Hot off the press, 26 days post-election and the formation of the 52nd New Zealand Government is pretty much in the bag.

For our Australian readers, under mixed-member proportional (MMP) voting, the party who receives the largest share of the vote (unless they achieve a clear majority) is not necessarily able to form government. Yesterday’s announcement demonstrates that despite much posturing post-election, no party has the ‘moral majority’ under MMP. If parties demonstrate that they can work together, and that combined they have enough seats to establish a majority in parliament, they are permitted to form government.

The outcome of post-election negotiations demonstrates what is possible under MMP; the adoption of which (in my view) has taken us a step closer to true democracy. Although we now have a record number of Māori MPs in parliament – which is worthy of celebration – there are still many significant challenges for Māori within our current political system, including low voter participation, and a party representation system that tends to pit Māori against each other.

As Māori, we have a historically uneasy relationship with te pōti (the vote). When voting was granted to Māori, it was assigned based on individual land title (although Māori land was held collectively at a hapū level) – one of the many ways the new imposed colonial political system sought to disenfranchise Māori. We still have amongst the lowest voting rates of any demographic group, with many of our whenau still firmly believing that their vote cannot and will not make a difference in a pākehā system that is rigged against them.

The Māori seats were a hot topic this election (with one prominent veteran politician vowing to abolish them pre-election.) The unfortunate demise of the Māori party demands reflection and re-evaluation about how to best ensure an independent Māori voice in parliament. How can we ensure our elected Māori representatives have a degree of autonomy and independence to represent their constituents, without being compromised by their own party’s political position?

The challenge moving forward is, how can we shift our political system to truly reflect the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi, our founding document, and, in the view of many, our unwritten constitution. If we were to take our Treaty partnership seriously, what could our political system look like? What form might our political representation take if it was based on our equal relationship under Te Tiriti, and not on our population as a proportion of the total? This matter has been given serious and considered thought by our Māori intellectual leaders, such as Moana Jackson, Margaret Mutu, and others. We should and must keep having these conversations.

In the lead up to the election, we took an in-depth look at each of the different political parties’ housing policies, with a focus on what these all mean for Māori. For each of the parties, we asked ourselves two questions: will it work, and will it make a difference for Māori? The answers were, predictably, along the lines of ‘yes – but…’, or ‘partially – but only for xyz demographic group’, ‘maybe – but it would work better in conjunction with xyz policy’. Most were basically workable, and most could be improved.

The point was not to tell voters who to vote for (if they voted only on policy, and if their priority issue was housing), rather, to unpack the various policies and piece them together to achieve a better Māori housing outcome.

In completing our analysis, we were encouraged to see a great deal of convergence in policy approaches to addressing housing issues and homelessness, with broad general agreement across the parties to support our most vulnerable, and stabilise the housing market to ensure secure and affordable housing for all. We made a point of considering how the various potential coalition partners’ policies might work together.

Post-election, we issued press statements reiterating our interest in, and commitment to, working with whoever forms government under MMP, to bring expediency and certainty to Māori housing.

We were concerned about the loss of the Māori Party, but also optimistic about our ability to work with whoever formed government. Maintaining our independence and the integrity of the kaupapa, whilst also maintaining a close relationship with government, is a balancing act, and the loss of the Māori Party is a cautionary tale in some respects.

Whilst I am quietly optimistic about the outcome of this election, I continue to have concerns about a political system that does not truly represent Māori or acknowledge our partnership under Te Tiriti. However, I firmly believe that while our social aims should be radical, our tactics are necessarily pragmatic and centrist because we need to be effective.

We cannot afford to be otherwise.

Endnote
1. Be ready, be vigilant
Kaupapa Māori Rites of a passage Kārero with Te Raina Ferris Hosts: Tiaki Coates and Kirialana Wilson. Poutama Rites of Passage.
19 June at 03:25. Kia hiwa rā, kia hiwa rā! Register your interest at https://tinyurl.com/y9u2g4v4 by Tue 3 July. Spaces are limited.
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Kia hiwa rā! 1298x828 Info. Important Information. Learner Rights and Responsibilities Kia hiwa ra! Kia hiwa ra! Te Kura Matakini ki Otago, Otago Polytechnic is committed to providing an environment that is enjoyable, safe and secure for all learners, staff and visitors. Important Information. Learner Rights and Responsibilities Kia hiwa ra! Kia hiwa ra! Te Kura Matakini ki Otago, Otago Polytechnic is committed to providing an environment that is enjoyable, safe and secure for all learners, staff and visitors. Introduction.