

Results from the IGPS March 2020 Trust Survey

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Introduction

This working paper reports the results from the 2020 Institute for Governance and Policy Studies (IGPS) public trust survey. The IGPS had previously surveyed public trust in 2016, 2018, 2019 (twice, once before and once after the Christchurch mosque shootings).

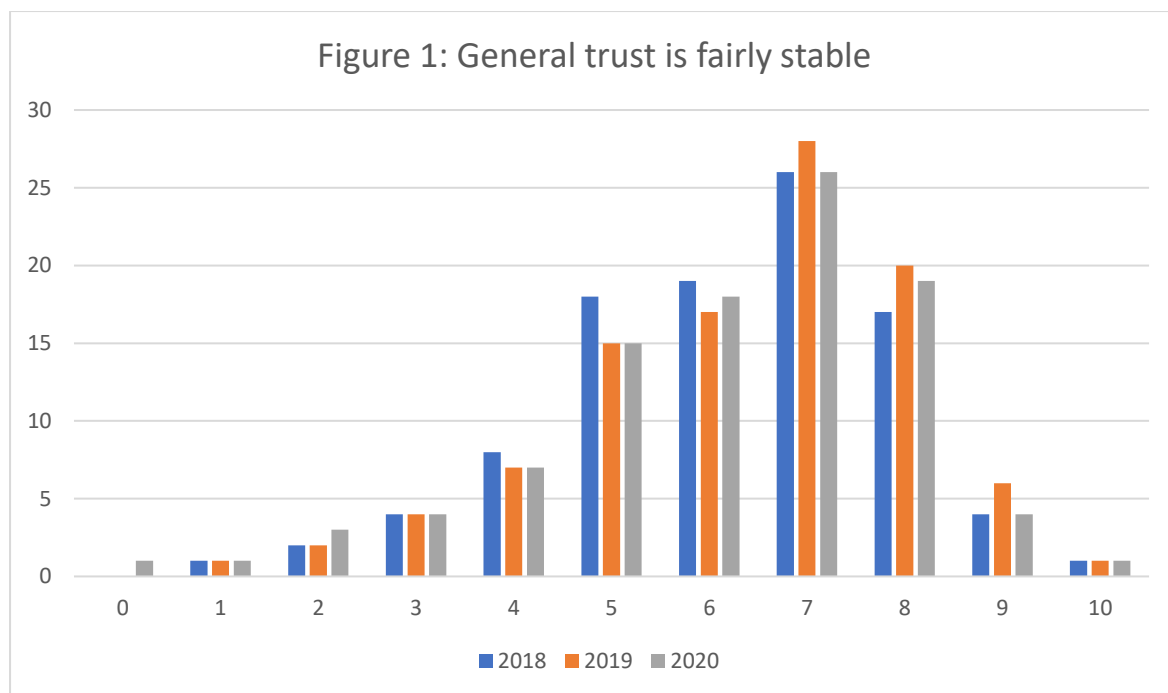
The 2020 data collection repeated most of the same questions as the earlier surveys.

However, because 2020 is an election year, a special module was incorporated addressing issues surrounding the health of democracy in New Zealand. The IGPS intends a general publication in this area to encourage New Zealanders to think, discuss and debate these issues during an election year.

The survey was completed before the 24 March announcement of the level 4 lockdown of the country to prevent coronavirus spread. Data for our 2020 survey was collected from the 25 February to 9 March. New Zealand's first CCovid-19 case was detected on February 28. And on 9 March when the survey ended there were still only five detected cases. It was on 11 March that the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic. Hence, we are confident that there is little impact of New Zealand's experience of Covid-19 in our results.

General trust

We asked: "On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, in general how much do you trust most people? The base was all respondents, with 2020 $n=1,002$; 2019 $n=1,000$; 2018 $n=500$. The mean value was 6.1 in 2020, compared to 6.4 in 2019 and 6.2 in 2018. Given the standard deviations was 1.85 in 2020, these are small effect sizes.



Trust in institutions

We asked New Zealanders how much trust they had in a variety of institutions – 15 in total – to “do the right thing?”. People had five options: “complete trust”, “lots of trust”, “some trust”, “little trust” or “no trust”. We have asked this question in 2016, 2018, 2019 and now 2020.

Table 1 shows that Medical Practitioners and Police are in the highest trust binary cluster in 2020, with about two thirds of the population giving them “lots” or “complete” trust (“high” trust below). Then follow another cluster – this time of three institutions – Schools, Judges and Courts, and Universities – where roughly half the population gives them high trust.

All other institutions have well under one half of the population placing them in the high trust category. The next on the list, working down, is Small Business, with just over one third of the New Zealanders giving them a high level of trust. This Small Business result compares to much lower trust in Big Business - slightly more than one in ten of the population have high trust in this group.

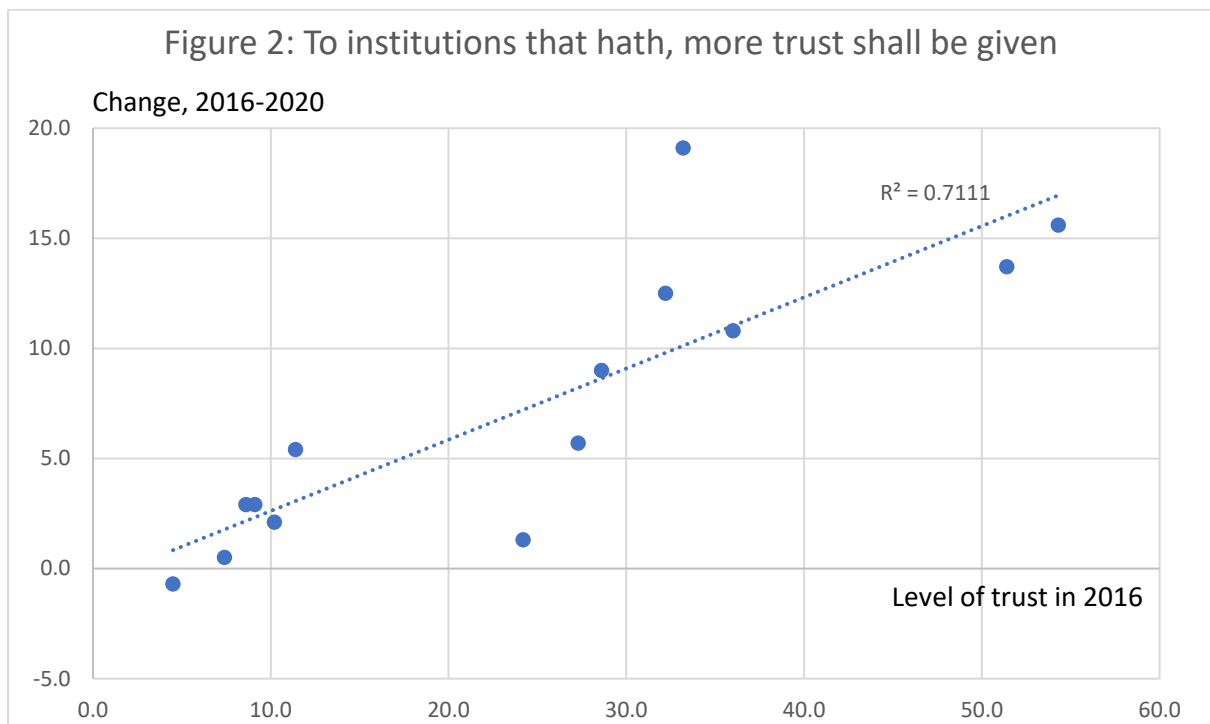
Also at the low trust end of the spectrum are various government groups. Local government fares the best of this low trust cluster. The two least trusted of low trust institutions are bloggers and online commentators, and a brand-new political entrant – political parties (2020 was the first time we included this institution). Political parties are lowest trusted of any group related to government, being moderately less well trusted than both Government Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Table 1: Trust in institutions, % with “lots” or “complete” trust, ranked high to low on 2016 levels

	2016	2018	2019	2020	Change 2016- 2020
Medical practitioners	54.3	58.1	65.8	69.9	15.6
Police	51.4	55.8	64.5	65.1	13.7
Schools	36.0	36.8	45.2	46.8	10.8
Judges & Courts	33.2	40.2	49.5	52.3	19.1
Universities	32.2	30.5	44.1	44.7	12.5
Small business	28.6	29.2	36.4	37.6	9.0
Charities	27.3	25.3	33.2	33.0	5.7
Churches	24.2	21.2	25.4	25.5	1.3
Local Government	11.4	14.8	17.5	16.8	5.4
Corporations & Big business	10.2	9.9	10.7	12.3	2.1
Government Ministers	9.1	13.2	13.0	12.0	2.9
TV/Print media	8.6	8.0	10.0	11.5	2.9
Members of Parliament	7.4	12.0	9.1	7.9	0.5
Bloggers and online commentators	4.5	4.9	3.9	3.8	-0.7
Political parties	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.9	N/A

In terms of changes in institutional trust since 2016, there is strong evidence of a “Matthew effect” (so named from the phrase “to he that hath shall be given”, from the Book of Matthew in the Bible) in our group trust series (see Figure 2). There is a strong positive correlation ($r=0.84$) between the initial baseline level of trust in the 14 institutions we have trust information about in 2016 and the change in that level of trust to 2020. At the bottom end of the scale there has been little change in trust – there are no institutions for which trust has

noticeably fallen. The biggest rise in trust has been in Judges and Counts, the number of high trust responses rising by nearly 20 percentage points.



Trust in groups

Table 2 shows the pattern of trust in groups over 2016 to 2020. The main pattern is a rise in trust in terms of reflect trust in government to do what is right for New Zealand and trust in government to solve national problems. Trust in the way political parties are funded remains at a very low levels throughout the survey.

Table 2: Trust in groups, % responding "A reasonable amount" or "a great deal", ranked high to low on 2016 levels

Trust....	2016	2018	2019	2020	Change 2016- 2020
...in your neighbours to make informed choices about the future	65.9	63.7	65.2	61.6	-4.3
...in your fellow New Zealanders to make informed choices about the future	53.5	52.0	54.0	49.1	-4.4
...in your local MP to do what is right for you and community	50.1	54.7	53.5	52.6	2.5
...in your local government to deal successfully with local problems	49.1	50.8	50.9	49.9	0.8
...in the government to do what is right for New Zealand	46.5	64.7	62.5	60.7	14.2
...in the government to deal successfully with national problems	45.0	58.0	58.6	58.8	13.8
...in the government to deal successfully with international problems	44.8	49.8	53.9	52.5	7.7
...in the extent New Zealand citizens interests are equally and fairly considered	38.0	49.3	50.2	47.7	9.7
...in the way in which political parties are funded	24.9	27.7	28.9	25.0	0.1

Corruption

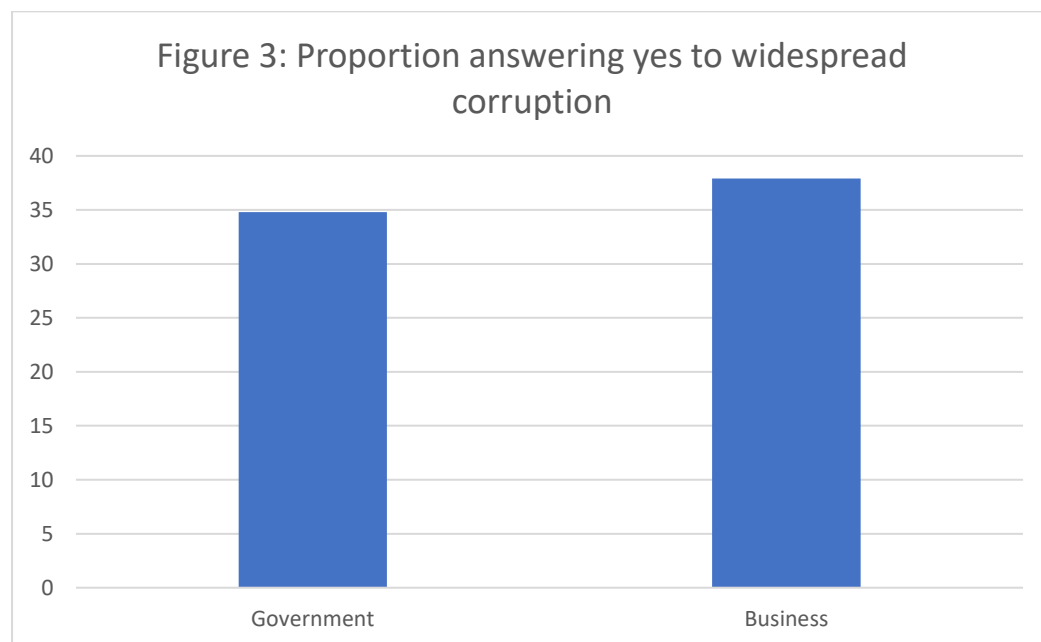
The following question on government corruption was asked from 2016:

Is corruption widespread throughout the government in New Zealand or not?

In 2020 a symmetrical question was added about corruption in business:

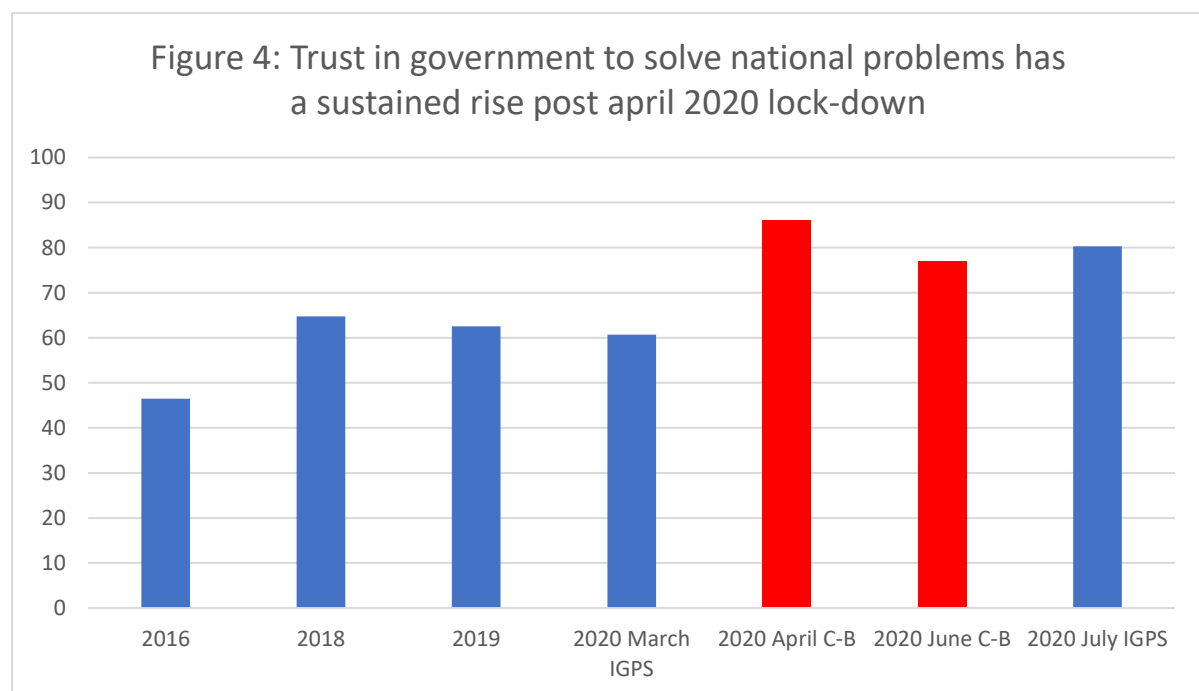
Is corruption widespread throughout business in New Zealand or not?

The good news in Figure 3 is that a majority of New Zealanders do not think corruption is widespread in either government or business. The bad news is that over one third of New Zealanders see corruption as widespread in government, and just under four in ten see corruption as widespread in business in 2020. In terms of size, these are significant minorities of the population.



Coronavirus and trust in government to solve national problems

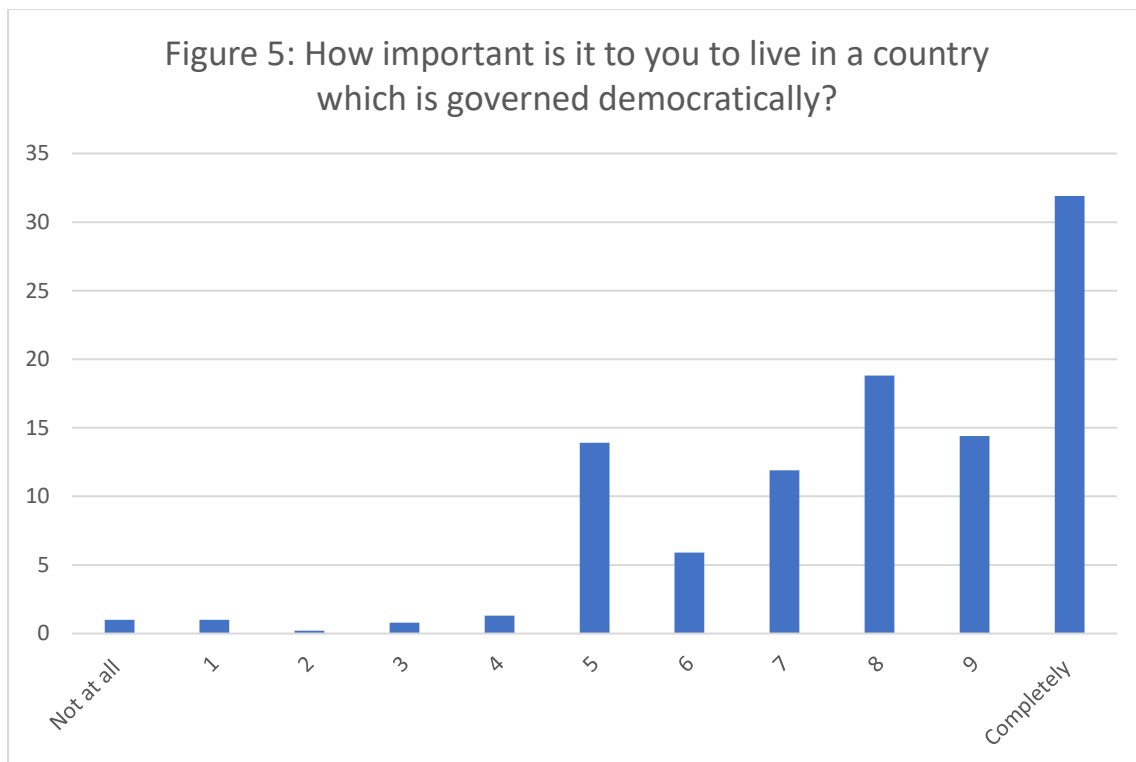
Our March survey was collected before the nation-wide coronavirus lockdown occurred and before the WHO declared a pandemic. Figure 4 presents the proportion of respondents who ticked “A Great Deal” or “A Reasonable Amount” of trust in government to solve national problems from our survey 2016-2020 (March). It charts two additional observations (April and June) collected by Colmar Brunton (C-B) for their “Covid Times Survey” and then a July figure collected from the second wave of the IGPS/Roy McKenzie Covid-19 survey. Figure 4 reveals that, following its large rise between 2016 and 2018, the slow erosion in government trust from 2018 to March 2020 was reversed during the Level 4 lockdown and largely sustained at very high levels thereafter.



Democracy special

As it is election year in 2020 and internationally there are widespread concerns that democracy is undergoing unusually high stresses, in our 2020 survey we decided to add a number of questions which were designed to consider the health of democracy in New Zealand.

We asked people two questions about democracy. The first asked people about the importance of living in a democratic country on a ten-point scale, where 0 was not at all important and 10 was completely important. The results, shown in Figure 5, suggest that New Zealanders overall were strongly committed to democracy as a shared value, with a plurality of nearly one third recording the maximum 10 on the scale, 77% recording a score of 7 or over on the scale and only 4% being under the mid-point of 5.



The second question asked people about how democratically they thought New Zealand was being governed currently. Figure 6 shows that New Zealanders, while placing a high value on

democracy, are less convinced that the country is being governed democratically. The mode is 5 compared to the mode of 10 for commitment to democracy. Nevertheless, nearly 80 percent of people reported at the mid-point and above.

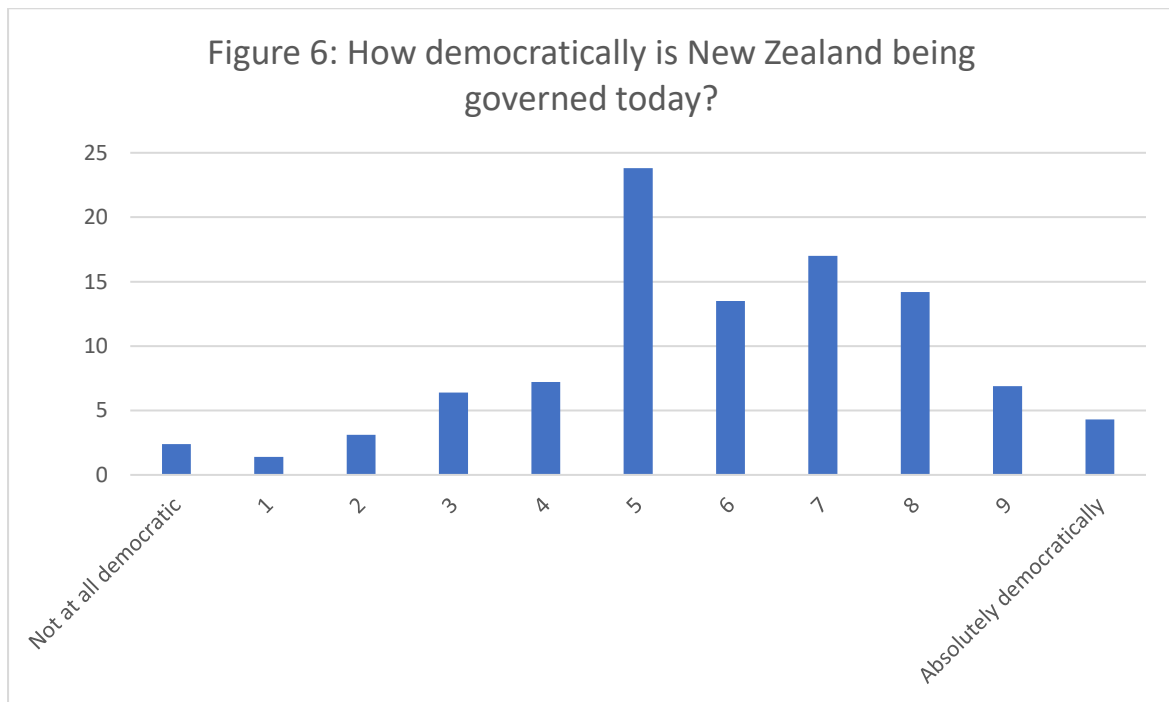
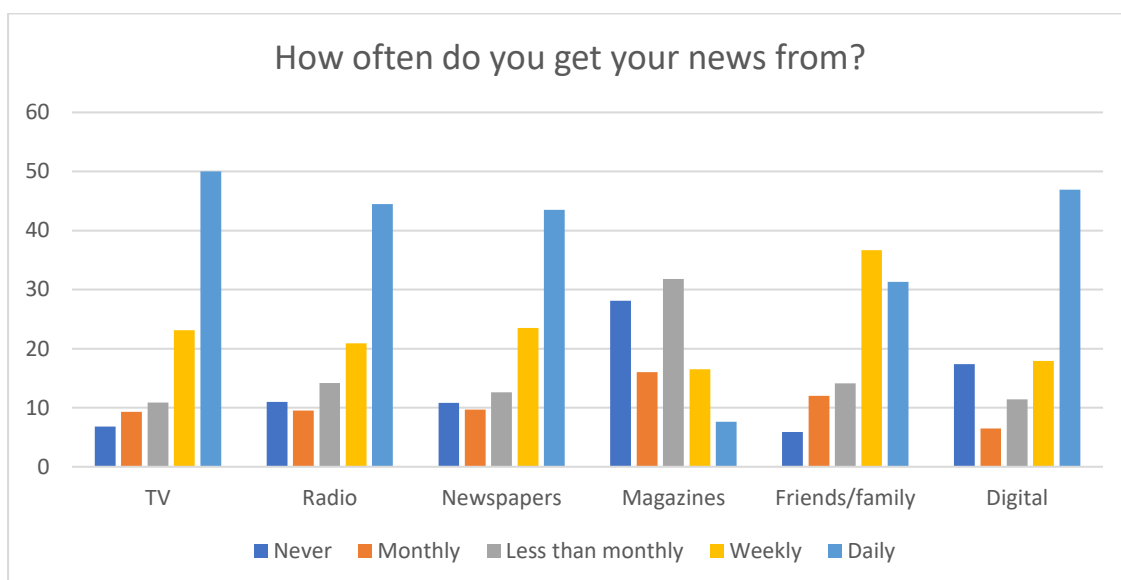
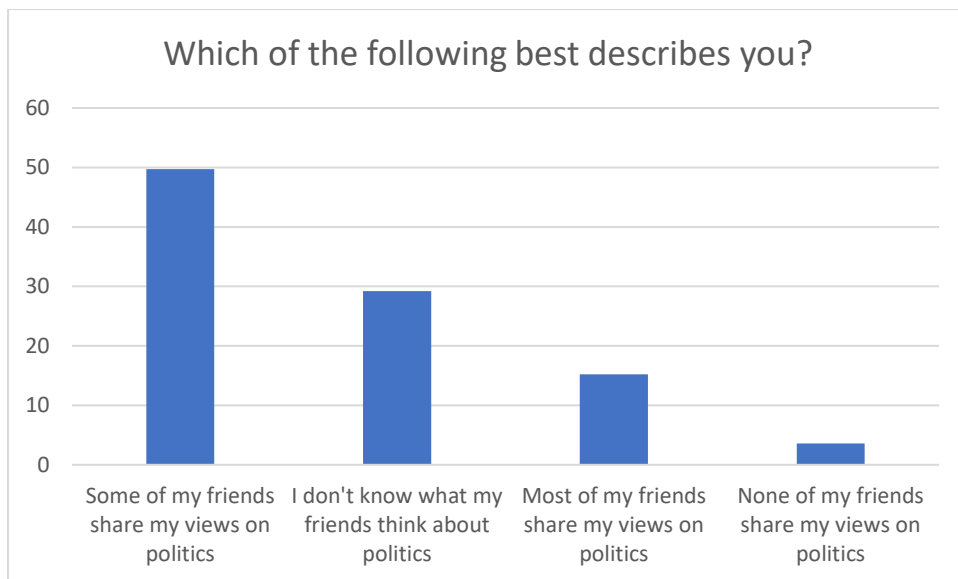


Figure 7 addresses the issue of information bubbles in terms of friendship networks. It suggests little strong evidence of people being in friend networks which are mostly consistent with one view, which is a positive sign. Figure 8 addresses sources of information in a broader sense, including media. Digital media is used roughly as regularly as newspapers and radio, with television leading the pack.



We also asked respondents whether they were a member of a political party. 93.3% people were not members of a political party, 4.5% were members of a NZ political party and 2.2% responded not applicable.