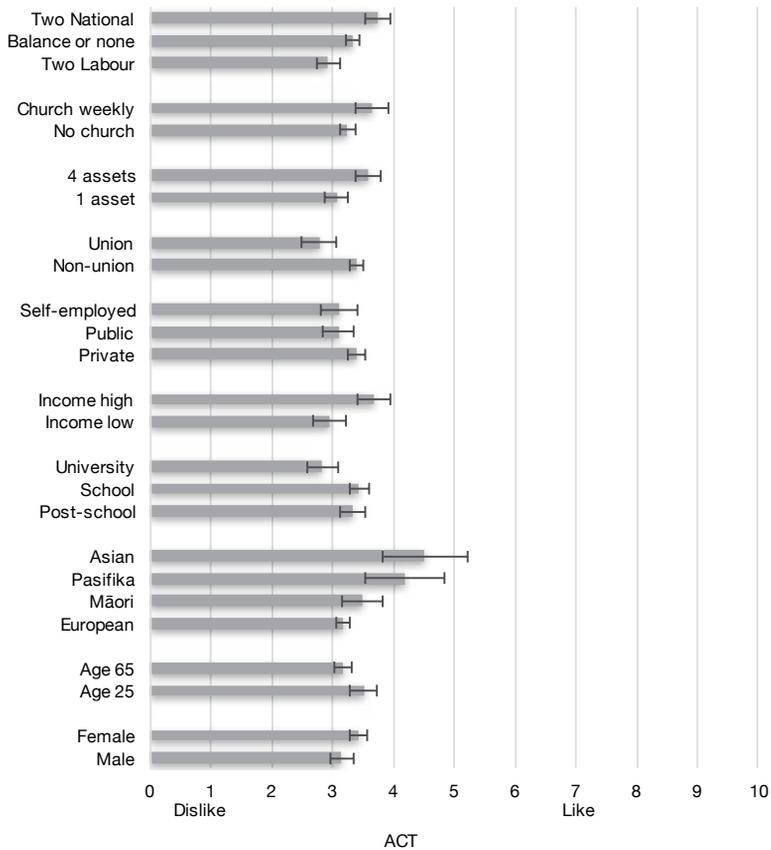


Figure 8.10: Liking or disliking the ACT Party: Baseline social, demographic and group variables: Model I.

Source: Appendix, Table 8.A6, Model I.

While we must be a little cautious when comparing a vote choice model for New Zealand First and a like/dislike model for ACT, all indications are that voters and supporters of the two parties are a long way apart, except on opposition to the Treaty of Waitangi being in the law. Immigration is the biggest difference. Favouring an increase of the number of immigrants relates positively to supporting ACT but negatively to voting New Zealand First. ACT comes across as clearly on the ideological economic right. The opposition of those who like ACT to universal social services (the services from which all benefit) stands out. The most likely explanation is that ACT supporters are drawing on a belief that all such services should be privatised and left to the market. This runs against majority public opinion that largely favours the current system of universal services.

The Key National Government has a record of maintaining those services with sufficient levels of public funding to effectively neutralise political debate on health and education. Ironically, it is the Labour party that raised the issue of superannuation reform, almost certainly to its political detriment (see Chapter 6). Only on the margins has the Key Government moved toward the ACT agenda on public services. The best example is ACT's most highly visible policy of Charter Schools (Sherman 2016). But even Charter Schools rely on public rather than private funding.

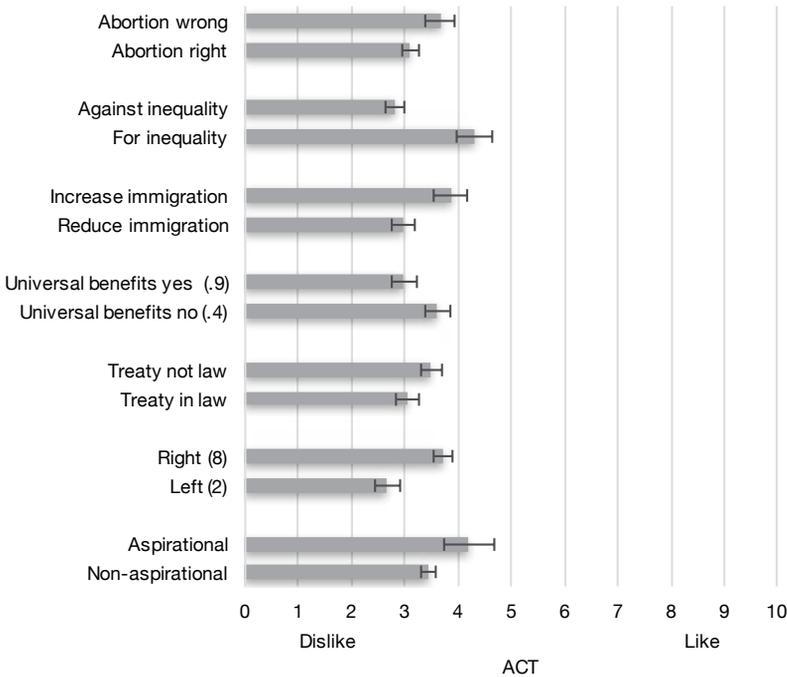


Figure 8.11: Liking or disliking the ACT Party: Model II

Source: Appendix, Table 8.A6, Model II.

Conclusion

Three New Zealand parties stand out in their presentation of alternate conservatisms. As we have seen, they exhibit policy and ideological differences and similarities, as do their voters. ACT has the profile of a classic right-wing liberal party, but most of those who support ACT feel equally at home in the National Party. Indeed, two of the party's former leaders, John Banks and Don Brash, previously served as National

Party MPs, and Brash also led the National Party between 2003 and 2006. The Conservative Party is similar in terms of many of its economic positions, but its support appears to be more strongly rooted in church attendance and right-wing Christian conservatism, although it also takes a populist position on a number of economic and moral issues. In terms of reducing inequality, neither ACT or the Conservatives can be expected to take positions to reverse the trend.

New Zealand First is the odd one out and also the most electorally successful. While the party is the one most critical of immigration and shares its nationalist approach towards the economy with ‘radical right-wing populist’ parties around the world, it is not a radical party—it is predominantly a socially conservative populist party of the centre. New Zealand First and its supporters value an older vision of New Zealand, one aspect of which includes a more egalitarian society than the one that is emerging in the twenty-first century. However, their notion of equality is not particularly liberal or tolerant. Nor does it embrace a culturally diverse society that continues to offer both economic and social challenges to the alternative conservative parties.

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