

Candidate and Councillor Diversity Report

2021/22





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

PURPOSE

The NSW Candidate and Councillor Diversity Report is prepared by the Office of Local Government (OLG) following NSW local government elections, which are held every four years. The report presents findings and trends to assist in monitoring the representation of the community on councils based on data provided by the candidates and the NSW Electoral Commission.

REPORT DATA

Candidates provide information on diversity factors such as age, gender, occupation, and previous experience as councillor. Under the Local Government (General) Regulation 2021, the information supplied by candidates is confidential and can only be published in aggregate or consolidated form.

Data provided may be incomplete, for example, candidates may not have responded to some, or any, of the survey questions. Calculations are based on completed responses unless stated otherwise.

COUNCIL CATEGORISATION

Councils are categorised into five regional areas based on a range of criteria such as location, land area and population. The categories are referred to in the report and are listed below, with the number of councils in each: Metro –25; Metro fringe – 9; Regional Town/City –37; Rural –15 and Large rural –42.

DATA SOURCES

Data sources used in the report include:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 census data
- NSW Electoral Commission 2021 election results
- Report on the conduct of the 2021 NSW Local Government Elections – NSW Electoral Commission

DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, OLG is unable to independently verify the information provided by candidates. OLG expressly disclaims any liability to any person in respect of anything done or not done as a result of the contents of the publication or the data provided.

Quick facts

Candidates



3,854

candidates

Councillors



1,255

councillors

Female representative



All councils have at least

1 female

elected representative

Female mayor



>1/4

of mayors are female

Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander
councillors



The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councillors is above the NSW population percentage

Age



10
councillors

are aged between 18 and 24

Language



Other than English, Arabic is the most common language councillors first learned to speak

Previous experience



43.2%

of elected councillors have had no previous experience.

Profession



Most candidates and councillors have professional occupations

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Across the State

Elections overview

The 2021 NSW local government elections were due to be held in September 2020 but were postponed twice in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Elections were instead held on 4 December 2021. Of the 128 general purpose councils in NSW, 124 councils held elections. Four councils, Balranald Shire, Central Coast, Central Darling Shire, and Wingecarribee Shire councils were under administration and did not hold elections. Three councils, Singleton Shire, Kempsey Shire, and Shellharbour City councils had subsequent elections on 30 July 2022 after the results of their December elections were disallowed by the Supreme Court because of the failure of the NSW Electoral Commission's technology-assisted voting platform, iVote.

There were three uncontested undivided council elections for councillors. These were in Bourke, Cobar and Narromine Shire Councils. There was one uncontested mayoral election at Dungog Shire Council.¹ Uncontested elections occur when the number of candidates nominated is the same or less than the number of councillor positions available for election.

Candidate and Councillor demographics

This report provides diversity information on the 3,854 candidates that stood for 1,255 positions on NSW councils. The core diversity groups identified in this report are female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability and those with a first language other than English. Representation by age is also considered. Those aged 18-29 are historically underrepresented.

Where comparable data is available, comparisons have been made to the State population. As can be seen in Table 1 below, of the diversity groups traditionally underrepresented in local government only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates and councillors are above the State population average, albeit marginally.

Table 1: Comparison of candidate and councillor demographics to NSW population

Demographic	Candidate %	Councillor %	NSW 2021 Census %
Female	42.1	39.0	50.6 ²
Male	55.3	59.2	49.4 ³
Gender not stated	2.6	1.8	NA
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	4.4	3.9	3.4 ⁴
Linguistic diversity	11.9	10.1	NA ⁵
Age 18-29	8.7	4.2	16 ⁶
Age 30-59	52.3	53.2	39.7 ⁷
Age 60 and over	37.2	41.0	23.55 ⁸

¹ NSW Electoral Commission Report on the conduct of the 2021 NSW Local Government elections

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, NSW 2021 Census All persons QuickStats

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, NSW 2021 Census All persons QuickStats

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (1 July 2022), New South Wales: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary

⁵ Data collected from the Australian Bureau of Statistics is not comparable to that collected from candidates and councillors

⁶ Office of Local Government Candidate and Councillor Diversity Report 2017 (Census data 2016 as 2021 not accessible)

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, NSW 2021 Census All persons QuickStats

⁸ Office of Local Government Candidate and Councillor Diversity Report 2017 (Census data 2016 as 2021 not accessible)



Participation

Mid-Coast Council, a Regional Town/City Council, had the highest number of candidates across NSW with 80 candidates vying for 11 positions. Hawkesbury City Council had the largest number in Metropolitan Fringe councils with 79, closely followed by Georges River with 78 as the largest of Metropolitan councils. Federation Council had the highest number for a Large Rural council with 31. Rural councils Coonamble Shire and Warren Shire both had 17 candidates. Table 2: Below shows the number of candidates by region, the number of councillors and the percentage of candidates elected.

Table 2: Candidates and councillors by region and percentage of candidates elected

Council Region	Candidates	Councillors	Percentage of candidates elected by region
Metropolitan	1,252	302	24.1%
Metropolitan Fringe	432	95	22.0%
Regional Town/City	1,412	365	25.8%
Rural	161	120	74.5%
Large Rural	597	373	62.5%

The typical councillor

The typical 2021 councillor is an English-speaking male aged 60-69 years with a professional occupation, who did not identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person or as having a disability, and, who has had previous experience as a NSW councillor. The typical candidate only differs in that they have had no previous experience as a councillor.

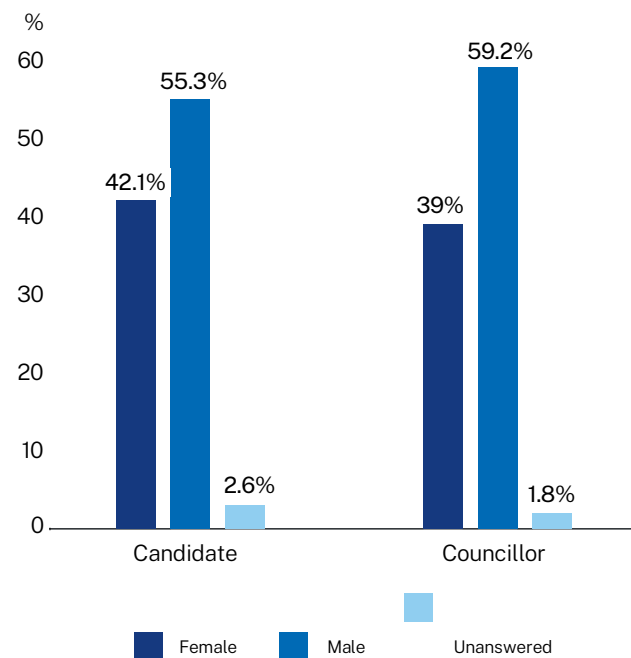
Women

Participation

2021 sees the highest number and percentage of female candidates and councillors on record. 1,622 females stood as candidates (42.1 per cent of all candidates) and 490 of these were elected to council, making 39.0 per cent of elected representatives in NSW female. This is an increase from the 2016/17 elections of 31.2 per cent.

25 councils have a majority of female representation and 2 have parity. All councils have at least one female councillor.

Chart 1: Candidates and Councillors by gender



Demographics

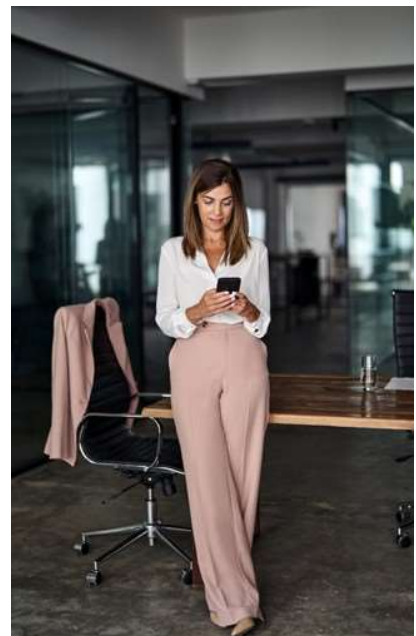
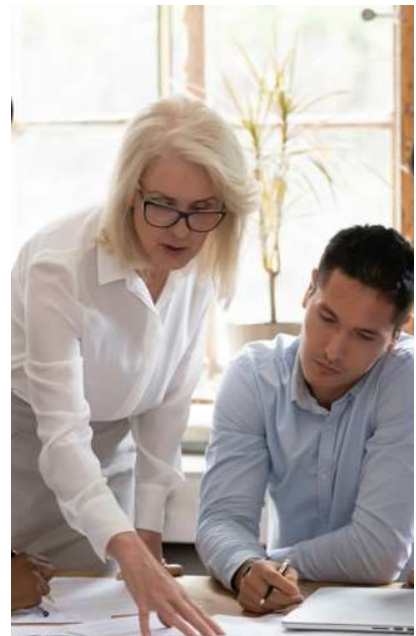
One-third (33.3 per cent) of female councillors have a professional occupation, the most common profession of all councillors. It was also the most common profession of female candidates at 30.1 per cent. Self-employed, managers and retirees each represent 10 per cent or more of female councillor occupations.

One-third (33.4 per cent) of female candidates and one-fifth (20.5 per cent) of females elected have no experience as a councillor. 17.8 per cent of councillors have completed at least 1 term as a councillor.

Over one-quarter (27.4 per cent) of mayors are female.

Other than English, Mandarin was the most common first language spoken by female candidates. Greek and Italian are the most common of female councillors.

17 female councillors first learned to speak a language other than English.



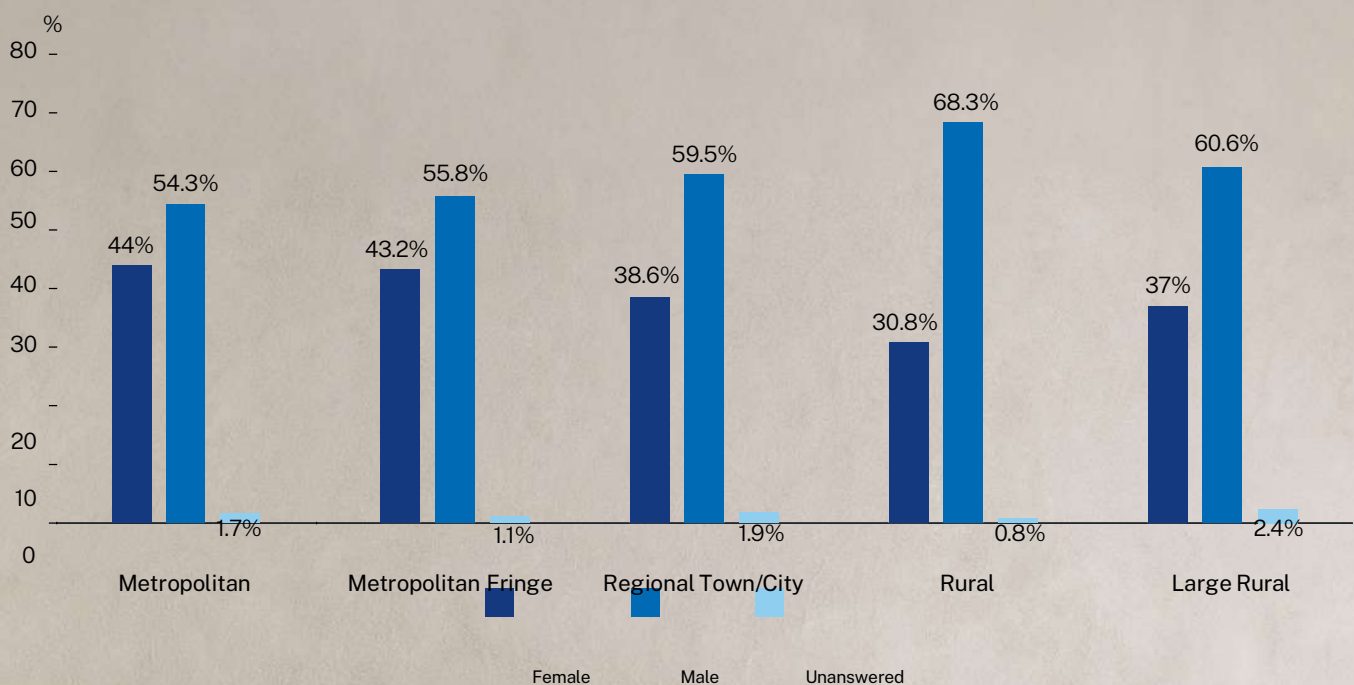
Participation and representation by regions

In terms of candidates, Metropolitan Fringe councils had the highest female candidate percentage rate at 46.1 per cent, followed by Metropolitan at 44.9 per cent and Regional Town/City had 42.4 per cent. Large Rural and Rural had 34.8 per cent and 33.5 per cent respectively.

The greatest disparity between male and female representation is found in the 15 councils in Rural areas where less than a third (30.8 per cent) of all elected representatives are female.

As in the 2016/17 elections, Metropolitan councils have the highest representation of female councillors (44.0 per cent) marginally higher than Metropolitan Fringe councils (43.2 per cent).

Chart 2: Gender representation of councillors by regions



Mayors

Gender

Across NSW, there is a significantly greater proportion of male mayors compared to female mayors. The highest representation of female mayors is in the 8 Metropolitan Fringe councils, where 37.5 per cent of mayors are female. The lowest is in the 42 Large Rural councils where female mayors only make up 19.0 per cent of mayors.

Chart 3 shows that there is less than 1 per cent difference in the gender of mayors elected in 2017 and

those elected in 2021.

Popularly elected mayors

Council mayors are either popularly elected, where candidates stand at local government election for the position of mayor and are elected by voters, or, are elected as a councillor and then elected by their peers at the first meeting of the council following the election. Mayors elected by councillors have a 2-year term, after which another election for mayor is held.

35 councils have popularly elected mayors. As can be seen in Charts 4 and 5, there is not a significant difference in the percentage of males and females being elected by councillors or popularly elected.

Demographics

The majority of mayors (61.3 per cent) are aged between 50 and 69, with 60–69-year-olds making up the largest demographic at 37.1 per cent.

There are 2 mayors aged between 25 and 29.

One mayor is an Aboriginal person.

6 mayors have a first language learned other than English.

Chart 3: Comparison of mayors by gender between 2017 and 2021

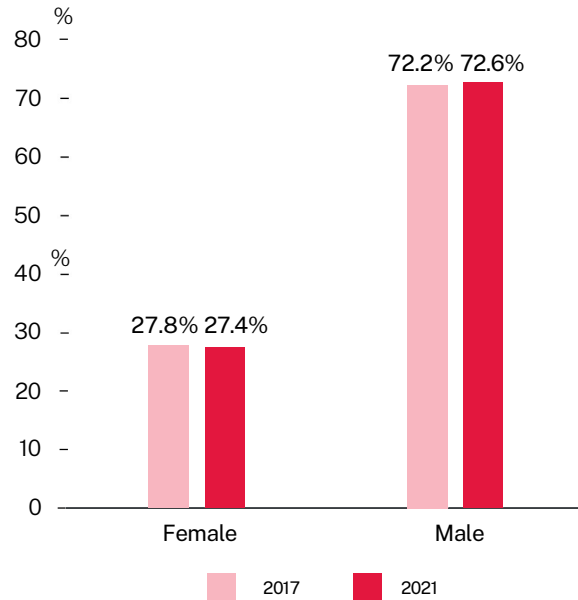


Chart 4: Male mayors elected by councillors or popularly elected by the community

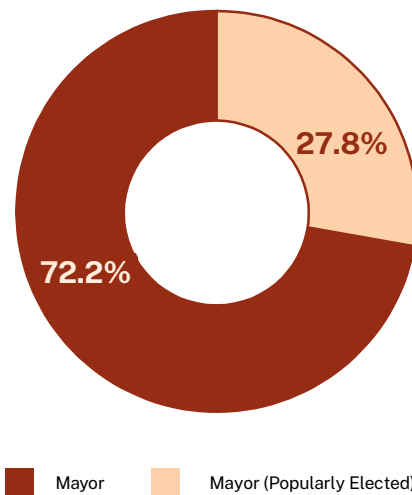
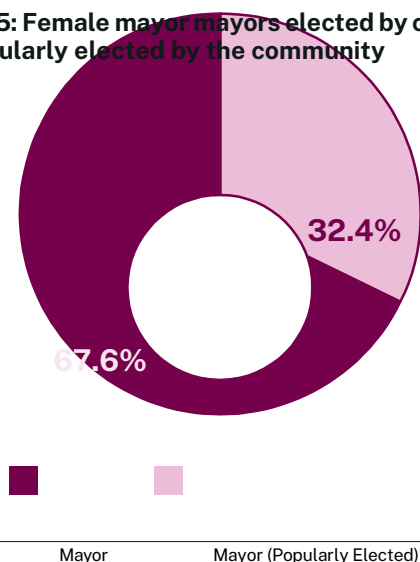
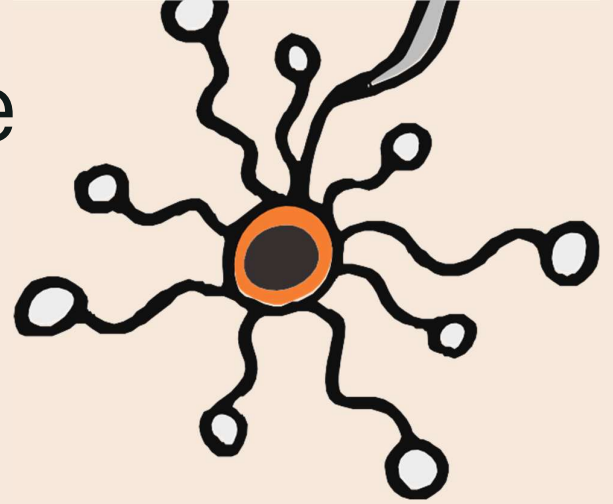


Chart 5: Female mayors elected by councillors or popularly elected by the community

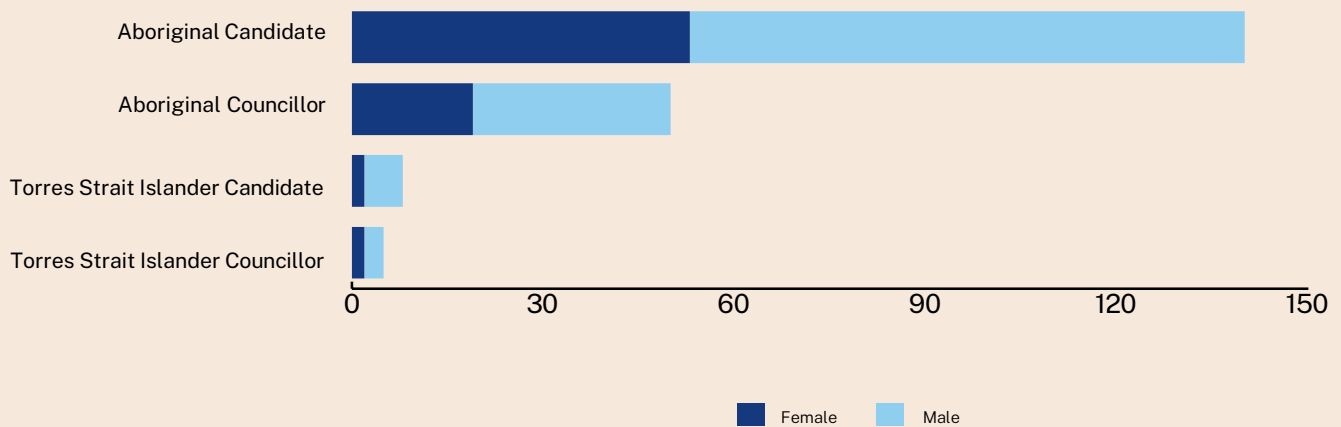


Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people



Gender

Chart 6: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Candidates and Councillors by gender



There were 140 Aboriginal candidates with 50 elected and 8 Torres Strait Islander candidates with 5 elected to council. Across the State, 3.6 per cent of councillors are Aboriginal and 0.3 per cent are Torres Strait Islander.

As can be seen in Table 3, Regional Town/City local government areas have the highest percentage of Aboriginal councillors at 1.6 per cent.

Region

Table 3: Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councillors by region

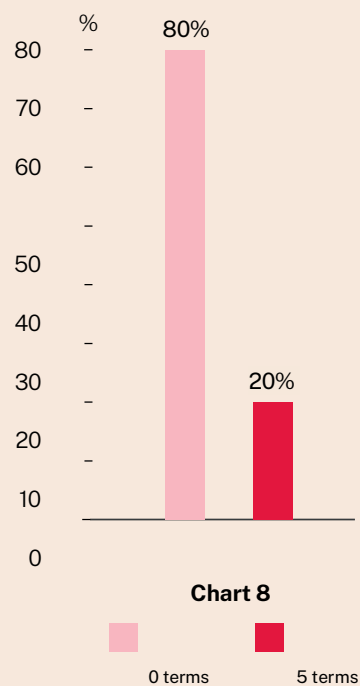
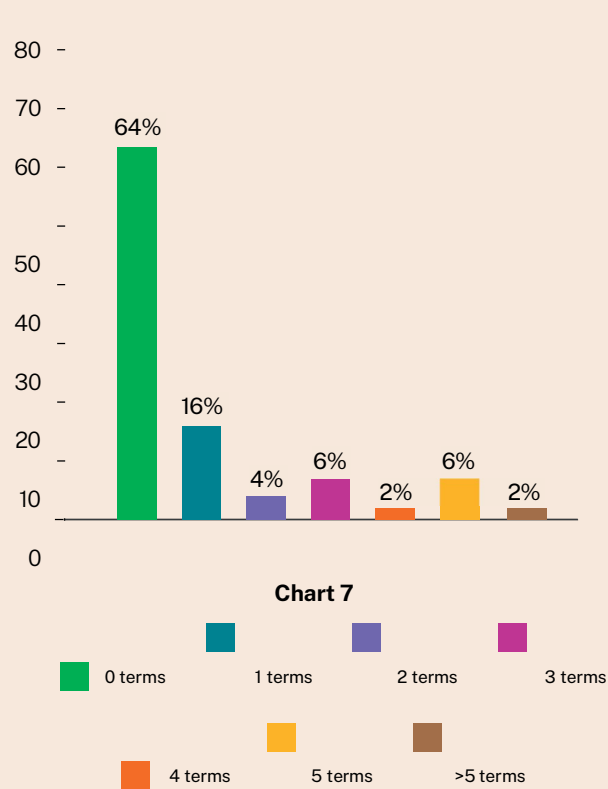
Region	Aboriginal councillors	Torres Strait Islander councillors
Metropolitan	0.4%	0.1%
Metropolitan Fringe	0.3%	0.0%
Regional Town/City	1.6%	0.1%
Rural	0.4%	0.0%
Large Rural	0.9%	0.1%
TOTAL	3.6%	0.3%

Experience

As can be seen in Charts 7 and 8 below, the significant majority of the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander councillors had not served as a councillor previously. 36 per cent of Aboriginal councillors have served at least one term as a councillor. Just 1 of the 5 Torres Strait Islander councillors has previous experience, having served for 5 terms.

Chart 7: Aboriginal councillors, previous experience as a councillor

Chart 8: Torres Strait Islander councillors, previous experience as a councillor



Age

Just under half (48.0 per cent) of Aboriginal councillors are aged between 40 and 59.

3 of the 5 Torres Strait Islander councillors are aged between 60 and 69.



Language

English as the first language learned to speak

Candidates and councillors were asked the first language they learned to speak. English was by far the most common of both. Responses indicate that 88.4 per cent of female and 87.8 per cent of male candidates and 89.8 per cent of female and 90.0 per cent of male councillors first language learned to speak was English.

Charts 9 and 10 show that other than English, Arabic was the most common language learned to speak other than English of candidates (40) and councillors (16).

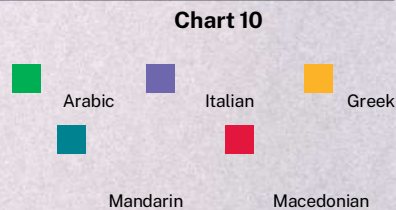
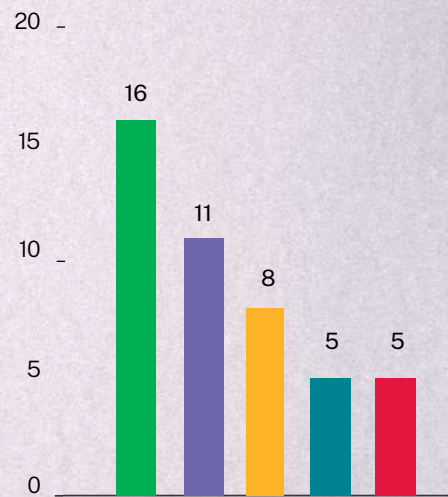
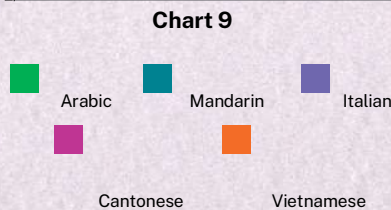
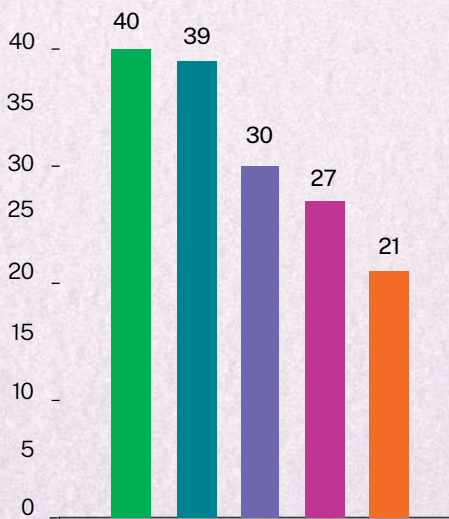
The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports show that in 2021 most people in NSW (67.6%)⁹ only spoke in English at home. The data in this report cannot be directly compared to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data as the ABS collects information on the “languages used at home other than English”. However, there are similarities between candidate and councillor responses and ABS census data. The 2021 census found that the top 5 languages spoken at home other than English were Mandarin (2.7 per cent), Arabic (1.4 per cent), Vietnamese (1.3 per cent), Cantonese (1.2 per cent) and Punjabi (0.9 per cent).¹⁰

Most common languages other than English

Arabic, Mandarin and Italian are 3 of the 5 most common first languages learned to speak other than English by both candidates and councillors.

Chart 9: Other than English the 5 most common first languages learned to speak by Candidate

Chart 10: Other than English the 5 most common first languages learned to speak by Councillors



Age



Age of candidates and councillors

Over half (52.6 per cent) of all councillors are aged between 50 and 69 years, (25.3 per cent are aged 50-59 and 27.3 per cent are aged 60-69). This age bracket also had the highest percentage of candidates (46.3 per cent).

The biggest variance between candidate numbers and those elected is in the 18–24 year-old age bracket where 149 candidates stood for election and 10 were elected (6.7 per cent).

Males make up the majority of all age groups of candidates and councillors.

Table 4: Percentage of male and female and those that did not state a gender candidates and councillors by age bracket

Age	Female Candidate	Male Candidate	Gender not stated Candidate	Female Councillor	Male Councillor	Gender not stated Councillor
18 and 24 years old	1.7%	2.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%	0.0%
25 and 29 years old	1.7%	3.0%	0.1%	1.4%	2.1%	0.0%
30 and 39 years old	5.7%	7.0%	0.3%	4.3%	6.5%	0.5%
40 and 49 years old	8.0%	8.5%	0.3%	7.3%	9.2%	0.2%
50 and 59 years old	10.1%	11.9%	0.4%	11.0%	14.0%	0.3%
60 and 69 years old	9.8%	13.7%	0.4%	10.5%	16.3%	0.4%
70 and 79 years old	4.0%	7.5%	0.3%	3.5%	8.8%	0.3%
80 years or older	0.5%	0.8%	0.1%	0.3%	0.7%	0.1%
Age not stated	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	0.8%	0.1%

Disability

Candidates and Councillors

Reporting indicates that 3.3 per cent of candidates and 2.2 per cent of councillors identify as having a disability.

Large Rural councils have the highest percentage of councillors who identify as having a disability at 39.3 per cent whereas Rural councils had the smallest percentage at 3.6 per cent.

It should be noted that a comparison cannot be made to the ABS Census data as it collects information that aims to identify people with more severe forms of disability, for example those that need personal support, rather than being a broad measure of people with a disability.¹¹

Occupation

Most common occupations

5 occupations make up 80.9 per cent of councillor occupations; professionals, self-employed, retirees, managers and primary producers/farmers. 125 occupations make up the other 19.1 per cent.

These 5 occupations were also the 5 most common of candidates.

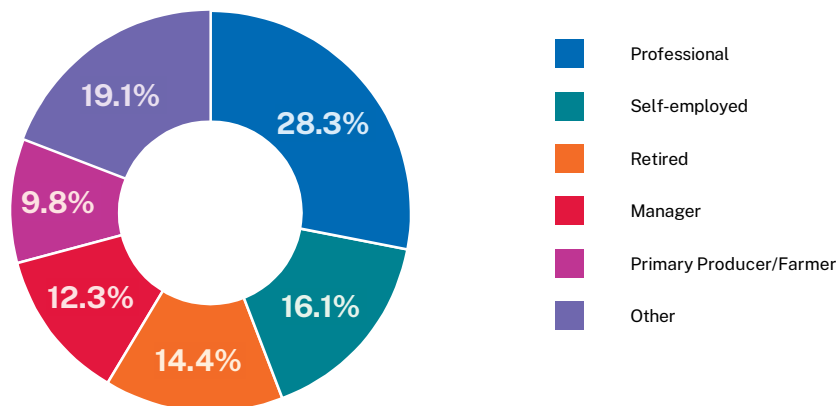
A professional occupation is the most common occupation of all candidates and councillors. ABS 2021 Census data reports the top occupations of employed people aged 15 years and over as professionals (25.8 per cent) and managers (14.6 per cent).¹²

Across NSW, primary producers make up 9.8 per cent of councillors.

Clerks, those with home duties and salespeople each make up 1.1 per cent of councillor occupations. All other occupations listed represent less than 1 per cent of councillors.

11 candidates identified as being a property developer; 5 were elected to council.¹³

Chart 11: Top 5 occupations of candidates and councillors compared to all 125 others as identified by each councillor



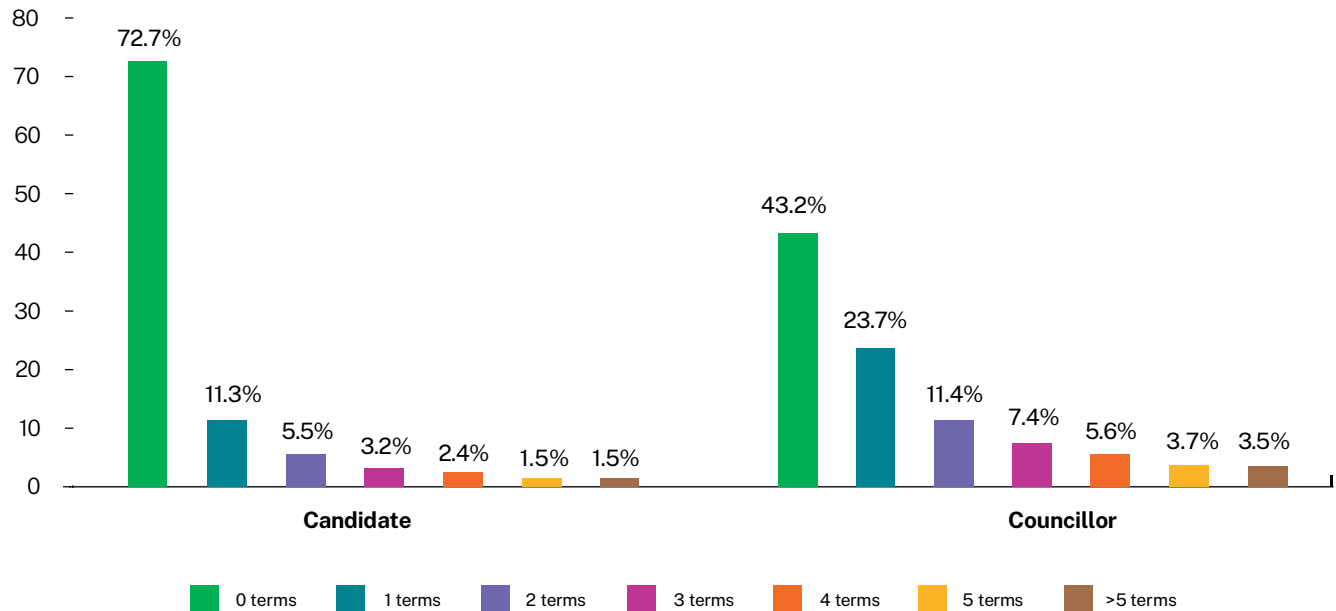
¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (27 July 2022), Understanding disability statistics in the Census and the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, ABS Website, accessed 18 May 2023.

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics NSW 2021 Census All persons QuickStats

¹³ Property developer within the meaning of Division 7 of Part 3 of the Electoral Funding Act 2018

Experience

Chart 12: Candidates, and councillors, experience as a councillor



As can be seen in Chart 12, a significant majority of candidates have no previous experience as a councillor.

At the 2016/17 elections 39.4 per cent of councillors had no previous experience compared to 43.2 per cent in 2021/22.

Just over half of all councillors (55.3 per cent) have at least 1 term's experience.

The highest proportion of councillors have not served on council before at 43.2 per cent, dropping then to 23.7 per cent with 1 term experience and then steadily decreasing to 3.5 per cent for those with more than 5 terms experience.

A similar percentage of female (20.5 per cent) and male (21.8 per cent) councillors have no previous experience, but there is a stark contrast between males and females with 1 term experience, where female rate drops to 8.3 per cent compared to 15.2 percent of males. Female councillors then remain at roughly half the number of males based on terms served.

Less than 1 per cent of councillors had served less than one complete term.

Member of a registered political party

42.9 per cent of candidates and 43.6 per cent of councillors identified as being a member of a registered political party.¹⁴

¹⁴ Being political parties registered under the Electoral Act 2017 or under the Local Government Act (1993).

