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A GRANULAR PICTURE OF DIVERSITY AND DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION IN NSW COUNCILS

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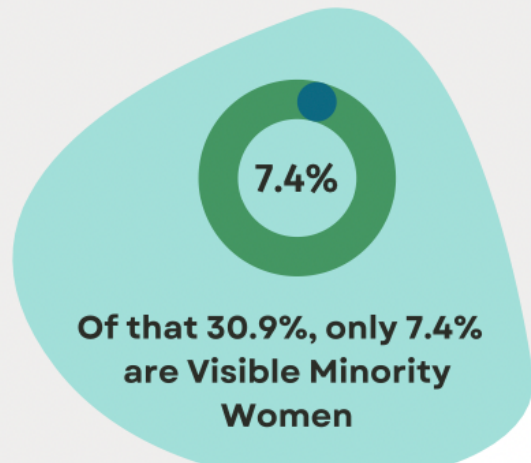
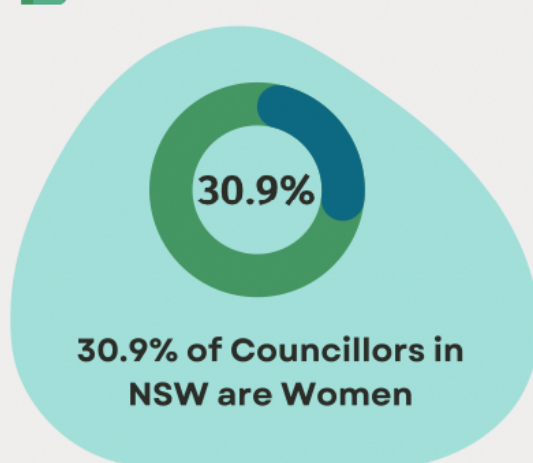
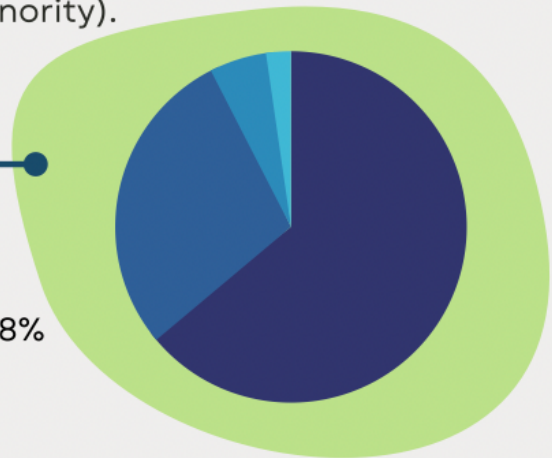
How Diverse are NSW Councils?

Descriptive representation by ethnicity and gender:

The following data provides a snapshot of the characteristics of NSW Councillors as of October 2021, identifying the extent of over/under-representation according to gender and ancestry: Anglo-Celtic/other European (white) and non-European ancestry (visible minority).

New South Wales

- White Men: 63.81%
- White Women: 28.57%
- Visible Minority Men: 5.33%
- Visible Minority Women: 2.28%



INTRODUCTION

As a liberal democratic political system, Australia's elected representatives should reflect the population of the society they govern, including in local government. As of 2017, the average councillor in NSW's 128 councils is an English-speaking male aged 60-69 (OLG 2017: 8). Only 31.2% of councillors are women and only 10% speak a language other than English at home compared to 26.5% state-wide (OLG 2017). The Office for Local Government's (OLG) *NSW Candidate and Councillor Diversity Report 2017* usefully identifies several forms of over- and under-representation, however, 'race' and its intersections with gender are currently missing in our picture of the diversity of NSW councils. This gap is important to fill given only 4.1% of MPs and Senators in Federal government are of non-European ancestry (Soutphommasane 2017).

We therefore sought to present a more granular picture of NSW councils that aimed to answer the following:

- What percentage of NSW councillors are of European/non-European ancestry?
- How does 'race' intersect with gender in patterns of under/over-representation?
- How do these patterns differ geographically across regions in NSW and Greater Sydney?

By answering these questions we aim to provide a more accurate picture as to the diversity of NSW councillors as of September 2021. This data can become a baseline to track the progress, if any, in addressing underrepresentation of key groups in the upcoming elections on 4th December 2021. We also hope these findings can assist in policy making and the allocation of resources to improve the diversity of local government in NSW.

TERMINOLOGY

In this report we use the terms European to refer to Anglo-Celtic and other 'white' European ancestry, and non-European to refer to other hyphenated identities. 'European' ancestry affords privileges and 'social invisibility' in the Australian context, while people of non-European ancestry are subject to racial categorization on account of their name, phenotypical features, skin colour or religion (Stratton 2016). We do not use the term 'Cultural and Linguistic Diversity' (CALD) that is frequently used in discussions of diversity, usually captured through language (including OLG 2017). The term includes people from non-English speaking European ancestry, such as speakers of Italian and Greek, who are socially categorised as 'white' in the Australian context. CALD diversity may also fail to capture racialized minorities including Asian Australians, many of whom are multi-generational Australians speaking English at home.

In Australian politics, the European/non-European distinction has proven most useful in presenting the overrepresentation of 'white' Australians, and the underrepresentation of Asian-Australians in particular (Kwok and Pietsch 2017). We do not undertake a separate analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to the limitations inherent within the methodology. 24 councillors self-identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander across NSW (OLG 2017: 14). We recognise their special status as First Nations Australians and the heightened need to ensure they are adequately represented in all levels of government, including and beyond descriptive representation.

METHODOLOGY

To capture the percentage of European and non-European ancestry on NSW councils we developed a method of classification deployed in studies of local government in the United Kingdom (Thrasher et al. 2013; Muroki and Cowley 2019). Three researchers individually visited the website of each council in Greater Sydney and classified each councillor as being of European or Non-European descent based on an observation of their physical appearance, their full name, and other available information on their profile.¹ We compared our findings and arrived at an agreed upon classification

for each councillor. Such classification is especially complex in the Australian context for reasons we outline below, but has nonetheless been used to categorise leaders as having a particular cultural background in the absence of other data (Soutphommasane 2017). Having completed the task collectively for Greater Sydney, councillors in regional and rural councils with less diversity were classified by one researcher only, then cross-checked by another.

Judgements based on physical appearance alone is problematic to classify European/non-European councillors. The distinction nonetheless matters, as Muslim councillors in particular often face additional forms of discrimination, particularly if they have Arab, Turkish or Lebanese ancestry. Hence it is important to consider given and family names, but these too are problematic as many names originate across large geographical areas, and women often change their family names after marriage. Identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councillors is highly fraught, as there are fewer cues through appearance or name and we often had to draw upon our knowledge of individual councillors. The discrepancies across our initial classifications underline the need for caution when interpreting our findings. We agreed upon only 20 out of 34 councils in our initial classifications, with 14 subject to scrutiny before arriving at our final agreed upon classification. It is also difficult to assume one's gender based solely on physical appearance, and our data did not capture any gender-diverse or non-binary councillors. The data, gathered through judgement calls rather than self-identification, is therefore less than 100% reliable. The findings should be read with caution.

We only counted councillors holding their positions as of September 2021. We did not include councils currently under administration, nor individual councillors who had resigned or passed away since the 2017 elections. These councillors were not always available on council websites.

FINDINGS

With these qualifications in mind, we present the findings across three sections; Greater Sydney councils, non-Metropolitan councils, and consolidated findings across New South Wales.

CONSOLIDATED FINDINGS OF NSW COUNCILS

NSW is made up of 137 councils, with a total of 1274 councillors as of September 2021. The overall findings reveal that for every 100 councillors, there are only 8 non-European councillors. New South Wales has a total of 881 male councillors, and 393 female councillors. Out of 881 male councillors, only 67 are of non-European descent, and out of 393 female councillors, only 29 are considered to be Non-European. Non-European councillors only make up 7.54% of all New South Wales councillors. 'White' men are significantly overrepresented, 'white' women are slightly underrepresented, and both men and women of non-European ancestry are significantly underrepresented. The most alarming statistic is that women of non-European ancestry only make up 2.28% of all NSW councillors.

Table 1: Under/over-representation by gender and ancestry in NSW

	Number of Councillors	Percentage Councillors
Men -European ancestry	813	63.81%
Women- European ancestry	364	28.57%
Men -non-European ancestry	68	5.33%
Women-non-European ancestry	29	2.28%
Total	1274	

The data from the classification of councillors shows a different picture to that captured in the OLG diversity report for the 2017 elections where language is used as a proxy for cultural diversity. They find that 8.2% of councillors speak a language other than English at home compared to 26.5% of NSW's population, with Italian, Arabic and Greek the top three languages (OLG 2017: 15). Our finding

of 7.54% is lower, but more importantly, captures the representation of racialized minorities, excluding European 'white' and including those who are English speaking. Most critically, disaggregated by gender, our data shows women of 'colour' to be significantly underrepresented. The over-representation of men of European ancestry and significant under-representation of both men and women of non-European ancestry, means that local governments in NSW are not representative of the diverse citizens they are voted to represent.

GREATER SYDNEY

The Greater Sydney region is made up of 35 councils, with a total of 412 councillors as of September 2021, with 263 male councillors and 149 female councillors. Out of 263 male councillors, only 59 are of non-European descent, and out of 149 female councillors, only 25 women are non-European descent. In total, non-European councillors only make up around 20% of all Greater Sydney councillors. Blacktown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Canada Bay and Strathfield councils have the greatest diversity, with the proportion of councillors being nearly equal, if not equal, across gender and European/non-European classification. Ten councils have no non-European female or male councillors.

We then compared the percentage of councillors in Greater Sydney with an estimate of their numbers in the population. Census data does not capture 'ethnicity', so we took the 2016 census data for 'ancestry by country of birth of parents', categorising the top 124 according to European and non-European in the ABS ASCCEG (see footnote 1) . We combined the number of people under non-European ancestry classifications (1,887,304) and European ancestry as (4,108,629). The percentage of the general population of Greater Sydney was thereby calculated to be 31.5 per cent non-European ancestry, and 68.5 per cent European ancestry.ⁱⁱ These numbers likely under-estimate the percentage of the former, as they are based on the birthplace of parents, and hence would not capture non-European Australians who have migrated to Australia three or more generations back. We have also made assumptions of a 50/50 split between men and women, not counting non-binary individuals nor accounting for differences in gender across ancestry groups. Again, we urge caution in the reading of our findings.

Table 2: Under/over-representation by gender and ancestry - Greater Sydney councils

	Number of Councillors	Percentage Councillors	Percentage Population	+/- representation
Men -European ancestry	204	49.51%	34.25%	+15.26%
Women- European ancestry	124	30.09%	34.25%	-4.16%
Men -non-European ancestry	59	14.32%	15.75%	-1.43%
Women-non-European ancestry	25	6.06%	15.75%	-9.69%
Total	412			

Using the same approach as Muroki and Cowley (2019), Table 2 presents the data comparing different categories of councillors with their percentage in the population to arrive at the extent of under/over-representation. Unsurprisingly, men of European ancestry (Anglo-Celtic/white European) are significantly overrepresented (+15.26%) relative to their numbers in the population. Perhaps more surprising given the focus on increasing the representation of women, 'white' women of European ancestry are only slightly underrepresented (-4.16%), with men having non-European ancestry being marginally underrepresented (-1.43%). The most underrepresented group are women having non-European ancestry, underrepresented by -9.69% points.

We next wanted to test for differences across LGAs with a higher concentration of either 'white' or visible minority groups. The 'Red Rooster' line, first developed by University of Sydney students Chrysanthos and Ding (2017), is a crude division of the city into areas with a more diverse mix of culture and ethnicity south of the line, compared to the less diverse areas north of the line, initially

based on presence of different types of fast food restaurants. This line has since been used to see how the city is split in terms of income, housing density, and more recently, differences in lockdown measures due to Covid. While crude, we wanted to test the extent to which representation patterns also reflected these differences. We counted 14 councils north of the line, and the same number south of the line. We did not include councils nominally within Greater Sydney but which are distinct from metropolitan councils (such as Blue Mountains and Wollongong). We do not account for how ancestry differs in the general population between these two broad areas.

Tables 3 and 4 outline these findings. The extent of the overrepresentation of 'white' men remains similar, +12.14% north of the line, and +13.62% south of the line. The difference lies in which other groups are overrepresented: 'white' women north of the line (+6.11%) and men having non-European ancestry south of the line (+3.40%). Women having non-European ancestry remain underrepresented both north and south of the line (-14.55% and -8.31% respectively). Despite possible differences in demographics, men of non-European ancestry still achieve 12.04% representation north of the line, while women comprise a tiny 1.20% of councillors, reflecting severe underrepresentation. There are significant differences in gender: women comprise 42% of councillors north of the line, but only 32% south of the line.

Table 3: Under/over-representation by gender and ancestry north of the Red Rooster line

	Number of Councillors	Percentage Councillors	Percentage Population	+/- representation
Men, European ancestry	77	46.39%	34.25%	+12.14%
Women, European ancestry	67	40.36%	34.25%	+6.11%
Men, non-European ancestry	20	12.04%	15.75%	-3.71%
Women, non-European ancestry	2	1.20%	15.75%	-14.55%
Total	166			

Table 4: Under/over-representation by gender and ancestry south of the red rooster line

	Number of Councillors	Percentage Councillors	Percentage Population	+/- representation
Men -European ancestry	90	47.87%	34.25%	+13.62%
Women- European ancestry	47	25.0%	34.25%	-9.25%
Men -non-European ancestry	36	19.15%	15.75%	+3.40%
Women-non-European ancestry	14	7.44%	15.75%	-8.31%
Total	188			

These findings suggest that we need to do better than simply examine the percentage of women elected in local government across NSW to break down exactly which women are underrepresented, and where. While it is critical that women are elected in councils where there is a strong presence of ethnic minorities, their near absence in the north despite considerable presence in the population is also worthy of concern. The data also suggests that one of the biggest barriers to greater diversity on NSW councils is the continued overrepresentation of white men.

NON-METROPOLITAN COUNCILS

The Non-Metropolitan region is made up of 102 councils, with a total of 862 councillors. As of September 2021, there were a total of 618 male councillors and 244 female councillors. Female councillors are underrepresented, with councillors of non-European ancestry extremely underrepresented. Whilst it was expected that Greater Sydney would have more diverse councils when compared to rural NSW, the total of 13 non-European (9 men and 4 women) councillors out of the 862 councillors recorded (less than 1% of the total rural councillors) was unexpected. It is likely that we have missed several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councillors due to the methodological limitations outlined above. We have drawn on our knowledge of particular

councillors to make some corrections to initial classifications. Notwithstanding these limitations, that councillors with non-European ancestry make up only 0.15% of all non-Metropolitan councillors is alarming. These findings also point to the continued underrepresentation of all women in regional and rural councils, constituting less than a third of councillors.

Table 5: Under/over-representation by gender and ancestry in non-Metropolitan NSW

	Number of Councillors	Percentage Councillors
Men -European ancestry	609	70.06%
Women- European ancestry	240	27.84%
Men -non-European ancestry	9	0.10%
Women-non-European ancestry	4	0.47%
Total	862	

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Initiatives to increase the diversity of NSW councillors remain necessary in a context in which women and people having non-European ancestry are underrepresented. This research aims to identify where efforts should be concentrated in order to achieve local representation that more accurately reflects NSW's diverse population, while also providing a baseline to measure trends in the future. We advocate the following:

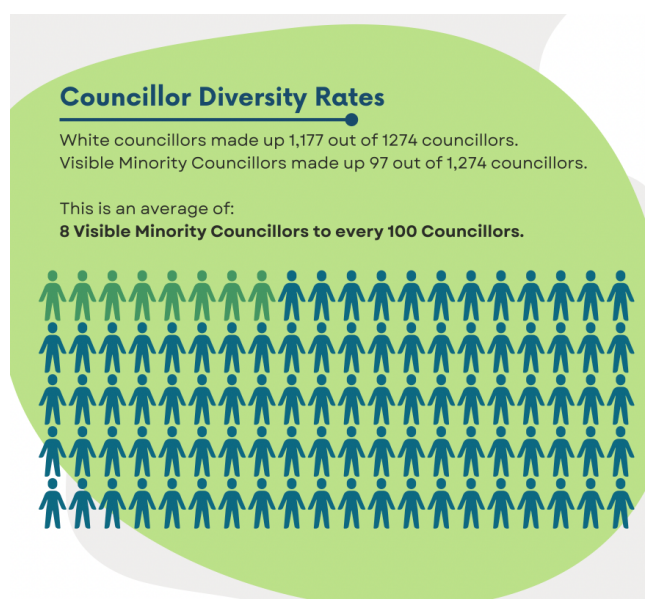
- Initiatives to improve gender equity on NSW councils must be attentive to the intersecting disadvantages faced by women of 'colour'. Resources should be prioritised to address their gross underrepresentation across NSW.
- Continual effort is required to increase the number of women of both European and non-European ancestry elected on to councils across regional and rural NSW.
- Attention needs to also be placed on addressing the underrepresentation of men having non-European ancestry, particularly in regional and rural NSW.
- The focus on the underrepresentation of groups should be matched with attention to the overrepresentation of men of European ancestry, developing policy that can disrupt the patterns of their dominance in local level of government.
- Future data collected about candidates and councillors could usefully include questions on ethnicity. Data based on self-identification would lead to more accurate picture as to the diversity of NSW councils and the identification of any patterns of under/over-representation. Analysis of this data should be intersectional, to capture the intersection of race, gender, age and so on.

Addressing the problems identified in this report requires an understanding of how practices, institutional norms, gender norms, policies and electoral rules shape over/under-representation. A report that outlines preliminary findings in this regard is available on request (see also Pietsch 2018). Finally, while this report has examined diversity in respect to gender, ancestry and its intersections, diversity is also important in consideration of age, (dis)ability, income, non-binary gender identity and sexuality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was conducted by Kelly-Ann D'Sylva and Sophie Dewis from Macquarie University, and Tanya Jakimow from the Australian National University. It is a collaboration between Politics in Colour <https://politicsincolour.com/> and the ANU. Our thanks to Kat Henaway, CEO of Politics in Colour for her feedback and support, and to Osmond Chiu, PerCapita, for timely and useful feedback that prevented several errors. Any remaining errors are our own. Data for this report, and additional

findings from the larger project of which this is a part are available on request. Feedback and comments are welcome. Please direct enquiries to tanya.jakimow@anu.edu.au



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ⁱ According to the ABS Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG), European ancestry broad groups were: North Western European and Southern and Eastern European. Non-European groups were: Oceania, North African and Middle-Eastern, South-East Asian, North-East Asian, Southern and Central Asia, Peoples of the Americas and Sub-Saharan African.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-standard-classification-cultural-and-ethnic-groups-ascceg/latest-release#data-downloads>

ⁱⁱ Data taken from: <https://profile.id.com.au/australia/ancestry?WebID=250>