



# 2019 Auckland local election voter turnout

## Who did and did not vote?

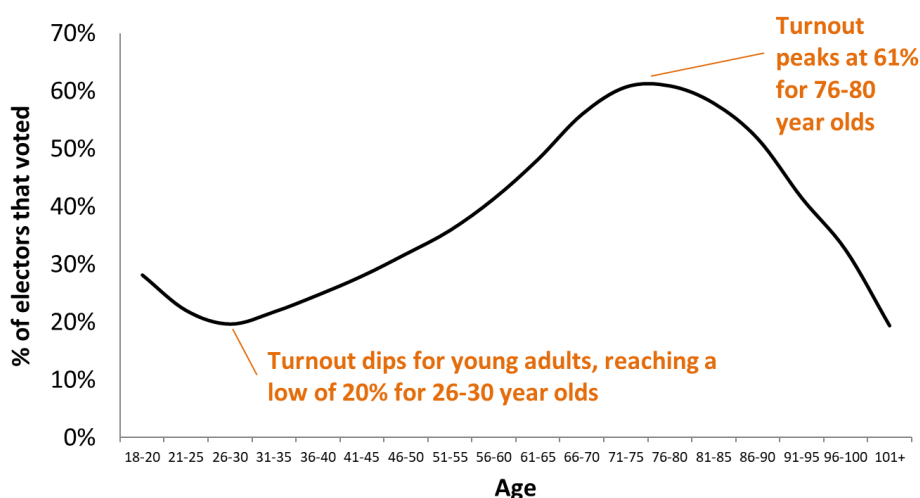
Dr Jesse Allpress, Research and Evaluation Unit (RIMU), Auckland Council

New Zealand local elections are held every three years, with the most recent taking place between September and October 2019. Voter turnout in local elections has been declining in recent decades and it is therefore important we better understand who is and is not voting. Such information is useful for those looking to encourage greater engagement with the local (and national) democratic processes.

This document provides information on who did and did not vote in the 2019 Auckland Council elections in terms of age, Māori descent status, gender, neighbourhood area (SA2), and relative socio-economic deprivation.<sup>1</sup> The dataset contains 1,063,735 registered electors, of whom 369,190 (34.7%) voted.<sup>2</sup>

## Younger Aucklanders were less likely to vote

Age was strongly related to whether someone voted or not in the 2019 elections. Turnout was lowest for 26-30 year olds (only 20% of eligible electors in this age group voted) but increased with age, reaching a high of 61 per cent amongst 76-80 year olds.



<sup>1</sup> Information on other ethnic groups and hard-to-reach communities is not available as it is not recorded in the electoral roll.

<sup>2</sup> This number is slightly different to official figures, as it excludes those who registered/voted via special vote during the election.

Find out more:

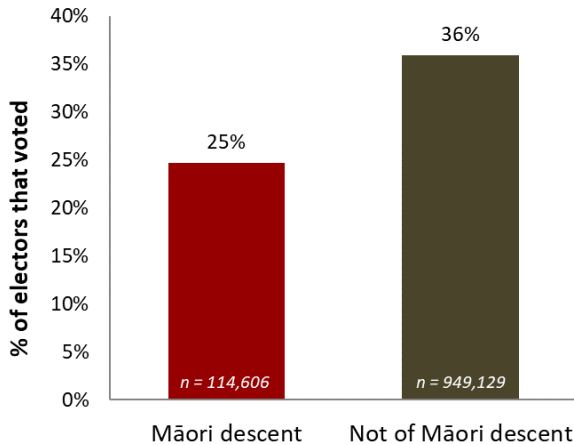
email [jesse.allpress@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:jesse.allpress@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

Visit [www.knowledgeauckland.org.nz](http://www.knowledgeauckland.org.nz)

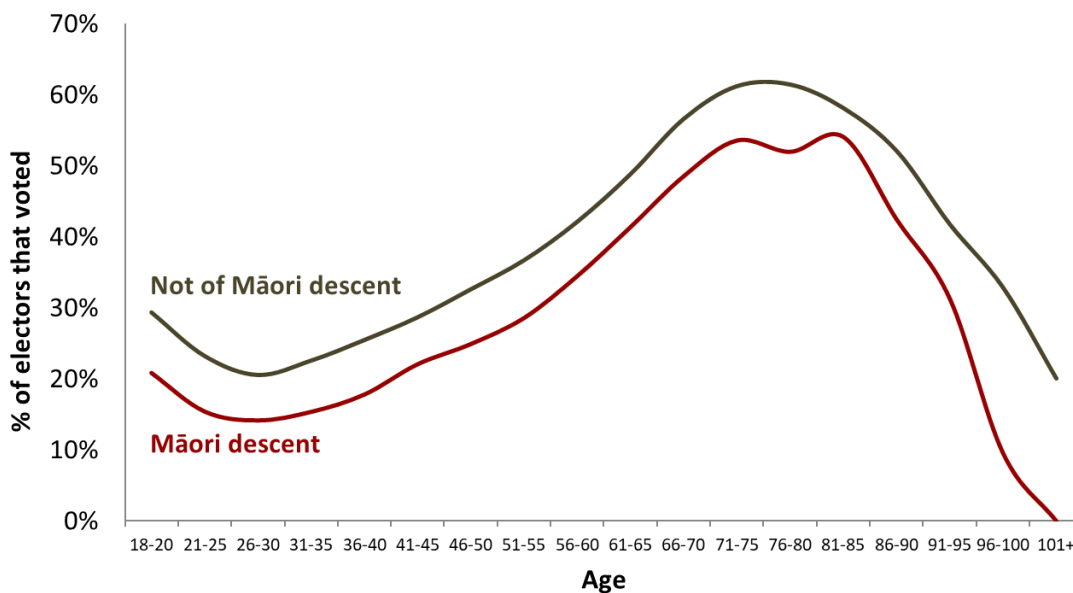
# Aucklanders of Māori descent were less likely to vote

Electors have the option when enrolling to indicate whether they are of Māori descent.

There was an 11 percentage point difference in voter turnout between electors who indicated Māori descent and those who did not (25% compared with 36%). This difference in turnout for local elections mirrors the difference seen in Auckland electorates for general elections (estimated from Electoral Commission statistics as 70% and 81%, respectively).



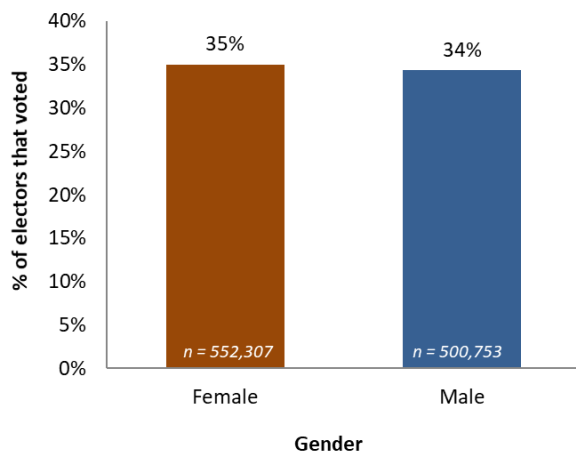
Further analysis by age shows that the approximately 11 percentage point difference between electors of Māori descent and those not of Māori descent was relatively stable across different ages. The differences seen between Māori and non-Māori therefore do not appear to be notably different in older and younger generations.



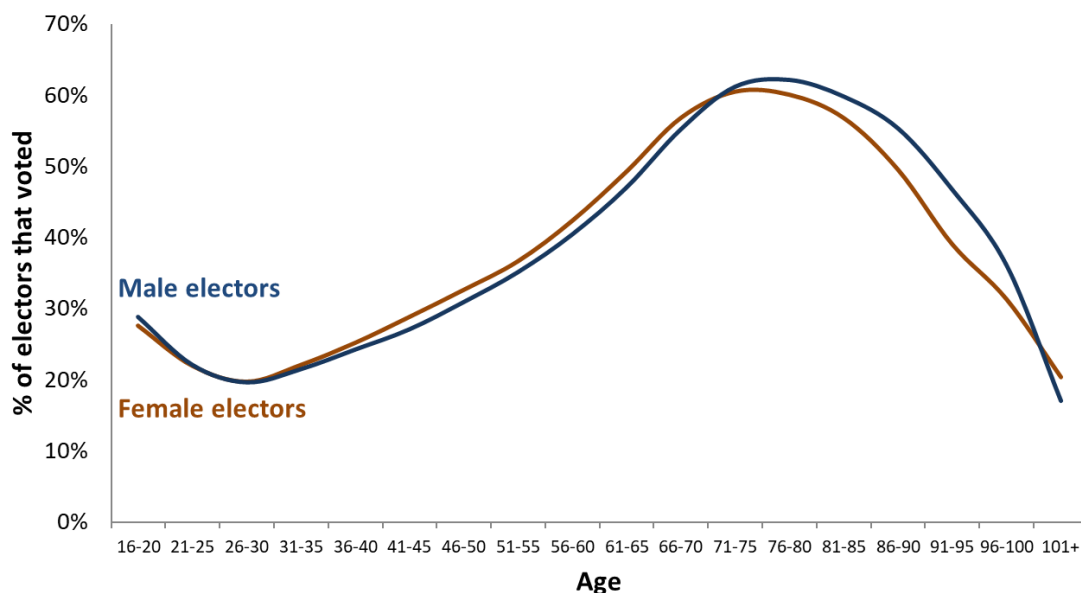
## No apparent differences by gender

The electoral roll does not collect information on individuals' gender. However, further analysis was undertaken by RIMU that attempted to assign gender using titles and first name(s).<sup>3</sup> Using this technique, it is estimated that 51.9% were female ( $N = 552,307$ ), 47.1% were male ( $N = 500,753$ ), and approximately one per cent either unable to be classified ( $N = 10,630$ ) or gender diverse<sup>4</sup> ( $N = 45$ ). It is acknowledged that this analysis is not perfect, especially in relation to those with diverse gender identities. However, it provides an indicative picture of turnout by gender.

There was little difference in turnout for female and male electors (35% and 34%, respectively).



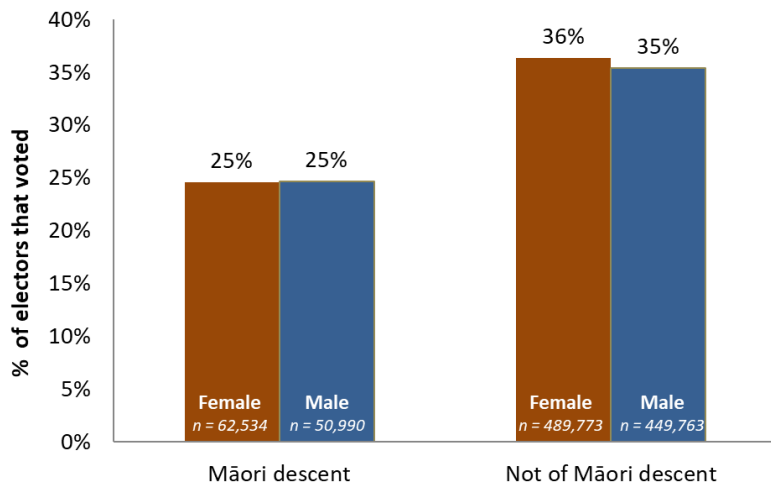
Further analysis by age shows some small differences between female and male electors, with turnout for the former being 1-2 percentage points higher between the ages of 35 and 65, but 2-5 percentage points lower from age 70 onwards.



Further analysis by Māori descent status shows no additional differences by gender (i.e. males and females of Māori descent vote at the same rates; and males and females who are not of Māori descent vote at the same rates).

<sup>3</sup> Gender was primarily assigned to each individual using gendered titles (i.e. female from 'Ms', 'Mrs', 'Dame' etc., male from 'Mr', 'Sir' etc.; and gender diverse from 'Mx'). Where the title did not denote a gender (e.g. 'Dr'), an individual's first and middle names were used to assign a gender, drawing on a list of gendered names from Victoria University of Wellington.

<sup>4</sup> Electors who had enrolled using an 'Mx' title.

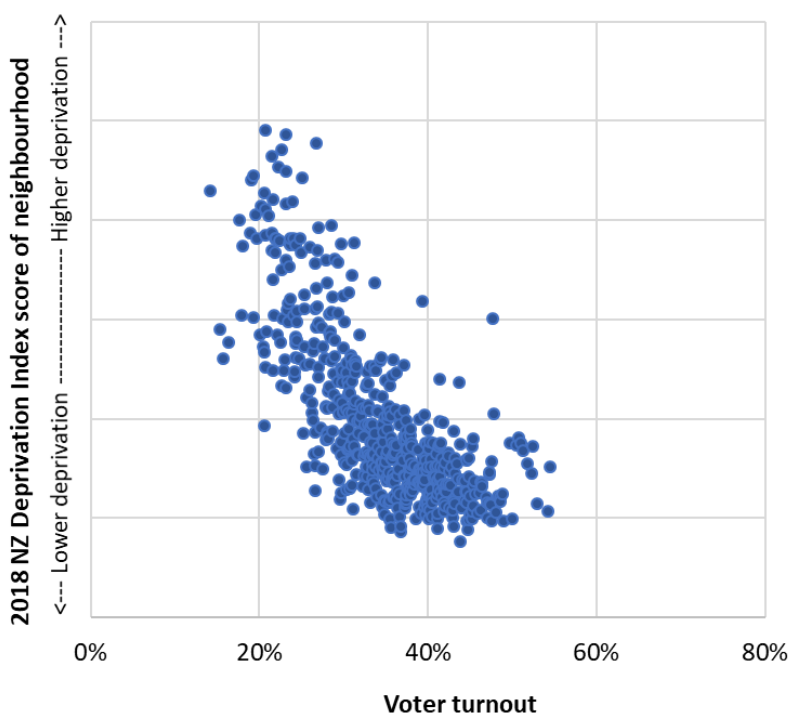


## Turnout varies dramatically across Auckland’s neighbourhoods

Voter turnout was notably lower in southern areas of Auckland, as well as in pockets of west Auckland, the Glen Innes area on the Auckland isthmus and the Glenfield area on the north shore. Rural and coastal areas tended to have higher turnout than other parts of Auckland. Three maps are provided on the following pages, showing turnout at neighbourhood areas overall, and for Māori descent and not of Māori descent separately.

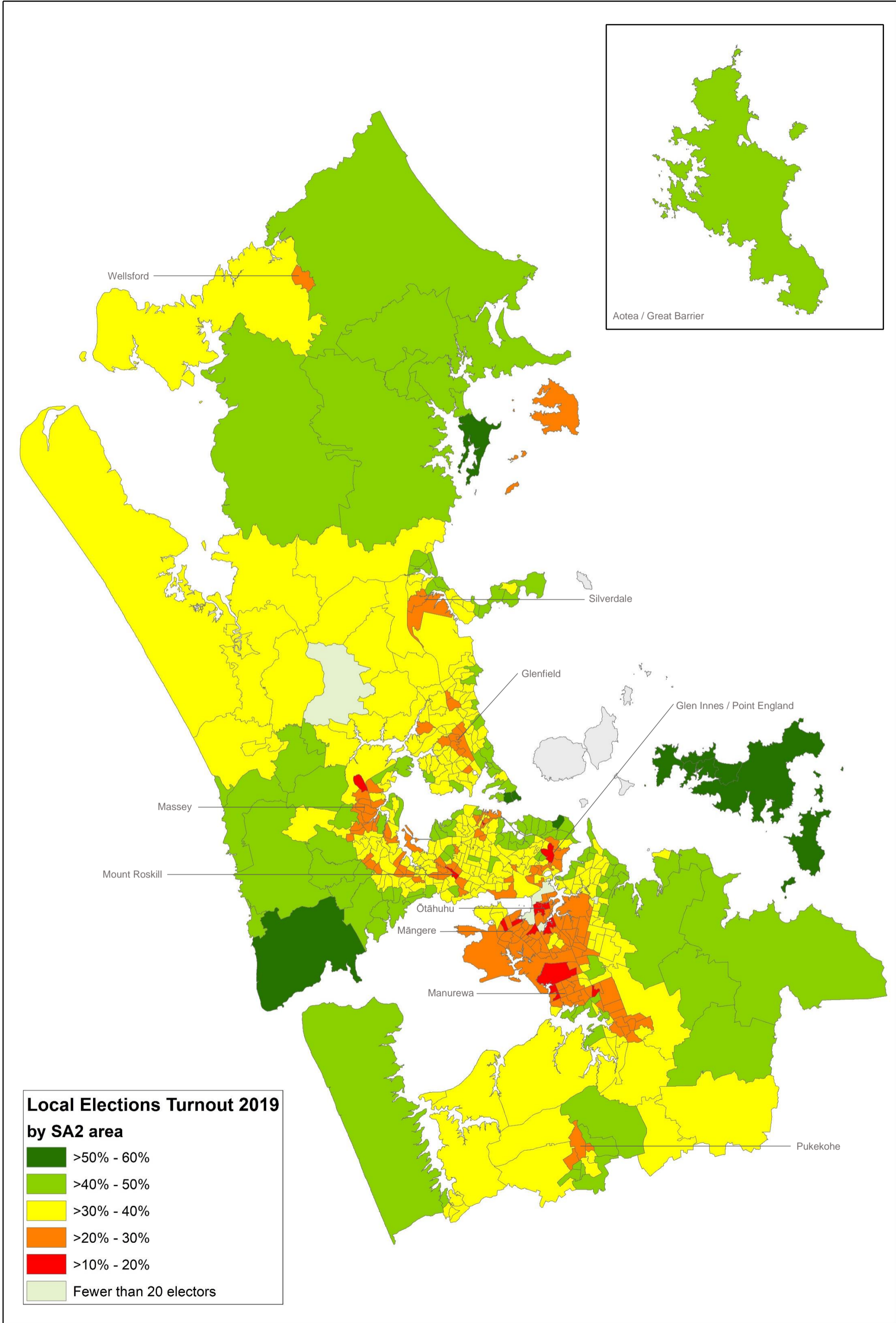
## Voter turnout is (inversely) related to neighbourhood deprivation

The maps of turnout across Auckland presented on the following pages mirror the distribution of socio-economic deprivation across Auckland. Plotting each neighbourhood’s 2018 New Zealand Deprivation Index<sup>5</sup> score against voter turnout shows that there is a strong negative correlation between the two ( $r = -0.74$ ), showing that people living in areas with higher socio-economic deprivation were less likely to vote than other Aucklanders.



<sup>5</sup> <https://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/departments/publichealth/research/hipr/otago020194.html>

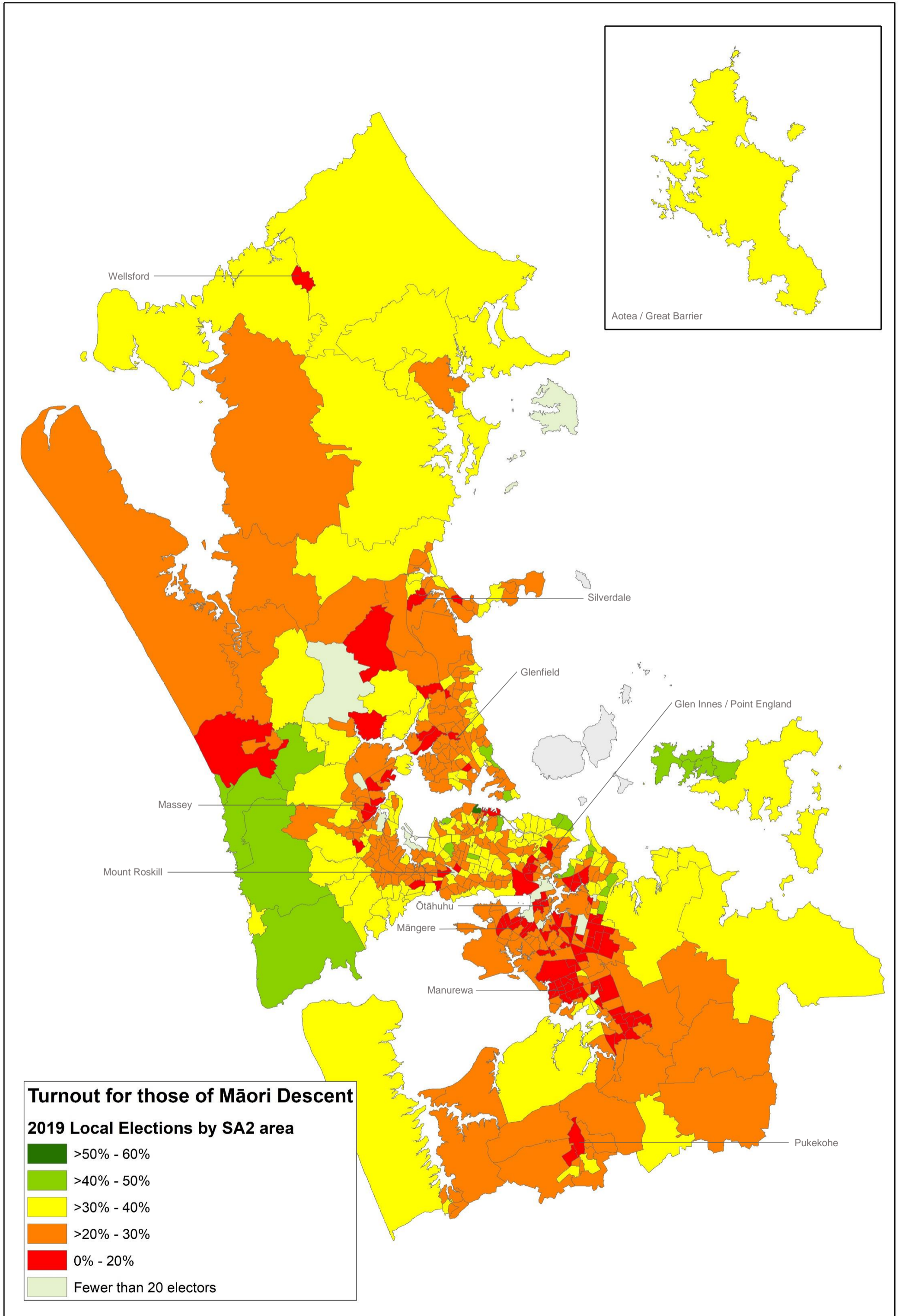
Proportion of electors who voted at 2019 Auckland Council elections, by Statistical Area 2 (SA2)







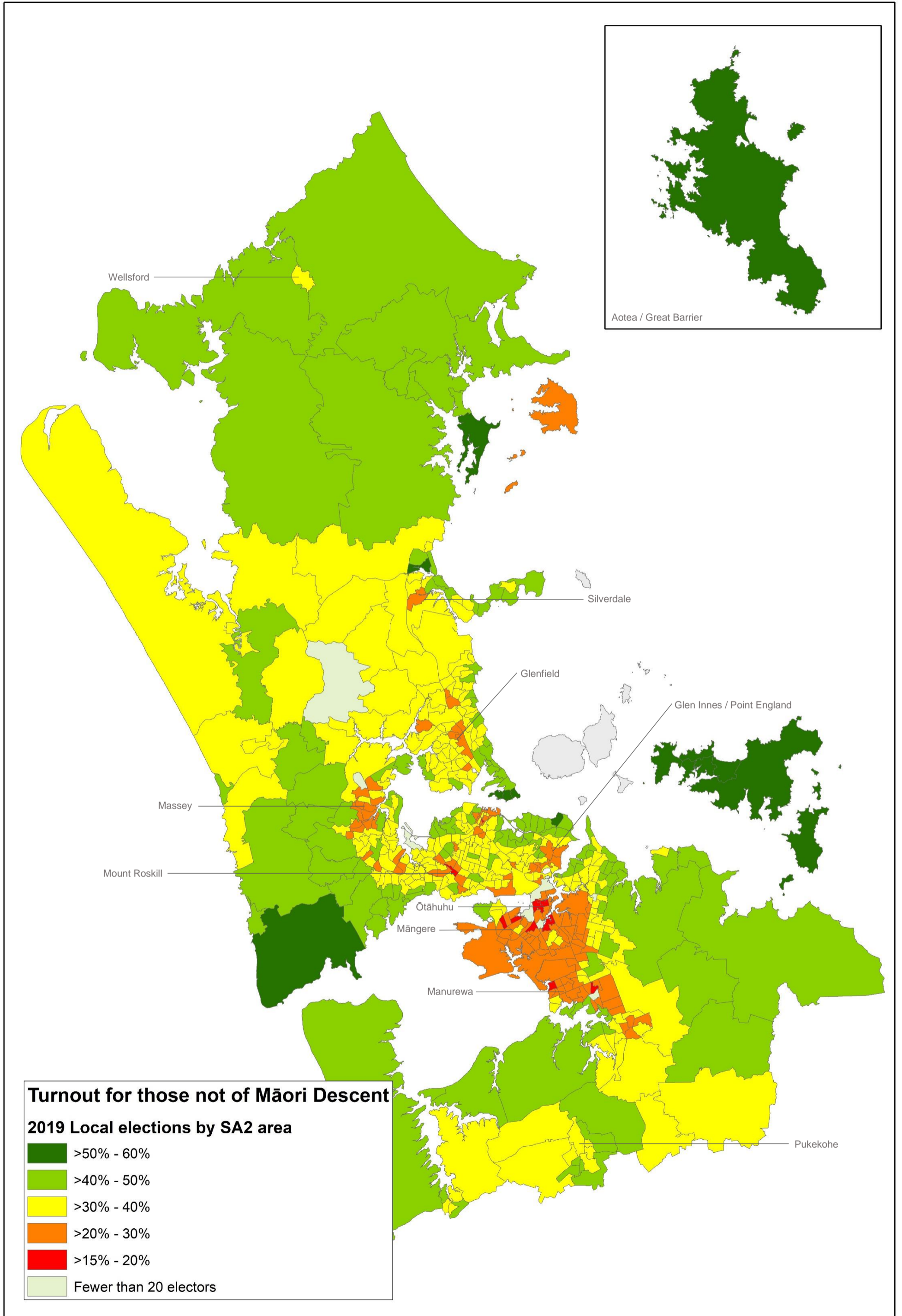
Proportion of electors of Māori descent who voted at 2019 Auckland Council elections, by Statistical Area 2 (SA2)







Proportion of electors not of Māori descent who voted at 2019 Auckland Council elections, by Statistical Area 2 (SA2)





## Implications

The voter turnout statistics presented above reveal stark discrepancies in who is and is not voting across Auckland. They show large differences by age, Māori descent status, location and neighbourhood deprivation.

A range of interrelated factors may be contributing to these discrepancies, including:

- Differences in the perceived relevance of local government to the everyday life of different communities
- Differences in family and work commitments and an ability to pay attention to local politics
- The complexity of the local government system and voting process, along with differences in knowledge about local government across communities in Auckland
- For some communities, a lack of identification with and ability to see one's identity reflected in the local governance system
- A distrust of and disengagement from the local government system, particularly amongst Māori
- The development of a social norm of non-voting in some families, neighbourhoods and communities.

Although the causes for different levels of voter engagement across Auckland are complex and difficult to fix, the information contained in this report will provide useful assistance to those looking to increase voting in different communities across Auckland.

In 2019 Auckland Council ran a large-scale field trial of different messages and approaches to encourage Aucklanders to vote. Results from this trial are expected to be published in April 2020 (the electronic version of this document will be updated with a link to this report when it is published).

For further details on anything in this report please contact

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