

Fairness, tika and political science in Aotearoa New Zealand: Some “inconvenient evidence”

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This article is a rejoinder to Annie Te One and Maria Bargh’s article, published in the previous edition of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, exploring whether the political science discipline in Aotearoa New Zealand is keeping pace with change with respect to Māori politics content in university political science programs, the number of Māori employed in the political science profession and the content of New Zealand’s *Political Science* journal. While acknowledging the importance of their case, an assessment of the empirical evidence and further analysis of the data and the methods used by Te One and Bargh refutes their allegations in relation to all three issues. As one of the co-editors of *Political Science*, I note that, from 2012 to 2022, the acceptance rate of articles on Māori politics was 91.7% and that of Māori authors submitting on a Māori topic was 100%. Recognition and change are underway.

Keywords: political science, Aotearoa New Zealand, publication, research, Māori

Introduction

In their article “Towards a Fairer and More Tika Political Science and Politics” Annie Te One and Maria Bargh have laid out a challenge to the discipline of political science in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the context of a call to “decolonise and indigenise universities” (Te One & Bargh, 2023, p. 12), they call for a series of practical actions.

Greater efforts must be put into hiring full-time Māori academics, as well as creating Māori academic pathways. Greater support for Māori academic publication and research, including support for non-Māori academics to better understand their positionality, would also impact what research finds its way to publication. Finally, in the context of both teaching and research, academics must be supported and accountable for greater interrogation of the pervasiveness and invisibility of white supremacy in academia, and how it impacts what is being taught through politics programs and published in New Zealand’s flagship politics journal. (Te One & Bargh, 2023, p. 12)

In particular, the two authors call for political science programs to follow the example of law schools that are incorporating Māori *tikanga* (Māori values) into their curricula, along with “*kaupapa* Māori [Māori based] research methodologies and Indigenous legal methods sitting alongside Western legal analysis” (Ruru et al., 2020, as cited in Te One & Bargh, 2023, p. 6). They advocate structural change involving a “transfer of resources and decision-making to Māori and a genuinely collaborative approach to the

content and teaching of courses, including via Māori pedagogy and with Māori staff” (Te One & Bargh, 2023, p. 6).

They contrast this aspiration with what they claim to be the woeful state of the political science discipline in New Zealand. According to their analysis, “1% of political science lecturers are Māori, 1% of content taught can be classified as Māori politics and approximately 1% of publications in the New Zealand *Political Science* journal can be classified as kaupapa Māori (Māori based) politics” (Te One & Bargh, 2023, p. 2). If these findings were *tika* (correct), there would be a powerful case for the sort of action they advocate. This rejoinder assesses the empirical evidence brought to bear to justify their argument, puts it in broader context, and concludes with some final remarks.

The teaching of political science in Aotearoa New Zealand

The evidence from the teaching curricula in the article comes from a search for “tags” on university websites, on which basic information about courses taught is made available for public inspection. But we are not told what these tags were, other than that they related to “Māori politics” or “Māori-politics centred” courses. Later in the article, some search terms for journal content are supplied, but only a selection.¹ These may have been used in the course web search, too.

Leaving aside the lack of transparency of the analysis, the web-sourced data is extremely thin. University administrators require course information to be included in highly formatted form, usually months in advance of a course being taught. The only requirement for content is a very brief description and a set of course objectives which tend to provide very limited information. Without further in-depth information, any analysis of this data will be of little value. Indigenous content may be included within courses even if it is not apparent in the publicly available data. Any attempt to examine the extent of Indigenous material and perspectives in various curricula will need to come to grips with these deficiencies.

The apparently damning finding of only “1%” comes from the proportion that had three or more tags identified; 5.8% had one or two. It also seems most likely from the information provided that all these tags were specifically Māori centred and most relevant for the domestic politics of Aotearoa New Zealand. Dipping into course information on various university websites, one finds various theory and international relations courses that would have been found with the search term “post-colonial”. This does not appear to have been one of the terms the authors employed, even though Te One and Bargh point out that Indigenous politics can and should be taught in international relations and, one might add, comparative politics as well as political theory. One could expect to find the search terms reported by the authors mainly in courses or articles on New Zealand politics, which are only a relatively small proportion of courses in political science programs in Aotearoa New Zealand.

One should note that their model for Māori content, law, is a professional program that teaches primarily New Zealand law. The content of a political science education is global. The comparison is based on a false equivalence. More Indigenous influence on political science curriculum content could be desirable, but probably not to the same extent as in law.

¹ Te One and Bargh searched *Political Science* for kaupapa Māori methodology and methods (2023, p. 10), noting 16 search terms were used, including “Māori”, “Māori centred”, “kaupapa Māori” and “community based”; for the Māori politics content, 21 search terms were used, including “Treaty of Waitangi”, “self-determination”, “Māori representation”, “Māori politics”, “post-settlement” and “iwi”. The absence of a full list of search terms makes further assessment difficult.

Māori in the political science profession

Something stands out clearly in when one begins an analysis of the political science profession in Aotearoa New Zealand: very few are employed in universities and the politics of Aotearoa New Zealand is not as intensively taught as it could, and probably should, be.

Te One and Bargh's report of the ethnic composition of staff in political science programs provides little background explanation other than being defined as "secured positions that currently exist" (2023, p. 8). Māori are said to be "approximately 1%" (Te One & Bargh, 2023, p. 2). Seeking to replicate this finding, searching university websites in Aotearoa New Zealand one can identify 72 people employed within explicitly political science or politics programs. Of these, three people are identified as Māori (4.1%). However, political science is taught in some interdisciplinary programs, such as in the School of Government and in Te Kawa a Māui (School of Māori Studies) at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington, and in Social Sciences at AUT University. At least two known political scientists also serve in other schools at AUT. Staff in these programs may teach courses or supervise students that are part of political science or politics programs and should probably be counted. Including these individuals in the calculations, one comes up with 93 political scientists of whom 5 are Māori (5.4%). The data is reported in Table 1 in the Appendix.

The number of Māori in the profession may be smaller than desired, although it is about the same as Māori in academic appointments throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. One should also note that non-New Zealanders, many of whom are recent immigrants, are a high proportion of those employed to teach political science in New Zealand, probably higher than that among the population in general. These include people from several non-European ethnicities who enhance the diversity of our profession. The pool of New Zealanders with doctoral qualifications in political science is not big enough to staff all our programs. Data on the number of New Zealand-born political scientists is not readily available, but the proportion of Māori among that number will be significantly higher.

Publication in Political Science journal

The empirical analysis of the proportion of Māori-centred research published in Aotearoa New Zealand politics focuses exclusively on *Political Science*, the journal published under the auspices of the Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington's political science and international relations program. The authors describe it as "the cornerstone periodical for politics scholars in New Zealand" and "the preeminent journal for the discipline in New Zealand" (Te One & Bargh 2023, p. 10). *Political Science* is the only journal published in the discipline in New Zealand other than the New Zealand Political Studies Association's more specialised journal *Women Talking Politics*.

Political Science is not a specialised journal of New Zealand politics. Reflecting the small pool of researchers into New Zealand politics, it does not receive sufficient submissions on New Zealand politics to take on that role. Until recently, the journal defined itself as one of comparative politics and international relations, with a regional focus on the Asia-Pacific. In early 2023 it adopted a generalist editorial policy open to all fields of political science and international relations, as well as to cognate fields (specifically listing Indigenous studies as one). Internationally, it is a middle-ranking journal at best.

Given the pressure from universities for staff to publish in high-impact international journals, *Political Science* is far from being the primary "go to" journal for publications on New Zealand politics. Those

doing research on Indigenous politics have several specialised international journals to choose from, most of which are likely to attract a wider readership and higher citation. The same applies to those researching other fields in which the New Zealand case can be analysed through a frame of international interest.

Te One and Bargh preface their analysis of the content of the journal by noting the strong encouragement of Māori-centred research by government and universities since the establishment of the Vision Mātauranga Capability Fund in 2010 (2023, p. 10). They say they hoped and expected to find some impact on the discipline of political science in Aotearoa New Zealand: “We hoped that, following at least a decade of these activities, some of this research and analysis involving co-design or strong *mātauranga* [Māori knowledge] themes would have flowed through into academic politics journals, and the *Political Science* journal in particular” (2023, p. 10).

But the data they analyse does not address this expectation. Instead, the analysis of the content of *Political Science* goes all the way back to its establishment in 1948. They include all articles published until the present. This does not examine the time period they identify for a test of change. Neither can it address the question of acceptance rates they raise earlier, comparing the research that finds its way to publication with that which does not.

Meanwhile the editors of *Political Science* have endeavoured to address these concerns. They have produced an analysis of published and unpublished submissions to the journal over the previous decade, the very period in question, breaking down acceptance rates by subdisciplines, ethnicity and gender (Editors of *Political Science*, 2022). The ethnicity analysis was reported to the annual meeting of the New Zealand Political Studies Association in 2022, and remains available on its website. From this data, the editors found that about half of the publications in *Political Science* between 2012 and early 2022 were on or relevant to New Zealand politics. These had a higher acceptance rate than others, largely on the grounds of relevance as assessed by reviewers and the editors. In more detail, the editors reported:

We published 11 articles on Māori politics over the period in question, just over 10 per cent of all articles published. But of those published on New Zealand politics, 18.5 per cent were on Māori politics (10/54). The acceptance rate of articles on Māori politics was 91.7 per cent (11/12). Note that one Māori politics article was on Māori in Australia, not therefore classified as New Zealand politics.

Over the period 2012–2022 13 articles were submitted by persons who could be identified as Māori. 77 per cent were accepted (10). Māori authors submitting on a Māori topic had an acceptance rate of 100 per cent. (Editors of *Political Science*, 2022, p. 3)

Concluding remarks

Seeking to replicate and more fully contextualise their findings, one discovers that the three empirical footings of Te One and Bargh’s argument are either incorrect and not tika, or on very shaky foundations. This does not entirely detract from the importance of their case. Greater recognition of Indigenous scholars, theories and practices of politics in political science teaching and research in Aotearoa New Zealand is desirable. But this growing recognition is widely shared and change is already underway, admittedly more slowly and in less radical forms than Te One and Bargh would like.

One cannot stop here. Two further points remain to be made. First, in their introductory remarks cited earlier, Te One and Bargh state as a matter of apparent fact “the pervasiveness and invisibility of white supremacy in academia” (2023, p. 12) and call for an investigation of how this impacts teaching and publication. This assumption appears to have precluded them from engaging with “inconvenient evidence” of which good activist scholarship should be aware (Frazer, 2023). It also raises ethical issues about their commitment to engagement with evidence and their true commitment to tika. While, from time to time, they do qualify their findings as preliminary and needing further investigation, this does not prevent them from making very strong conclusions and making policy recommendations.

Second, the implicit allegation that the university in general and its administrators, scholars, and the editors of the journal are complicit in “white supremacy” is an unfounded racial slur. “White supremacy” is an objectionable and repugnant ideological belief. Patterns of descriptive representation, curriculum content and research in universities today may be related to historic and ongoing structural inequalities. But their explanation is complex, multi-faceted and not reducible to a pernicious ideology.

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Appendix

Table 1: Securely employed political scientists at universities in Aotearoa New Zealand – All and Māori, December 2023 (data accessed 15–17 December 2023)

	All	Māori
University of Auckland	13	0
AUT University	7	0
University of Waikato	5	0
Massey University	8	0
Political Science & International Relations, Victoria	26	1
School of Government, Victoria	10	0
Te Kawa a Māui, Victoria	2	2
University of Canterbury	9	1

University of Otago	11	1
University of Otago Peace Studies	2	0
Total	93	5

Data reliability is dependent on the accuracy, updating and accessibility of staffing information on university websites. Other persons with political science postgraduate qualifications may be employed in other programs but are not readily apparent from the available sources. The data also does not take account of fractional appointments which are included as full.

About the author

Jack Vowles is Professor of Comparative Politics at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington and a co-editor of *Political Science*. Over his long career he has taught and researched at several New Zealand universities and at the University of Exeter in England.

Conflict of interest: As acknowledged above, Professor Vowles is a co-editor of *Political Science* and, therefore, has an interest in protecting the reputation of that journal and refuting allegations made in the article to which this is a rejoinder.

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