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ENGINEERING THE BACKLASH:

THE CAMPAIGN COMPANY, THE STOP CO-GOVERNANCE ROADSHOW, AND THE UNMAKING OF CO-GOVERNANCE IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND, 2021-2024

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ABOUT CARE

The Center for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centred methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions to health and wellbeing. Through experiments in methods of radical democracy anchored in community ownership and community voice, the Centre collaborates with communities, community organisers, community researchers, advocates and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organising, food and agriculture, worker organising, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor and economic transformation.

Prof Mohan J Dutta is the Director of CARE and author of books such as Neoliberal Health Organizing, Communicating Health, and Voices of Resistance.

This paper documents a sustained campaign against the constitutional position of tangata whenua, and reproduces campaign material, including a manipulated image of a Māori member of Parliament, as evidence for analysis. We encourage you to care for your safety and wellbeing while reading this paper.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2021 and 2024 the constitutional question of co-governance moved from the margins of public debate in Aotearoa New Zealand to the centre of an election and then out of the statute book altogether. Three Labour Government initiatives carried the weight of that shift: the Three Waters reform, the establishment of Te Aka Whai Ora as an independent Māori health authority, and the He Puapua report on realising the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Each was a technical instrument with a Tiriti dimension. Each ended the period recoded in public discourse as a threat to democracy itself.

This paper examines two circuits in the communicative infrastructure that produced that recoding, one professional and one amateur, and shows that they ran on the same grammar. The first is a firm. The Campaign Company Limited was incorporated on 4 November 2021 and registered under the business classification of public affairs consultant service. Jordan Williams is its founder, chief executive and sole director, and 98 percent of its shares are held by a corporate trustee company that he co-owns and co-directs.[1,2] Williams is also the co-founder and executive director of the New Zealand Taxpayers' Union and a co-founder of the Free Speech Union.[3] The company sells digital campaign services. Its documented clients and domain registrations across 2021 to 2023 include Groundswell NZ, Hobson's Pledge, the Taxpayers' Union, two competing Auckland mayoral campaigns, and a tobacco industry front campaign run for British American Tobacco New Zealand and Imperial Brands.[4]

The second circuit is a man with a projector. Stop Co-Governance, run by the Northland evangelist Julian Batchelor, held 82 public meetings across the country in 2023 and distributed hundreds of thousands of pamphlets, with no vendor, no database and no expense return; its organiser registered as a third party promoter only after the Electoral Commission had referred his booklet to the police. In March 2026 a District Court judge dismissed Batchelor's defamation claim against Television New Zealand and the researcher Sanjana Hattotuwa, finding that he had used racist rhetoric that was sustained and deliberately targeting Māori, and in July 2026 the court ordered costs against Jim Grenon, who had funded the litigation and who now sits on the board of NZME, the publisher of the New Zealand Herald, as its second largest shareholder.[5,6]

I make five arguments. First, the anti-co-governance mobilisation ran on a professionalised circuit rather than on spontaneous public feeling. That circuit converted policy anxiety into personal data, personal data into money and mailing lists, and mailing lists into physical and electoral presence. The circuit was built and serviced by a small number of interlocked organisations sharing personnel and a single vendor. Second, the central communicative operation was inversion. A reform designed to lift infrastructure debt off ratepayers was renamed an asset grab. A health equity body that grew out of a Waitangi Tribunal inquiry into the Crown's breaches was renamed a two-tier system. A campaign against Māori constitutional authority was branded in te reo Māori and addressed to migrants under the language of belonging and unity. Third, the Crown lost the communicative field before it entered it, because it spent $4m on emotive advertising while refusing to make the Tiriti argument in public.[7] Fourth, the grammar travelled without money. What a firm built for a client, a self-funded evangelist reproduced in a hired hall and a laminated placard, arriving at the same vocabulary

of unity, equality and anti-racism, which is why this paper treats the vocabulary rather than any organisation as the object of analysis. Fifth, the regulatory architecture in Aotearoa remains close to blind to this form of political work. Domain registration, campaign vendor relationships, digital advertising targeting and political data harvesting sit almost entirely outside disclosure.

I hold the causal claim tighter than the popular commentary does. The public record establishes that The Campaign Company was the digital vendor to the principal organisations campaigning against co-governance. It does not establish that the company authored the strategy, it does not establish that its work decided the 2023 election, and nothing in it connects the two circuits by contract or organisation; I assert no such link. What the record does establish is more consequential for policy: a market now exists in Aotearoa for the manufacture of simulated publics, it is cheap, it is legal, and its first sustained domestic application was directed against the constitutional position of tangata whenua. The paper also records, from the published accounts, what it cost tangata whenua and their allies to meet the tour at its doors: police lines outside their own community halls, admission decided by complexion, a punch, a car, and five months of turning out.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE VACUUM AND THE FUNNEL

In the winter of 2022 a campervan branded Stop Three Waters worked its way through 39 towns across five weeks and more than 5,000 kilometres.[8] At each stop the Taxpayers' Union team met mayors, councillors and candidates for the October local elections and asked them to sign a Community Leaders Appeal to the Prime Minister. Local newspapers covered the meetings. The Otago Daily Times reported the strongest turnout yet. The Marlborough paper called the turnout amazing.[9] By any ordinary reading of a newspaper archive, this was a grassroots revolt of provincial New Zealand against a centralising government.

A campervan is a vehicle. It is also the visible end of a machine. Nine months before the roadshow, the Taxpayers' Union had launched a campaign hub at StopThreeWaters.nz, bought Google advertising so that the hub would appear beside the government's own taxpayer funded campaign site, and announced that more than 65,000 New Zealanders had signed its petition. The press release closed with a sentence that tells you what the petition was for: the Union was updating those individuals and was ready to deploy them during any consultation period.[10] The signatures mattered chiefly as the raw material of the list.

I write this paper from Palmerston North, in a region whose councils were among those told they would lose direct control of their water assets, and whose marae have spent generations arguing for authority over the same water. Both of those constituencies were addressed in 2022. Only one of them was addressed by a professional digital operation with a database, a petition funnel, an advertising budget and a campervan.

A year later, in halls from Kerikeri to Tākaka, a different vehicle was carrying the same argument. Julian Batchelor arrived alone with a projector, a self-published booklet and a hall booking, spoke for three hours beside a banner comparing co-governance to apartheid, and left behind pamphlets that told people how to vote. Police attended. Iwi and marae organised outside. The two operations had nothing in common as businesses. They had everything in common as language, and the second could not have travelled as far as it did without the first having already made its vocabulary ordinary.

The culture-centered approach reads communication as the site where structures are held in place or opened up. Structures are the rules, resources and institutions that distribute what can be said and heard. Culture is the field of meanings through which people make sense of those structures. Agency is the everyday capacity to negotiate, resist and remake them.[11] Voice runs on infrastructure rather than on individual attributes: the platforms, budgets, staff, databases, legal forms and access points that determine whose account of a policy reaches a public and whose does not.[12] Read this way, the co-governance debate of 2021 to 2023 was a contest between an infrastructure and an absence, and the question of who argued more persuasively barely enters it.

The organising concept I use throughout is communicative inversion, the technique by which a communicative act describes itself as the opposite of what it materially does.[13] Inversion is the signature of settler colonial communication because settler colonialism must present itself as the ordinary condition of things rather than as a continuing structure of dispossession. The campaigns examined here inverted at every level. Equality named the removal of an equity mechanism. Democracy named the removal of a Tiriti obligation from public administration. Belonging named a campaign against the constitutional standing of the people who host belonging. Grassroots named a company.

2. EVIDENCE, INFERENCE AND THE LIMITS OF THIS ANALYSIS

Work on covert political communication invites overclaiming. A researcher who finds a domain registration wants it to prove authorship of a movement. It does not. To keep the analysis usable in a policy setting and defensible in a legal one, I sort every factual claim in this paper into three classes and mark the class wherever the distinction matters.

Documented claims rest on a primary record that a third party can inspect: a companies register entry, an electoral return filed with the Electoral Commission, a domain registration record, an Act of Parliament, a Waitangi Tribunal report, an organisation's own published statement. Reported claims rest on journalism by named outlets that has not been retracted, principally Radio New Zealand, Stuff, Newsroom and the New Zealand Herald. Analytic inferences are mine. They are interpretations of the documented and reported material through the culture-centered approach, and they are argued rather than proven.

Every factual assertion in this paper carries an endnote, and every endnote was checked in September and October 2026 against the record it names. Where a primary record exists I cite it: the Companies Office register, the Electoral Commission returns, the statutes, the Waitangi Tribunal reports, the domain registration records, and the campaigning organisations' own press releases and websites. Where the claim depends on journalism I name the outlet, the reporter where the byline is available, and the date. Two compiled sources appear repeatedly, the Astroturfing NZ investigation of March 2024 and Bryce Edwards's Lobbying and Influence Register entry on the company. I use them only where they reproduce or link an inspectable primary record, and I name that record in the note rather than resting the claim on the compilation. Three further classes of evidence appear in the second half of the paper. Campaign material published by Stop Co-Governance on its own website is reproduced as figures and treated as the campaign's own assertion rather than as verified fact, with provenance set out in Appendix B. A District Court judgment and a subsequent costs judgment are cited for findings made after evidence was tested at trial.

For the three domain registrations the argument leans on most, webelong.co.nz, saveourstores.nz and motherofallprotests.nz, I have read the .nz query service output itself, as captured from the Domain Name Commission's lookup between 1 and 5 March 2024 and published as PDF by the Astroturfing NZ investigation, and I cite the fields I rely on. I was not able to run live queries in September 2026 from the environment in which this paper was checked, because the Commission's lookup requires an interactive verification step and the registry's port 43 service was not reachable; a live re-query before publication is the first of the limits set out below. The .nz terms of use prohibit publishing historical versions of register data, so the records are cited by field and date rather than reproduced. Where a campaign has made a numerical claim about itself, such as an attendance figure or a distribution total, I attribute the figure to the campaign and say so.

Five limits follow. The domain records were read from captures dated March 2024 rather than from live queries; the current register may differ, and the sequence of earlier registrants for motherofallprotests.nz rests on screenshots and reporting rather than on the register itself. The account of the counter-organising in section 6.5 rests on published reporting rather than on interviews with the marae, hapū and organisers

concerned, which is a limit the culture-centered approach treats as serious; those conversations are the next phase of this work and belong to the people who would be in them. The company's client list is not public, so the documented record captures only those engagements that surfaced through electoral returns, domain records or journalism. Third party promoters are required to file returns only when they spend more than $100,000 in the regulated period, so an unknown quantity of expenditure sits below the disclosure line.[14] And the relationship between a campaign and a vote is probabilistic in every democracy on earth. Section 9 sets out what the polling evidence supports and what it does not.

Four claims commonly made about this period do not survive that standard, and I have removed them rather than soften them. The first is that the domain equalhealth.nz ran a campaign against Te Aka Whai Ora. The second is that The Campaign Company authored the anti-co-governance strategy. The third is that its work decided the 2023 election. The fourth is that the professional and the amateur circuits were organisationally connected; no contract, payment or shared registration links them on the public record, and the argument of this paper does not require one. Appendix A lists them alongside every linkage the paper does rely on, with the class of record for each.

I have deliberately not attributed to The Campaign Company any campaign for which the public record shows no registration, no payment and no reporting. Where an inference about coordination is available but unproven, I say so in the text.

3. THE POLICY FIELD: WHAT CO-GOVERNANCE ACTUALLY PROPOSED

The efficacy of the inversion depended on a public that did not know the content of the policies. Setting out the content is therefore part of the analysis, not preliminary to it.

3.1 Three waters

The reform proposed transferring drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services from 67 local and regional councils into four publicly owned regional water services entities, later revised to 10.[15] The driver was balance sheet capacity. Councils carrying the assets could not borrow at the scale required, and modelling commissioned for the reform from the Water Industry Commission for Scotland estimated that between 120 and $185b of investment would be needed by 2050 to replace and upgrade the country's water infrastructure.[16,17] Moving the assets into entities that could borrow against a national revenue base was the point of the exercise.

The co-governance element was narrow and specific. Each entity would have a regional representative group composed of an equal number of representatives of the territorial authority owners and of mana whenua within the entity's service area. That group would set expectations, approve strategy and appoint an independent selection panel, which would in turn appoint a skills based board to run the entity.[18] Councils remained the shareholders. The boards themselves were not split 50:50; the popular description of tribal boards running the water was wrong at the level of the statute. The 50:50 arrangement sat one and sometimes two removes from operational control, in a body whose function was oversight and appointment.

This distinction matters because the campaign against the reform did not engage it. The material distributed to ratepayers described entities separated from ratepayers by four layers of bureaucracy and framed the reform as a transfer of assets to a group defined by descent.[19] Both the financing rationale and the actual governance mechanism disappeared.

3.2 Te Aka Whai Ora

The Māori Health Authority was established on 1 July 2022 under the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022. It came out of the Waitangi Tribunal's Wai 2575 inquiry, which found in 2019 that the Crown had breached Te Tiriti by failing to design and administer the primary health care system to address persistent Māori health inequities and by failing to give effect to the guarantee of tino rangatiratanga. Both claimant groups in that inquiry proposed a national Māori-controlled agency with substantial oversight of Māori health spending and policy, and the Tribunal made an interim recommendation that the Crown and the claimants co-design solutions using those proposals as the starting point, along with a recommendation that a stand-alone Māori health authority be investigated.[20,21] Decades of Māori advocacy for independent Māori health leadership sit behind that finding. The Authority's functions were strategy, policy, commissioning of kaupapa Māori services, co-commissioning alongside Health New Zealand, and monitoring of system performance against Māori health inequities.

The inequities the body existed to address are documented across the clinical and public health literature and were the subject of the Tribunal's findings. They are the measurable outcome of a health system that has never distributed voice evenly.[22] An authority with its own commissioning power was an attempt to build a voice infrastructure inside the state. The campaign against it described this as a two-tier system and as health by race. The inversion is exact: a mechanism created because the existing system produced two tiers of outcome was named as the thing that would create two tiers.

3.3 He Puapua

In August 2019 the Ministry of Māori Development convened a Declaration Working Group of four officials and five non-state members to advise on how Aotearoa might realise the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which New Zealand endorsed in 2010 under a National-led government. The group reported to the Minister of Māori Development at the end of 2019. Its report, He Puapua, set out a discussion pathway toward 2040, the bicentenary of Te Tiriti.[23]

Cabinet did not release the report, on the stated ground that it might be misconstrued as government policy. A version was obtained under the Official Information Act and circulated in 2021, after which the opposition parties published it.[24] The non-release was a communicative failure of the first order, and it handed the opposition a genuine grievance about transparency. What followed converted that grievance into something else. The lead author, Claire Charters, described the discussion being racialised and the report turned into a political football to create fear.[25] Hobson's Pledge published the report as Labour's plan for co-governance by 2040 and asked its readers whether the Māori sovereignty takeover had started.[26] Democracy Action described a plan to replace democracy with a Tiriti based constitution handing 50 percent of decision-making power to 17 percent of the population.[27] An advisory document produced by a working group with no statutory force became, in the space of a few months, a secret plan.

3.4 The common structure

The three initiatives were technically unrelated. Water infrastructure financing, health commissioning and constitutional advice have almost nothing in common as policy instruments. What they shared was a proposition that Māori authority is a legitimate component of public administration rather than a cultural supplement to it. That proposition, and not any specific clause, is what the campaign of 2021 to 2023 targeted. Bundling the three under a single word, co-governance, was itself the first move of the campaign, and it was executed so successfully that the word now functions in New Zealand public discourse as a synonym for constitutional danger.

4. THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CAMPAIGN COMPANY

4.1 Incorporation and interlock

The Campaign Company Limited was incorporated on 4 November 2021, company number 8257633, New Zealand business number 9429050044078, registered under the classification of public affairs consultant service. Williams is its founder, chief executive and sole director. The shareholding is layered: 980 of the 1,000 shares are held by Bermuda Corporate Trustee Limited, a company co-owned and co-directed by Williams and Emily Hughes, with Williams and Hughes each holding 10 shares directly. The company employed around seven people as of 2023 and operates from the Auckland waterfront. Its general manager is Ani O'Brien, who is also a prominent Free Speech Union advocate.[28,2] Williams co-founded the New Zealand Taxpayers Union in 2013 with the pollster David Farrar and remains its executive director. He co-founded the Free Speech Union. He fronted the Vote for Change campaign against MMP in the 2011 referendum. He attended Atlas Network training in 2015 and received an Atlas fellowship grant in 2018 to support the growth of the Taxpayers' Union, which is an official partner of the network. Williams told Newsroom that Atlas money, including awards and travel scholarships, had never amounted to more than one or two percent of the Union's annual income and was its only overseas funding.[29,30] The Auckland Ratepayers Alliance, a company Williams founded and directed, was folded into the Taxpayers' Union in 2021.[31]

Taken together these facts describe a single organisational field with multiple legal faces. An advocacy organisation with a membership base and charitable style appeals, a free speech organisation with a civil liberties frame, a ratepayer organisation with a local government frame, and a private company selling digital campaign services to all of them, share leadership and technique. The multiplication of brands is the product. It allows the same operation to address a farmer, a ratepayer, an immigrant and an academic in four different registers while the underlying strategic direction and the underlying contractor remain singular.

4.2 The prehistory: personas and denial

The method predates the company. During the 2018 National Party leadership contest a website appeared urging supporters to sign a letter to National MPs backing Judith Collins. Its domain details were false. Stuff reported that the account used to establish the site listed Williams's personal email address as its password recovery address; Williams denied involvement and described himself as the victim of a smear. The site was taken down the same day. The persona attached to the domain, Raquel Ray, matched one of a set of false identities the Taxpayers' Union had already admitted using to make Official Information Act requests to Callaghan Innovation.[32]

I record this as reported material rather than as established authorship. Its analytic value lies elsewhere. The 2018 episode contains, in miniature, every element that would be industrialised three years later: a synthetic grassroots persona, a petition or letter as the point of capture, an opaque registration, and a rapid retreat when the registration was traced.

4.3 Groundswell and the mother of all protests

Ten days after the company was incorporated, on 14 November 2021, the domain motherofallprotests.nz was created for the second wave of the Groundswell farmer protests; the creation date is confirmed by the .nz query service record.[33] The registrant at creation was the Taxpayers' Union, and when this was noticed the registration was updated to The Campaign Company; that sequence rests on contemporaneous screenshots and on Newsroom's reporting rather than on the current register, because the .nz service shows only the present state of a record. By March 2024 the registrant of record was Groundswell NZ at its Gore address, the domain had expired in November 2023, and it was pending deletion.[34,33] The Groundswell founders explained the connection on a rural radio programme by saying they had been impressed by the Taxpayers' Union's own Three Waters campaign site, asked the Union to build them something similar, and were referred to the Union's contractor.[35] The contractor was Williams.

By July 2022 the relationship was being marketed. The New Zealand Herald carried a sponsored advertorial paid for by The Campaign Company presenting Groundswell as a case study. In it Williams described the division of labour with unusual clarity: the leadership in Gore picks the issues and prioritises the campaigns, while community building, fundraising and the back office requirements of servicing tens of thousands of enquiries are new territory for those leading the cause.[36] That sentence is the business model. The client supplies grievance and legitimacy. The vendor supplies the apparatus that converts grievance into an addressable population.

4.4 The domain portfolio and We Belong Aotearoa

In August 2023 Radio New Zealand reported on a website called We Belong Aotearoa, launched earlier that year, bright, modern, heavy on te reo Māori, carrying photographs of smiling people of many ethnicities and the phrase whiria te tāngata, weave the people together. It described itself as standing for togetherness, unity, inclusiveness and equality, and invited visitors to join by supplying a name and email address. The first version of the site did not say who was behind it. The .nz query service record for webelong.co.nz, captured in March 2024, shows the registrant as Campaign Company at an Auckland address, a registration date of 19 May 2023, a last change on 10 July 2023, and a domain creation date of 19 June 2014; the name had existed for nine years before it was taken up for this campaign.[37]

In August a note in dark type on a dark background was added disclosing that the site had been created by Hobson's Pledge, and naming Don Brash, the former National and ACT leader. Brash told Radio New Zealand the site existed to oppose co-governance, and when asked why the site never mentioned co-governance he said that was the implied message; what would eventually be sent to the people who had signed up would be decided at future Hobson's Pledge strategy sessions. He said the site used the word Aotearoa because the audience it was trying to reach commonly used it, while confirming that the word would not appear on the Hobson's Pledge site because the organisation disapproved of the country's name being changed. RNZ established that the website and its social media were run by The Campaign Company, that every portrait on the site was a stock photograph, and that Facebook's advertising library showed between $6,000 and $20,964 spent promoting the page that year, alongside between $31,400 and $45,879 on the Hobson's Pledge page. The site also reproduced a photograph and a quotation from Dame Whina Cooper. Karaitiana Taiuru, a Māori cultural adviser of Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Kahungunu descent, said he had almost been taken in until he saw Brash's name at the bottom, called the site offensive, insulting and quite deceitful, and described it as cultural appropriation used as a weapon to deceive immigrants. A real migrant and refugee organisation with a near-identical name, Belong Aotearoa, told RNZ it had no connection to it. Dylan Reeve, the author of a book on conspiracy theories in Aotearoa, called it astroturfing.[38]

RNZ's report also stated that The Campaign Company was listed as registrant of other domain names associated with Hobson's Pledge, naming isthisracist.nz, bottomline.nz and equalhealth.nz, and that hobsonspledge.nz had been registered by the Taxpayers' Union.[38] The Astroturfing NZ investigation of March 2024 reported the company as administrative contact for the same three names and for hobsonspledge.co.nz, and found all three single-issue names still active but carrying no content.[39] I have not been able to read the query service records for those names myself, so the linkage stays at the reported tier in Appendix A, now resting on two separate reports. I flag this carefully, because some commentary about this period asserts that equalhealth.nz ran an active campaign against Te Aka Whai Ora. The public record does not establish that. What it establishes is that a vendor held, on behalf of a single client, a portfolio of pre-registered single-issue domain names covering health equity, racism and constitutional argument, ready for deployment. The inference I draw is about capacity rather than about a campaign that ran: the architecture was built to segment a public before the segments were needed.

4.5 Save Our Stores

The method carries no attachment to race politics, and that is what makes it dangerous in race politics. On 28 June 2023 the domain saveourstores.nz was created and registered to Campaign Company at the same Auckland address and with the same registrant contact as webelong.co.nz, according to the .nz query service record; RNZ reported that the campaign it carried was run on behalf of Imperial Brands New Zealand and British American Tobacco New Zealand.[40,41] From 1 August, advertisements appeared on Facebook urging people to sign a petition to repeal the Smokefree legislation. The site opened with a dairy owner from Lower Hutt introducing himself and his 17 years of service to customers. Smaller type at the foot of the about page disclosed the tobacco companies.[41]

Save Our Stores completes the picture of a general purpose technology. A corporate interest that cannot speak in its own name acquires a sympathetic human face, a petition, a domain, a Facebook advertising budget and a data capture form. The same vendor, in the same period, was doing the same work for a campaign against Māori constitutional authority. The technique is indifferent to content. That indifference is what makes it an industry rather than a movement.

4.6 The money

The Electoral Commission's returns for the 2023 general election show close to $2m spent by registered third party promoters, 13 times the 2020 figure. Of 31 registered promoters, seven spent more than $100,000, against a maximum of three in previous elections. Most of the record spending went to campaigners pushing positions favoured by the centre right.[42] Three returns name The Campaign Company as a payee. Groundswell reported total spending of $141,060, of which $78,200 went to the company. Hobson's Pledge reported $283,899, of which $34,500 went to the company. The Taxpayers' Union reported $371,565, of which $23,033 went to the company.[43]

Reporting on the same election records the company working for an electorate candidate as well: Casey Costello, standing for New Zealand First, a party that campaigned on ending co-governance and entered government on that commitment.[4] Total third party promoter spending at the 2020 election had been about $147,000.[44]

These are not large sums by the standards of political advertising in comparable democracies. That is the finding. A little over $135,000 of disclosed vendor payments, spread across three organisations in a single regulated period, bought professional digital operations for the three most visible third party campaigns of the election. The barrier to entry for manufacturing a simulated public in Aotearoa is roughly the price of a modest house deposit, and most of the work sits outside the regulated period altogether, where no disclosure is required at all.

5. THE CIRCUIT: HOW THE FUNNEL WORKED

The operation described in section 4 can be read as a value chain with five stages. I set them out in sequence because the policy implications attach to specific stages, and because the chain is reproducible by anyone who reads this paper.

5.1 Shell construction

A domain is registered, often in advance of any campaign, in the name of a vendor rather than a principal. A visual identity is built that carries no trace of the funder. Where the target audience is one that would reject the principal, the identity borrows the aesthetics of the target: te reo Māori, multi-ethnic photography, the vocabulary of unity and belonging. The disclosure, if it appears at all, appears late and in low contrast. In the We Belong case the acknowledgement of Hobson's Pledge was added months after launch, in dark type on a dark background.[45]

5.2 The emotive binary and the petition as instrument

The landing page presents a single decision with two options, framed in loss terms and addressed to a possession: your water, your assets, your local control, your store. The mechanism of participation is a petition. Signing produces a name, an email address, a location and, most valuable of all, a policy trigger, which is a record of the specific fear that moved this specific person to act.

The Taxpayers' Union stated the purpose in its own launch release. Sixty-five thousand signatures had been collected, those individuals were being updated, and the organisation was ready to deploy them during any consultation period.[46] Deployment is the operative word. In a submission based policy process, a list of 65,000 pre-sorted, pre-motivated, contactable people functions as a capacity to generate the appearance of public opinion on demand, at a moment of the holder's choosing, which is a different thing altogether from public opinion arriving.

5.3 Segmentation and the simulated public

The captured data is then split. The constitutional argument goes to one audience through Hobson's Pledge. The local control and rates argument goes to ratepayers. The rural argument goes through Groundswell. The multicultural argument goes to migrant communities through We Belong. Each segment receives material calibrated to its own vocabulary, and each segment sees a movement that appears to consist of people like itself. The major platforms also allow a harvested list to be uploaded as the seed for lookalike audience modelling, which finds users whose behavioural profile resembles the signers and permits an audience far larger than any membership organisation in the country could reach on its own. I record this as a standard capability of the advertising systems these campaigns used rather than as a documented practice of any named operator, since targeting parameters are not disclosed in New Zealand and cannot be inspected after the fact.[47,48]

This is the point at which a campaign becomes a simulated public. Nothing in the material is false in the narrow sense. Real people signed. Real farmers protested. What is manufactured is the impression of separate publics arriving independently at the same conclusion, when the separation is a marketing artefact of a single operation.

5.4 Conversion into money and physical presence

The list is then monetised through rapid response fundraising appeals tied to legislative milestones, and the money is converted back into physical presence: billboards, newspaper advertisements, television spots, coreflute signs, t-shirts, drink bottles and a branded campervan. The Stop Three Waters roadshow visited 39 centres in five weeks, gathered signatures from local body candidates on a Community Leaders Appeal, and generated a substantial volume of local newspaper coverage which the organisation then curated and recirculated to its own list.[49] The loop closes. Coverage of the campaign becomes proof of the campaign, which recruits more signatures, which funds more presence.

5.5 Conversion into electoral pressure

The final stage converts the aggregated list into a political commitment. Local body candidates sign an appeal. Members of Parliament are asked for public undertakings. At the first roadshow event an ACT MP was applauded for committing to reverse the reforms if her party formed part of the next government.[50] By the time the general election arrived, parliamentary parties were not persuading a public. They were ratifying a position that a professionally maintained list had already established as the price of a segment of the vote.

6. THE AMATEUR CIRCUIT: STOP CO-GOVERNANCE

Running through the same eighteen months, in the same towns, and against the same three policies, was a campaign built on the opposite economics. Stop Co-Governance was one man with a projector, a self-published booklet and a hall booking. It had no vendor, no database and no expense return. It is in this paper because the two circuits together show what the grammar of the backlash was, how far it travelled without money, and where the regulatory holes sit.

6.1 What it was

Julian Batchelor is a Kenya-born, Britain-raised New Zealander who worked as a teacher and school principal, then as a real estate agent, and who has spent three decades as a Christian evangelist and author of a book on evangelism.[51] He told the New Zealand Herald that his campaign was triggered by his relationship with Māori at Rawhiti in Northland, where a property he bought in 2008 has been the subject of a long dispute, and where local people say his development desecrated an urupā and destroyed a culturally significant pōhutukawa.[52] The campaign therefore begins where settler colonial politics usually begins, in a contest over land, and it travels outward as a claim about the nation.

Across 2023 he toured the country from Northland to Southland, presenting for about three hours beside banners comparing co-governance to apartheid. The District Court judgment that later examined the campaign records 82 public meetings held that year and hundreds of thousands of pamphlets distributed.[5] Re: News, which attended and reviewed the presentation, reported that he described pre-colonial Māori as a primitive stone age tribal group and told audiences the country was at war as elite Māori worked to impose tribal rule. The argument turns on three propositions: that Māori knowingly ceded complete sovereignty in 1840, that an elite has captured politicians, councils, courts, historians, educators, churches, lawyers and the media, and that every race based law must go.[53,51] The historical claims were contested wherever a historian was in the room. Newsroom fact-checked the presentation in March 2023, and when the tour reached Timaru in June a Waimate historian told the Timaru Herald that its interpretations of the Treaty were flawed and inaccurate.[51,54]



Figure 1: *The Stop Co-Governance mark. A prohibition sign over a governance term, with no funder, no organisation and no address attached to it. The mark carried the campaign across booklets, placards, banners and a website.*

The identity in Figure 1 is worth a moment. It contains no organisation, no person and no funder. A red prohibition circle sits beside a constitutional term, and the whole argument is delivered before a word is read. The economy of it is the point: a mark of this kind can be printed by anyone, carried by anyone, and disowned by everyone.

6.2 The blog as a machine for counting

The campaign website published a running blog of the tour, and the pattern of its posts is a complete account of how a small operation manufactures the appearance of a movement. Announcements of arrival, counts of attendance and counts of opposition were published as news about the campaign, then circulated back to the people who had already signed up.



Figure 2: *Stop Co-Governance blog, 22 April 2023, announcing the first Tauranga event. The post format is local arrival: a place name, a photograph of the place, and a date. Screenshot supplied by the author; see Appendix B for provenance.*

Figure 2 shows the arrival post. Mauao and the Tauranga harbour stand in for the community, and the headline places the campaign inside it: our first event, today, here. Nothing in the post identifies who is paying, what organisation exists behind the name, or what the presentation contains. The local photograph does the work that a membership base would otherwise have to do. There is a further irony in the choice of image. Ownership of Mauao was vested in the Mauao Trust on behalf of Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui and Ngāti Pūkenga by the Mauao Historic Reserve Vesting Act 2008, while Tauranga City Council remained the administering body under the Reserves Act 1977, and since 2013 the maunga has been managed through a joint administration board, Ngā Poutiriao ō Mauao, with four members appointed by the trust and four by the council. The Auditor-General examined that board as a case study in her 2016 report on co-governance.[55] The campaign against co-governance opened its Tauranga leg under a photograph of a co-governed mountain.

The Tauranga events themselves illustrate how the tour operated. Batchelor moved the April meetings out of the council owned Historic Village into a private building whose address he would not disclose, telling SunLive that attendees would gather at the village and then be directed onward, that people had to pre-register, and that only people whose identity was known would be admitted.[56] The blog announced a public meeting in a named town whose venue was concealed and whose audience was screened.



Figure 3: *Stop Co-Governance blog, 15 July 2023, reporting the number of protesters at a Golden Bay event. Opposition is published as a metric of the campaign's own significance. Screenshot supplied by the author; see Appendix B.*

Figure 3 shows the inversion that kept the tour alive. Many of Batchelor's meetings drew as many protesters as attendees, and some drew more.[53] A hundred people turning out to oppose a meeting is, on any ordinary reading, a community rejecting it. Published as a headline with a hundred in red, it becomes proof of importance. The same conversion runs through the venue cancellations. When Auckland Council cancelled a booking at the Mt Eden War Memorial Hall, the fourth North Island venue to withdraw in two months, Batchelor described it to 1News as corruption and the quashing of free speech, and told the outlet that supporters had offered him private facilities.[57] Resistance became content. Refusal became persecution. The campaign fed on what it provoked.

What the meetings did in the rooms themselves is documented. At Ōrewa, police separated protesters from attendees at a council owned venue, with the protest led by Ngāti Manuhiri and members of Te Herenga Waka o Ōrewa Marae.[58] Before the Mount Maunganui events, the Tauranga historian and iwi representative Buddy Mikaere said he was embarrassed and ashamed that a community hall was hosting meetings he believed excluded people by race, and asked how the organisers would discern who counted as a good Māori.[59,60] He was referring to a Local Democracy Reporting account of the Marlborough film maker Keelan Walker, who was stopped at the door of a Blenheim meeting and told he could not come in because he was not a good Māori who would sit and listen respectfully. Batchelor's answer was that he was ejecting troublemakers and that ethnicity had nothing to do with it.[60] At Dargaville, police attended a gathering of 150 people, half of whom had come to protest.[52] Re: News witnessed a car accelerate and swerve towards protesters as attendees left a Paraparaumu event, clipping one person hard enough to shatter a wing mirror; asked about violence at his meetings, Batchelor told the outlet that if you play with fire you get burnt, and that he was never in control of how the crowd responded.[53]

6.3 The booklet and the hole in the law

The most consequential object the campaign produced was a 28 page booklet. It described co-governance as a code for the takeover of New Zealand by private tribal companies and as the end of democracy, and it closed with an instruction: do not vote for any party that will continue with co-governance to any degree, and vote for the party that will completely abandon it, scrap the Waitangi Tribunal, and repeal the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 and all race-based legislation. Copies distributed in central Tauranga carried a stapled flyer advertising marches in Christchurch, Auckland and Wellington. Batchelor said 120,000 copies had been distributed in the wider Tauranga area.[61]

That is an election advertisement by any reading, and it carried no promoter statement. The Electoral Commission wrote to Batchelor setting out the requirement, opened an inquiry, and on 18 August 2023 referred a publication distributed by an individual without a promoter statement to the police. A breach of the advertising rules can attract a fine of up to $40,000. Asked by 1News whether he intended to influence the election, Batchelor answered that he totally did; he called the infringement extremely minor and said it would be hard to prove in court; and he declined to say how much he had spent, which matters because an unregistered promoter faces a low statutory ceiling on election advertising in the regulated period and must register once it is crossed.[62] The online version of the pamphlet was later amended to carry a promoter statement.[63,61]

I have not been able to establish from the public record whether any charge followed, and I do not assert one. The documented facts are the letter, the inquiry, the referral, the spending limit, the refusal to disclose spending, and the admission of electoral intent. One further fact sits on the register. On 24 August 2023, six days after the referral, Batchelor registered with the Electoral Commission as a third party promoter, giving the campaign's email address and his Rawhiti Road address. Jim Grenon, who would later fund his defamation claim, registered on the same day. Neither filed an expense return, which the Act requires only above $100,000. The register records the two registrations and the date, and nothing more; I draw no inference from the coincidence beyond noting it.[14]

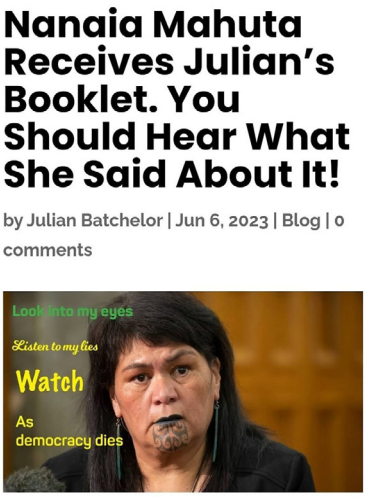


Figure 4: *Stop Co-Governance blog, 6 June 2023. The post reports delivering the booklet to the Minister of Local Government and carries a manipulated image of her captioned with an accusation of lying and the death of democracy. Reproduced here as evidence for criticism and analysis. Readers may wish to skip the image. See Appendix B.*

Figure 4 is the campaign at its plainest, and I reproduce it because the argument of this paper cannot be made without showing what the material actually looked like. The Minister responsible for the water reform is Nanaia Mahuta, who wears moko kauae. The image is cropped tight on her face and overwritten with three lines that instruct the viewer to look into her eyes, listen to her lies, and watch as democracy dies. The technical claim about a governance model has been discarded. What remains is a face, a lie, and a death, arranged so that the face carries the other two. This is the point at which a policy campaign becomes something else, and it ran on a public website beside the event notices.

6.4 The placards say equality



Figure 4: *A Stop Co-Governance rally in central Christchurch, 2023. The placards read Say No! to Racism, Keep us United, United under the same sky, and Nothing about co-governance in the Treaty, each carrying the campaign's web address. Photograph published on the campaign's own Facebook page, Stop Co-Governance NZ; the page does not name a photographer or give a date. See Appendix B.[64]*

Figure 5 completes the argument of section 7. Read the placards. Say no to racism. Keep us united. United under the same sky. Democracy is not one person one vote. Nothing about co-governance in the Treaty. Not one of them says what the campaign said in the hall, where the audience heard about a stone age tribal group and a country at war. On the street the vocabulary is anti-racist and unifying, and it is deployed against the constitutional position of tangata whenua.

This matters for the central claim of the paper. The We Belong Aotearoa site, built by a professional vendor for a well resourced lobby, and these hand-held placards, carried by people who paid for their own signs, arrive at exactly the same words. Unity. Equality. Belonging. Anti-racism. No contract connects them on the public record, and I assert none. What connects them is a shared grammar in which the remedy for a racial hierarchy is renamed as the hierarchy, and in which opposing Indigenous authority can be performed as opposing racism. Once that grammar is available, it costs nothing to use, which is why it spread from a firm with a client list to a man with a projector and a laminator in the same season.

6.5 Holding the ground: what the counter-organising costs

A paper written through the culture-centered approach cannot end its account of a campaign at the campaign. The tour was met, at almost every stop, by tangata whenua and their allies who turned out to contest it in person, and the public record of what that cost them is fuller than the record of what the tour cost its organiser. What follows draws on that published record. I have not interviewed the people named here, and I say so because the difference between quoting a reporter's account of a marae and sitting with that marae is the difference this approach exists to mark. The interviews belong to a later phase of this work and to its owners.

The first cost was the loss of ordinary use of their own places. At Ōrewa in March 2023 the meeting was held at the council owned community centre, and the protest that met it was led by Ngāti Manuhiri and members of Te Herenga Waka o Ōrewa Marae, who found themselves separated from a hall in their own rohe by a line of police officers.[58,65] Mikaela Matenga, who filmed the meeting, described the room as volatile, said she could sense the fear in the crowd, and reported being pushed and told that she needed Jesus when she approached attendees with a camera. She said protesters had to shout to be heard over the microphone, because the alternative was to let comments that denigrated Māori stand in a public building unanswered. When the protesters sang Tūtira Mai Ngā Iwi, the hall answered with the national anthem.[65] The second cost, then, was being cast as the disruption of a civic occasion whose entire content was a claim against them.

The third cost was the door. In Blenheim in June 2023 the Marlborough film maker Keelan Walker, of Rangitāne, Ngāti Kuia, Ngāti Apa and Ngāi Tahu, arrived to ask questions and was stopped at the entrance and told he could not come in because he was not a good Māori who would sit and listen respectfully. Other whānau who turned up were refused as well. Walker, who filmed the exchange, said the only Māori he saw admitted were fairer in complexion, and that through the windows he could see banners reading Stop Apartheid in New Zealand while a man at the door decided which Māori could enter. Batchelor was filmed at the entrance saying that Māori were wrecking his meetings, and later told a reporter that activists were not allowed in.[66] A public meeting advertised in a public town, run on a private admission test administered by eye, is a small reproduction of the constitutional arrangement the tour claimed to be defending the country against.

The fourth cost was the labour of showing up, over and over, for five months. At Mount Maunganui in July the Tauranga historian and kaumātua Buddy Mikaere, of Ngāi Tamarāwaho and Ngāti Pūkenga, said he was embarrassed and ashamed that a community hall in the town he grew up in was hosting meetings he believed excluded people by race, and vowed to protest all three nights. About 20 people stood outside the hall on the first night with placards reading Stop this racist hate, eight police officers stood on the footpath, and Mikaere told the Bay of Plenty Times that most of the people who had come out were Pākehā and that they would be back the next day.[60,67] Rawiri Waititi, backing him publicly that week, said he was ashamed that meetings of this kind were happening within their spaces and that the fear they instilled allowed a rhetoric that endangered tangata whenua and anyone else fighting for a more balanced society.[60] In Whangārei in August a large crowd blocked the front door with waiata and dance and held the meeting up for more than an hour.[68] In Levin a meeting was abandoned after clashes in which protesters accused the organisers of excluding only Māori.[69]

The fifth cost was physical. At Tākaka in July, police broke up a scuffle at the venue door between attendees and protesters, made several arrests, and a witness described a local woman punched and her arm trapped between the door frame and the crush.[70] At Paraparaumu a car accelerated and swerved toward protesters as attendees left, clipping one hard enough to break a wing mirror; at Palmerston North, in my own city, a physical confrontation between an attendee and a protester was photographed on 22 July.[53] Asked about violence at his meetings, Batchelor said that if you play with fire you get burnt, that he was never in control of how the crowd responded to protesters, and that he applauded members of the public who took action to eject them.[53]

The sixth cost was symmetry. When Auckland Council cancelled the Mt Eden War Memorial Hall booking in March, it cancelled both bookings for the evening: the tour's, and the one the Aotearoa Liberation League had taken for the slot afterwards to present a rebuttal of the tour's claims. The council's letter cited health and safety and the significant interest in the event.[71] The people who had organised to answer the campaign lost their venue on the same grounds and by the same letter as the campaign itself, and the tour's organiser then described the cancellation to 1News as corruption and the quashing of free speech.[57] By September, the organisers of an Auckland rally called Honour Te Tiriti, Unite Against Racism were describing the tour as a contributor to the rise of the far right four years after the Christchurch mosque attacks, and alleging that men known for neo-Nazi organising had acted in security roles at its Christchurch and Palmerston North meetings, an allegation I record as the organisers' own and have not independently established.[72]

Set these six against the ledger in section 4.6. The professional circuit cost its clients a little over $135,000 in declared vendor payments. The amateur circuit cost its organiser a hall fee and a print run, and later a defended defamation claim paid for by someone else. The people who held the ground paid in their own bodies, in the loss of their own community buildings for an evening, in being vetted by complexion at a door, in being filmed as the aggressors when they sang, and in the accumulated hours of turning out at every stop of an 82 meeting tour with no vendor, no list and no return. None of that appears in any electoral return, because the law that regulates political campaigning in Aotearoa has no category for the cost of answering one.

6.6 The aftermath: a funder, a court and a finding

The campaign has a second act that belongs in any account of how this kind of politics is financed. In 2023 Batchelor sued Television New Zealand and Sanjana Hattotuwa, then a research director at the Disinformation Project, over the 1News report on the Electoral Commission investigation, in which Hattotuwa described the campaign's output as dangerous speech that incites hate and instigates harm offline, and as racist rhetoric. Batchelor sought $50,000 in damages from Hattotuwa, an unspecified sum from the broadcaster and an apology read on the six o'clock news. During the hearing it emerged that the litigation was being funded by Jim Grenon, a businessman who by then was a director and the second largest shareholder of NZME, the publisher of the New Zealand Herald, with a stake of just under 19 percent.[73,5]

In March 2026 Judge David Clark dismissed the claim in full. He found the statements defamatory on their face and then found all three defences proven: truth, honest opinion and responsible communication in the public interest. On the question of whether Batchelor used racist language he wrote that on any measure the answer must be yes, that the comments were not one-off quips or confined to a period, that they were sustained, made over a significant time and deliberately targeting Māori, and that they were in many instances highly pejorative, offensive and patently wrong. The judgment records that Batchelor held 82 public meetings across New Zealand in 2023 and distributed hundreds of thousands of pamphlets.[5] In July 2026 the court ordered costs against Grenon as a non-party, finding that his involvement went well beyond that of a passive donor and that his shadow loomed large over the proceedings; Batchelor and Grenon were ordered to pay Hattotuwa $107,137 and the broadcaster $125,818.65.[6]

Two things follow for the argument of this paper. The first is evidentiary. A court has now examined the campaign's output at trial and made a finding about its character, which puts the description of this material beyond the reach of the usual objection that calling it racist is a matter of opinion. The second is structural. The same name appears at three points in this record: Grenon registered as a third party promoter at the 2023 election on the same day as Batchelor and filed no expense return, he funded the litigation that a campaigner brought against a public broadcaster and a researcher who had studied him, and he now sits on the board of NZME, the publisher of the New Zealand Herald, as its second largest shareholder.[14,6] Money that is invisible at the point of campaigning becomes visible only when a judge orders it into the open, and by then it has moved from the campaign into the courtroom and from the courtroom into the ownership of a masthead.

6.7 Where the circuits touch

The two circuits were separate as businesses and joined as an ecology. In September 2023 Democracy Action published a single call to action that described He Puapua as a blueprint to break the country's constitutional arrangements and to establish two race-based peoples in an unequal partnership, pointed readers to Hobson's Pledge and the Free Speech Union for lists of questions to put to candidates, and urged them to join with other groups in making democracy and its nemesis co-governance an election issue.[74] Three weeks later Batchelor addressed the crowd at Civic Square in Wellington alongside Brian and Hannah Tamaki at a protest that marched on Parliament, with Stop Co-Governance among the participating groups.[75]

A professional vendor had built the lists and the landing pages. A lobby group with more than a quarter of a million dollars of declared election spending had built the constitutional argument. A self-funded evangelist had taken it into 82 halls and put 120,000 booklets through letterboxes in one district alone. A church leader shared the platform. None of that requires a conspiracy, and the public record shows none. It requires only a shared target and a vocabulary that travels, and the second of those was manufactured.

7. COMMUNICATIVE INVERSION: FROM INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCE TO RACIAL THREAT

The technical achievement described in section 5 would have produced nothing without a semantic operation running alongside it. That operation was inversion, and it worked at three levels.

7.1 The asset grab

Three Waters was a financing instrument. Its central purpose was to move water assets onto balance sheets capable of carrying the debt required to fix them, because the councils holding them were not.[17] A public debate on those terms would have turned on borrowing capacity, on rates increases under each scenario, on the record of aggregation in comparable jurisdictions, and on the Auditor-General's repeated findings about council underinvestment in critical assets.[76] Some of that debate happened in select committee. Almost none of it happened in public.

The campaign relocated the argument to ownership and identity. The reform became a seizure of community assets, and the 50:50 composition of the regional representative groups became the mechanism of the seizure. Once the frame was ownership, every technical answer sounded like evasion. A minister explaining balance sheet separation to a person who has been told their water is being taken is not answering the question that person has been given.

The inversion carries a settler colonial structure that deserves naming precisely. In 2012 the Waitangi Tribunal found that Māori held rights and interests in their water bodies at 1840 for which the closest English equivalent was ownership, and that those rights were confirmed and protected by Te Tiriti. In 2019 it found that the

Resource Management Act had failed the standard of active protection and recommended a national co-governance body and an allocation of water to iwi and hapū.[77] A reform giving mana whenua an equal voice in the oversight of infrastructure built on water whose ownership the Crown has never settled with Māori was described as a theft of assets from the public. The word theft was doing constitutional work. It located ownership with the settler public and rendered Māori authority an intrusion into property that was never in question.

7.2 Equality against equity

The second inversion turned the vocabulary of equality against the remedy for inequality. Te Aka Whai Ora existed because the health system produces different outcomes by ethnicity, a finding the Waitangi Tribunal made in Wai 2575 after examining Crown conduct across the primary health care system.[20] The campaign renamed the remedy as the disease. A body created to close a gap became a two-tier system. Health equity became health by race.

The domain names reported to be held by the vendor on behalf of Hobson's Pledge record the vocabulary in condensed form: equalhealth, isthisracist, bottomline.[39] Each name performs the inversion at the level of a single word. Equal names the removal of equity provision. The question is this racist, addressed to a policy for Māori, relocates racism from a structural distribution of harm to an act of recognition. Bottom line names a limit to be imposed on Tiriti obligations. The names were registered and left empty. The semantic strategy was inventory.

The Act that dissolved Te Aka Whai Ora was introduced under urgency on 27 February 2024 and received Royal assent on 5 March, with disestablishment on 30 June.[78] A Critical Tiriti Analysis published in the New Zealand Medical Journal found the Act had very limited Tiriti compliance and the potential to do great harm.[79] The Waitangi Tribunal, whose urgent inquiry had been cut short by the introduction of the bill, recommended in Hautupua that the Crown commit to revisiting the option of a standalone Māori health authority, consult extensively with Māori on any alternative, and always undertake proper regulatory impact analysis in matters affecting Māori health.[80] The sequence tells its own story: the legislation was passed at a speed that outran the institution designed to test it.

7.3 Belonging as a weapon

The third inversion is the most sophisticated and, for my own communities, the most consequential. We Belong Aotearoa addressed migrants and ethnic minority New Zealanders in the language of unity, wove te reo Māori through its design, and used it to recruit them into opposition to tangata whenua authority.[38]

This works because it names a real experience. A bicultural constitutional framework, described badly, can leave a Punjabi grandmother in Papatoetoe or a Filipino nurse in Palmerston North wondering where they stand in a settlement between Crown and Māori. That uncertainty is genuine and it deserves a genuine answer. The answer is that tangata whenua authority is the ground on which manuhiri belong, that the Tiriti relationship is what makes a plural Aotearoa constitutionally coherent, and that migrants have most to lose when the state decides that historical obligations can be dissolved by a parliamentary majority. Nobody with resources was making that argument to migrant communities in 2023. A campaign with a designer, a domain and a Facebook budget was making the opposite one, and it did so while borrowing the face and words of Dame Whina Cooper, who led the 1975 land march against the Crown, to front a campaign whose funder disapproves of the name Aotearoa appearing on its own website. Karaitiana Taiuru's description, cultural appropriation used as a weapon to deceive immigrants, is the precise name for the inversion.[38]

The manoeuvre belongs to a global repertoire. Multicultural inclusion is offered to racialised communities as a substitute for structural justice, on the condition that they accept a settler frame in which the Indigenous claim is the anomaly. The offer is real in the short run. A migrant community that signs up receives visibility, an invitation into a national we, and the pleasant sensation of being on the side of unity. What it surrenders is the analysis that would let it recognise the same structure operating on itself. The parties whose campaigns were most assisted by anti-co-governance sentiment in 2023 have since made migrants a target in their own right. In July 2026 the Foreign Minister and leader of New Zealand First told a China-born Green member of Parliament to go back to your own country during a debate in the House, the third occasion in 18 months on which he had invoked a member's origins or ethnicity in the chamber.[81]

8. THE CROWN LOST THE FIELD BEFORE IT ENTERED IT

It would be too easy to read this as a story about a clever opponent. The Crown's own communicative conduct was a condition of the outcome.

Cabinet approved a $4m public information and education campaign for Three Waters in December 2020. The strategy behind it was supplied by Kim Wicksteed, a consultant and former chief executive of Saatchi and Saatchi New Zealand, who advised that the reforms required inspirational, emotive marketing rather than the information first approach normally used for public service campaigns. The advertising, produced by FCB New Zealand, ran on television, in print and online. It used animation to depict a slime-covered child, a sick duck, and other unhappy creatures, and warned of nasties in the water.[7]

The response was immediate and hostile. The Leader of the Opposition called the advertisements fake news. Local government representatives called them fear mongering and propaganda. The Public Service Commission warned that the work was of concern in light of guidelines requiring government advertising to fill an identifiable and justifiable information need. Seven complaints went to the Advertising Standards Authority, which declined to uphold them on the basis that the advertising was advocacy and the identity of the advertiser was clear.[82,83] The campaign failed at its stated aim, which was to secure councils' voluntary agreement to the reform.[7]

The deeper failure lies past the aesthetic misjudgement, in the fact that $4m of public money bought no argument at all. The advertisements never explained why an equal voice for mana whenua in the oversight of water was a Tiriti obligation rather than an administrative preference.[7] The Crown spent its money on feelings about water and left the constitutional question unanswered in public, at the precise moment when a well resourced operation was answering it in public every day. A state that declines to explain its own obligations under Te Tiriti creates a vacuum rather than neutrality, and the vacuum is filled by whoever holds a mailing list.

The same pattern recurs across the period. He Puapua was withheld from public discussion on the ground that it might be misconstrued, which guaranteed that it would be.[24] Consultation on Three Waters ran to a schedule set by the legislative programme rather than by the communities affected. Te Aka Whai Ora was launched into a health system with no sustained public account of what the Waitangi Tribunal had found. In culture-centered terms, the Crown treated communication as a downstream promotional function attached to a decision already made, rather than as the infrastructure through which a public participates in making one. That is the standing failure, and it is not confined to the Labour government or to these three policies.

9. WHAT CAN AND CANNOT BE CLAIMED ABOUT 2023

Two claims are frequently made about this period. The first is that the anti-co-governance campaign decided the 2023 election. The second is that The Campaign Company ran that campaign. Both overstate the record.

On salience, the evidence is solid and specific. Horizon Research surveyed voters in late September 2023 and found that 26 percent named stopping co-governance policies as one of the most important issues deciding their party vote, against 15 percent who named continuing them. Among intending ACT voters the figure for ending co-governance was 62 percent; among intending New Zealand First voters 45 percent; among intending National voters 40 percent. Forty-six percent of Māori respondents named honouring Te Tiriti as an important influence on their vote. Horizon estimated that these issues were being factored into party vote choices by more than a million eligible voters.[84] Talbot Mills polling published after the election found more respondents opposed Māori wards, co-governance and the Māori Health Authority than supported them, with the divide falling along party lines.[85]

What those numbers establish is that a constitutional question which had almost no electoral salience in 2020 had become a first order vote driver for a large minority by 2023. What they do not establish is causation. The 2023 election was also fought on the cost of living, on crime, and on a general exhaustion with the incumbent. The New Zealand Election Study found voters wanted economic relief, reduced crime and better public services, and that the coalition's mandate rested substantially on those expectations.[86] A campaign that made co-governance vivid did not need to change many votes to matter. It needed only to make the issue available as a coalition forming demand, and it succeeded at that.

On authorship, the documented record supports a narrower claim than the commentary does. The company was the digital vendor to Groundswell, to Hobson's Pledge and to the Taxpayers' Union, registered the domains, was paid from the electoral returns of all three, and held a portfolio of unused single-issue domains for one of them.[34,38,39,43] It does not follow that the company set the strategy. Hobson's Pledge has campaigned against mandated Māori representation in central and local government since its founding and requires no consultant to tell it what it thinks.[38] Groundswell was a real farmer network with real grievances about regulation. The Taxpayers' Union has a decade of institutional practice behind it. The accurate description is that an existing political project acquired a professional digital capability, and that the capability changed what the project could do.

The policy consequence is unaffected by that distinction, which is why I insist on it. The coalition agreements signed in November 2023 read like an index to the campaign of the preceding two years. The National and New Zealand First agreement undertook to stop all work on He Puapua and recorded that the government does not recognise the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as having binding legal effect in New Zealand. The agreements also committed the government to remove co-governance from the delivery of public services, to issue a Cabinet Office circular directing that public services be prioritised on the basis of need rather than race, and to restore the local referendum on Māori wards.[87] The repeal record is not in doubt. The Water Services Acts Repeal Act passed on 14 February 2024 as part of the coalition's hundred day plan, restoring council ownership and control.[88] The Pae Ora (Disestablishment of Māori Health Authority) Amendment Act received assent on 5 March 2024, with the authority dissolved on 30 June.[78] Two years of constitutional argument were closed by legislation inside a hundred days, and the Waitangi Tribunal's urgent inquiry was cut short by the introduction of the bill, because the Tribunal cannot inquire into legislation once it is before the House.[80]

10. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MANUFACTURED GRASSROOTS

Astroturfing is not new and it is not a New Zealand invention. Sharon Beder documented the corporate manufacture of citizen groups against environmental regulation in the 1990s.[89] Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway traced the transfer of the tobacco industry's doubt production apparatus into climate denial.[90] Edward Walker's study of the American public affairs industry established the central structural point: the grassroots lobbying firm is a vendor, its product is participation, and its clients buy the appearance of a constituency they do not have.[47] What is specific to Aotearoa is how late, how cheap and how unregulated the arrival has been, and that its first sustained domestic deployment ran against Indigenous constitutional claims.

Four features of the political economy deserve emphasis. The first is the vendor form itself. A private company selling campaign services to advocacy organisations converts political mobilisation into a market transaction, insulates the principal from scrutiny, and makes the technique available to anyone who can pay. The tobacco engagement and the co-governance engagements ran through the same firm in the same period.[41,43] There is no ideological filter in a vendor relationship. There is a price.

The second is the transnational architecture. The Taxpayers' Union is an Atlas Network partner and its executive director trained with and was funded by the network.[29] Atlas provides a shared repertoire of organisational forms, campaign templates and framing devices to hundreds of affiliated organisations, and the taxpayer group model has been replicated across jurisdictions with the same structures and the same vocabulary.[91] The local campaign against co-governance drew on a globally circulating grammar in which any state recognition of collective Indigenous or minority rights is coded as a violation of individual equality. The grammar arrives fully formed. Only the nouns change.

The third is data. The petition funnel is an extraction technology. It takes political feeling from a population and returns it in a proprietary form, held by a private company, invisible to the people it describes, usable at any future moment for any future campaign. Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor's work on Indigenous data sovereignty establishes the principle at stake: data about a people, and increasingly data taken from a people, is an asset with governance implications, and control over it is a dimension of sovereignty.[92] New Zealand has no mandatory register of lobbyists, no requirement that a campaign vendor disclose its clients, and no rule requiring a political data operation to tell a signatory how their record will be segmented, modelled, transferred or seeded into a platform's audience system.[2] Timothy Kuhner of the University of Auckland put the general problem to Newsroom in terms this paper adopts: the number of ways in which electoral outcomes and public opinion can be shaped free of public scrutiny is increasing.30 Shoshana Zuboff's account of behavioural surplus describes the general mechanism; what the co-governance campaigns show is that mechanism applied to constitutional politics in a small democracy with almost no countervailing infrastructure.[48]

The fourth feature appears only at the end of the sequence, and section 6.6 supplies it. When a campaign of this kind is examined by journalists or researchers, the response available to a well funded backer is litigation. A defamation claim against a broadcaster and an academic costs the claimant nothing if a third party pays for it, imposes years of cost and risk on the defendants, and does its work whether or not it succeeds. The claim in this instance failed and the funder was ordered to contribute to costs, which is the system working; it worked slowly, expensively, and only because the defendants were a state broadcaster and a researcher with institutional backing.[5,6] A community organisation or a local reporter would have folded.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are directed at four audiences: Parliament, the Electoral Commission and the Privacy Commissioner, the public service, and community and Tiriti-based organisations. They are ordered by the stage of the circuit they interrupt.

1. Extend third party promoter disclosure below the current threshold. The $100,000 reporting threshold means that most of the market described in this paper is invisible. A registered promoter could spend up to $100,000 at the 2023 election without filing any return, and up to $391,000 in total, and there is no limit on how many promoters may register.[93] Registration and itemised expense reporting should begin at a substantially lower figure, and returns should require the naming of every campaign vendor, every domain operated, and every advertising platform used.[14,42]

2. Regulate the regulated period. The most consequential work described here, the domain registrations, list building and roadshow of 2021 and 2022, fell entirely outside the regulated period and generated no disclosure obligation whatever.[14,93] A continuous disclosure regime for organisations spending above a threshold on political advertising in any 12-month window would close the gap.

3. Publish the outcome of promoter referrals. The Electoral Commission referred a publication distributed without a promoter statement to the police in August 2023; the public record shows that the individual concerned registered as a promoter six days later, and shows nothing of what followed from the referral. A rule whose breach carries a $40,000 maximum penalty and no visible consequence is not a rule. The Commission should publish, in an annual compliance report, the number of referrals made, their subject matter in general terms, and their disposition.[61,62]

4. Require identification of the funder on political campaign material at the point of first contact. Disclosure added months after launch, in dark type on a dark background, is not disclosure.[38] The promoter statement requirement should extend to campaign websites and social accounts, appear above the fold, and name the entity that pays for the campaign rather than the entity that hosts it.

5. Make domain registration transparent for political campaigning. The .nz framework already keeps the registrant name and country public and allows only individuals outside significant trade to withhold an address and telephone number, so the gap this paper describes is not the privacy option itself.[94] The gap is that a campaign can be registered in the name of a vendor or a shell while the funding principal stays off the record, as motherofallprotests.nz, webelong.co.nz and saveourstores.nz each show.[34,38,41] Political campaign domains should carry a declared principal, and that declaration should be enforceable under the Electoral Act rather than left to domain policy alone.

6. Bring political data processing within the Privacy Act's enforcement reach. A petition signature should carry a plain statement of what will be done with the record: retention period, segmentation, transfer to third parties, and use as a seed for lookalike audience modelling. The Privacy Commissioner should issue a code of practice for political data, and the exemptions that currently allow political actors wide latitude should be narrowed.

7. Require platform level transparency for political advertising in New Zealand. Advertisers should be identifiable, the targeting criteria should be disclosed in a public archive, spend should be reported by campaign and by advertiser, and the archive should be accessible to researchers rather than only to platform partners.

8. Reform Crown communication on Tiriti matters from promotion to voice infrastructure. The $4m spent on emotive advertising for Three Waters should have been spent building the capacity of hapū, iwi, community organisations, migrant associations and local media to hold the conversation themselves.[7] Public communication budgets on constitutional questions should be assessed against a single test: does this expenditure increase the number of communities able to speak for themselves about the policy, or does it increase the volume at which the Crown speaks about them?

9. Make the Tiriti argument in public, in advance, and in the ordinary vocabulary of public administration. Withholding He Puapua from public discussion produced exactly the outcome the withholding was meant to avoid.[24] Departments should publish the Tiriti reasoning for a proposal at the same moment they publish the proposal.
10. Establish a standing public capability for detecting and disclosing coordinated inauthentic domestic campaigning. The function is transparency: registration records, advertising archives, network analysis and publication, with no power to restrict what anybody says. Universities, the Electoral Commission and independent researchers should share it, and it should be funded on a multi-year basis rather than through project grants that expire between elections.
11. Build the counter-infrastructure. Regulation constrains the worst of this. It does not produce voice. The organisations that were outspent and outbuilt in 2021 to 2023 need what the other side has: durable communication capability, list infrastructure they own, staff who are paid, and the ability to address migrant, Pacific and Asian communities in their own languages with an account of why Tiriti obligations protect them too. That work is slow, it is unglamorous, and it is the only thing that changes the balance described in this paper.

12. CONCLUSION

A campervan drove into 39 towns and the newspapers reported a movement. A website in te reo Māori invited migrants to weave the people together and delivered them into a campaign against the people whose language it borrowed. A blog counted the people who turned out to oppose a meeting and published the number as proof of the meeting's importance. A petition against water reform became a database, and the database became a coalition demand, and the demand became legislation inside a hundred days. At every stage the operation described itself as the opposite of what it was, and at every stage the description held, because the resources to contest it did not exist on the other side.

The finding I want to leave with policy makers runs past any single company. The manufacture of simulated publics is now a purchasable service in Aotearoa New Zealand. It costs very little. Almost none of it is disclosed. It was first turned at scale on the constitutional standing of tangata whenua, and once the grammar was built it was free for anyone to carry, which is how it reached a hired hall in Golden Bay and a placard in central Christchurch. A court has since described that language for what it is, and a funder whose name had sat on the promoter register since August 2023 with no return attached to it was ordered to pay for the litigation he had financed. The next campaign will use the same circuit. The names on the domains will be different.

APPENDIX A: LINKAGE REGISTER

The table records each linkage relied on in this paper against its evidentiary class. Documented claims rest on an inspectable primary record; reported claims rest on named journalism; analytic inferences are mine.

LINKAGE	CLASS	BASIS
The Campaign Company incorporated 4 November 2021; Jordan Williams sole director	Documented	Companies Office register, company no. 8257633
Williams is executive director of the Taxpayers' Union and a Free Speech Union co-founder	Documented	Organisations' own published material; RNZ interview, 2024
Williams attended Atlas Network training (2015) and received an Atlas fellowship (2018)	Reported	Published accounts of Taxpayers' Union funding and affiliation
motherofallprotests.nz created 14 November 2021; registrant Groundswell NZ by March 2024, domain expired and pending deletion	Documented	.nz query service record captured 5 March 2024
motherofallprotests.nz registered first to the Taxpayers' Union, then updated to The Campaign Company	Reported	Contemporaneous screenshots; Newsroom, 31 October 2023
Groundswell engaged The Campaign Company as its digital contractor	Reported / self-disclosed	Groundswell founders on The Country; NZ Herald sponsored advertorial paid for by the company, July 2022
webelong.co.nz registrant Campaign Company; registered 19 May 2023, created 19 June 2014; site created by Hobson's Pledge	Documented / reported	.nz query service record captured 2 March 2024; RNZ, 31 August 2023
The Campaign Company listed as registrant or administrative contact for isthisracist.nz, equalhealth.nz, bottomline.nz and the Hobson's Pledge domains	Reported	RNZ, 31 August 2023; Astroturfing NZ, March 2024; query service records not read by the author
equalhealth.nz ran an active campaign against Te Aka Whai Ora	Not established	No campaign content recorded on the domain; asserted in some commentary without support
saveourstores.nz created and registered to Campaign Company 28 June 2023; campaign run for Imperial Brands NZ and BAT NZ	Documented / reported	.nz query service record captured 1 March 2024; RNZ, August 2023
Payments to The Campaign Company by Groundswell ($78,200), Hobson's Pledge ($34,500) and the Taxpayers' Union ($23,033)	Documented	Third party promoter returns filed with the Electoral Commission, 2023
Third party promoter spending in 2023 approached $2 million, thirteen times the 2020 figure	Documented	Electoral Commission returns; RNZ analysis
The Crown spent about $4 million on the Three Waters public information campaign	Documented / reported	Cabinet approval December 2020; NZ Herald reporting on OIA material
Williams is founder, chief executive and sole director; 98 per cent of shares held by a corporate trustee he co-owns	Documented	Companies Office register, compiled and linked in the Lobbying and Influence Register entry
The Campaign Company's general manager is also a Free Speech Union advocate	Documented	Lobbying and Influence Register entry; Free Speech Union material
Māori held rights in water at 1840 for which the closest English equivalent was ownership	Documented	Waitangi Tribunal, Wai 2358 stage 1 report, 2012
The Wai 2575 Hauora report recommended investigating a stand-alone Māori health authority and co-designed solutions	Documented	Waitangi Tribunal, Hauora, 2019, and the Tribunal's published summary of its recommendations
Batchelor held eighty-two public meetings across 2023	Documented	District Court judgment, March 2026; Re: News reported more than fifty events, November 2024
The Electoral Commission referred a publication distributed without a promoter statement to police on 18 August 2023	Reported	Electoral Commission statement, reported by the Bay of Plenty Times, 29 August 2023

LINKAGE	CLASS	BASIS
Batchelor said he "totally" intended to influence the election and declined to disclose his spending	Reported	1News, August 2023, amended September 2023
120,000 booklets were distributed in the wider Tauranga area	Campaign claim	Batchelor's own statement to the Bay of Plenty Times; not independently verified
Any charge or conviction followed the police referral	Not established	No public record located; the paper asserts none
Stop Co-Governance and The Campaign Company were contractually or organisationally linked	Not established	No registration, payment or reporting connects them; the shared element is vocabulary
Figures 1 to 5 are material published by the Stop Co-Governance campaign on its own blog and Facebook page	Documented	Campaign blog screenshots; Stop Co-Governance NZ Facebook page
Ngāti Manuhiri and Te Herenga Waka o Ōrewa Marae led the Ōrewa protest; Māori were refused entry at Blenheim; arrests at Tākaka	Reported	RNZ, Te Ao Māori News, Local Democracy Reporting, NZ Herald, 2023
Neo-Nazi organisers acted in security roles at Christchurch and Palmerston North meetings	Not established	Allegation by counter-rally organisers, September 2023; not independently verified
A court found Batchelor used racist rhetoric, sustained and deliberately targeting Māori	Documented	District Court judgment, Batchelor v TVNZ and Hattotuwa, 24 March 2026
Batchelor and Grenon each registered as third party promoters on 24 August 2023, six days after the referral; neither filed an expense return	Documented	Electoral Commission register of promoters, 2023 general election; register of promoter expenses
Jim Grenon funded the defamation claim and was ordered to contribute to costs as a non-party	Documented	District Court costs judgment, July 2026; contemporaneous reporting
Mauao is held by the Mauao Trust and jointly administered with Tauranga City Council	Documented	Mauao Historic Reserve Vesting Act 2008; Auditor-General, co-governance report, 2016
Harvested lists were seeded into platform lookalike audience systems by a named operator	Not established	Targeting parameters are not disclosed in New Zealand; the capability is standard, the use is not evidenced
The campaign funnel operated as a five-stage value chain	Analytic inference	Author's reading of the documented and reported material
The vendor's domain portfolio indicates pre-built segmentation capacity	Analytic inference	Author's reading of the registration record
The Campaign Company authored the anti-co-governance strategy	Not established	No public record of strategic authorship; vendor relationship only
The campaign decided the 2023 election result	Not established	Salience is documented in polling; causation is not demonstrable from the available data

APPENDIX B: IMAGES, PROVENANCE AND USE

Five images appear in this paper. Figures 1 to 4 are screenshots of material published by the Stop Co-Governance campaign on its own public website and social media accounts during 2023, supplied to me in that form; the dates and headlines visible in the images are reproduced as they appear, and each carries the author byline, date and post format of the campaign's own blog. I have not altered any of them. For print, all five were enlarged by conventional interpolation, which increases pixel dimensions without adding content; no AI enhancement or generative upscaling was applied, so no detail in any figure, including the faces in Figures 4 and 5, has been invented. I have not been able to retrieve the individual posts at their original addresses, so the screenshots are treated as the record of what was published rather than as links a reader can follow, and every factual claim drawn from them is corroborated in the text by a separately cited news report. Figure 5 is a photograph of a Stop Co-Governance rally in central Christchurch, published on the campaign's own Facebook page, Stop Co-Governance NZ, which the campaign lists as its official account on its petition material.[64] The page does not credit a photographer or date the image, so the photographer is not identified and the date is not established beyond the 2023 tour, during which the campaign's closing marches were held in Christchurch, Auckland and Wellington in September.[61] The campaign web address is legible on the placards. That the campaign published the photograph of its own march is itself part of the record: the image is the campaign's self-presentation, and I read it as such. Where an image carries a claim I have not independently verified, such as the attendance figure in Figure 3, I treat the claim as the campaign's own assertion rather than as a count, and say so in the text.

All five are reproduced for the purposes of criticism, review and reporting of current events. Each is analysed in the body of the paper rather than used decoratively. Figure 4 reproduces a manipulated image of a sitting member of Parliament captioned with an accusation of lying and the death of democracy. I have included it because an argument about the degradation of public communication cannot be made honestly while hiding the material it describes, and I have flagged it in the caption and in the front matter so that readers can choose to pass over it.

APPENDIX C: REFERENCES

All references were checked against the record named in each entry in September and October 2026. Where an entry rests on journalism, the outlet, the date and, where a byline is available, the reporter are given. Where it rests on a primary record, the record is named so that any reader can retrieve it independently.

Use of AI tools. Claude (Anthropic), a large language model, was used for editing and revision support: redrafting passages to the author's direction across successive revisions, locating and checking sources, and checking citations, numbering and formatting for consistency. The analysis, argument and conclusions are the author's, every factual claim was checked against the record cited for it, and no claim rests on the tool's own output. The author is responsible for the whole of the content. Disclosure follows Committee on Publication Ethics, "Authorship and AI Tools: COPE Position Statement," 13 February 2023, https://publicationethics.org/cope-position-statements/ai-author.

1. New Zealand Companies Office, register entry for The Campaign Company Limited, company number 8257633, incorporated 4 November 2021, https://app.companiesoffice.govt.nz/companies/app/ui/pages/companies/8257633.
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3. Guyon Espiner, interview with Jordan Williams, 30 with Guyon Espiner, RNZ, May 2024, https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/30-with-guyon-espiner/story/2018938627/jordan-williams-on-what-the-taxpayers-union-really-is-and-who-funds-it.
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8. New Zealand Taxpayers' Union, "Taxpayers' Union Launches Nationwide Stop Three Waters Roadshow," press release, 31 May 2022, https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO2205/S00277/taxpayers-union-launches-nationwide-stop-three-waters-roadshow.htm.
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12. Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* (London: Sage, 2010); Mohan J. Dutta and Mahuya Pal, "Theorizing from the Global South: Dismantling, Resisting, and Transforming Communication Theory," *Communication Theory 30*, no. 4 (2020).

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14. Electoral Commission, "Registered Promoter Expenses for the 2023 General Election," https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/historical-events/2023-general-election/registered-promoter-expenses-for-the-2023-general-election/. Only promoters spending more than $100,000 in the regulated period are required to file expense returns. The register of promoters for the 2023 general election, https://elections.nz/guidance-and-rules/for-third-party-promoters/register-of-promoters-for-2023-general-election/, lists 32 registered promoters with their contact details and registration dates; it records Jim Grenon (10 Gibbons Road, Auckland) and Julian Batchelor (stopcogovernance@gmail.com; 147 Rawhiti Road, RD4 Hikurangi) as each registered on 24 August 2023, and Democracy Action Incorporated as registered on 16 May 2023. Neither Grenon nor Batchelor appears among the seven promoters who filed expense returns.

15. Water Services Entities Act 2022; on the later revision to ten entities and the retention of equal representation on the regional representative groups see "Explained: What's Going On with Formerly-Named Three Waters and Co-Governance," The Spinoff, 24 April 2023, https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/24-04-2023/explained-whats-going-on-with-formerly-named-three-waters-and-co-governance, in which Carwyn Jones and Andrew Geddis set out the governance arrangements.

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17. On the scale of the investment need see note [16]; the modelled figures were adopted in the Department of Internal Affairs case for change and are summarised in "The Three Waters Reform in New Zealand: Learning from Local Government Narratives for Improved Governance," Water Policy 27, no. 12 (2025), https://iwaponline.com/wp/article/27/12/1325/110106/.

18. RNZ, "Mahuta Won't Rule Out Forcing Councils into Three Waters Reforms," 2021, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/452517/mahuta-won-t-rule-out-forcing-councils-into-three-waters-reforms; Water Services Entities Act 2022, provisions on regional representative groups and board appointment.

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20. Waitangi Tribunal, Hauora: Report on Stage One of the Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry (Wai 2575), 2019; Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022.

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25. Claire Charters, quoted in "He Puapua Explained," *New Zealand Herald*, 2021.

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28. Companies Office register entry, note [1] above.

29. On the Atlas training, the 2018 fellowship grant and partner status, see the compiled account in Torrin, "The Campaign Company," and Astroturfing NZ, "Understanding Atlas: How a Right-Wing Network Is Building Global Influence," 1 May 2024, https://www.astroturfing.nz/understanding-atlas-how-a-right-wing-network-is-building-global-influence/.

30. Newsroom, "Chiding in Plain Sight," 31 October 2023, https://newsroom.co.nz/2023/10/31/chiding-in-plain-sight/. Williams is quoted there stating that Atlas prize money and other Atlas funding had never constituted more than one or two percent of the Taxpayers' Union's annual income and was its only overseas funding. The same report quotes Timothy Kuhner, associate professor of law at the University of Auckland, on the lack of transparency around third party promoters.

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