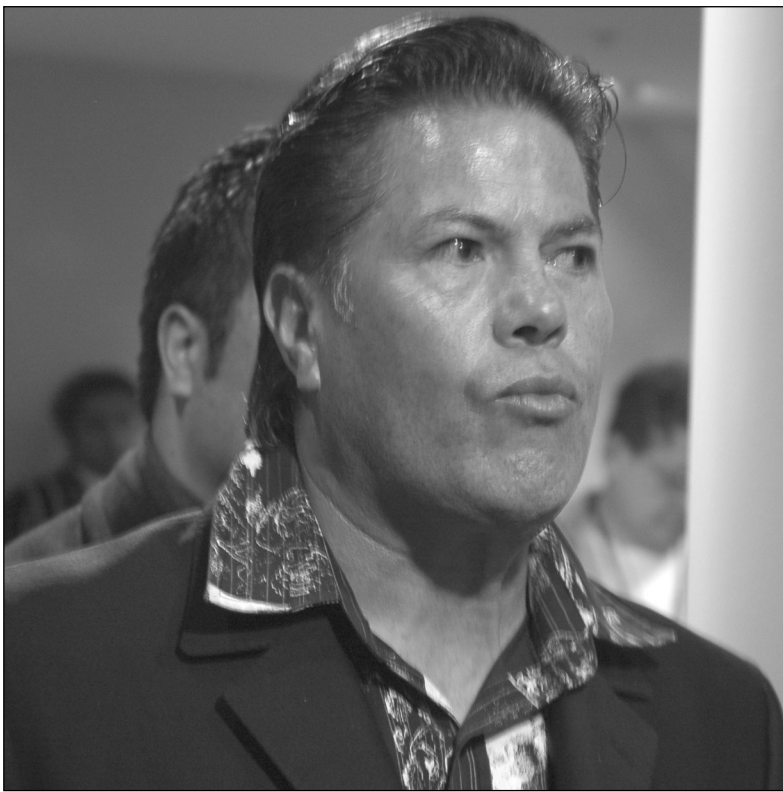


Christian parties down for the count

PHOTO: BEN CLARK



DOWN AND OUT: Brian Tamaki's Destiny Party received only 0.61 per cent of the party vote on election night.

by Hayden Donnell

The future of Christian politics is in doubt after the Destiny Party received a heavy election day pounding.

The party gained just 0.61 per cent of the party vote, raising questions over whether the religious right is more comfortable with National and Labour than overtly Christian parties.

Destiny's appeals to "traditional family values" and its desire to repeal the Civil Union and Prostitution Bills were delivered in a series of TV commercials and an extensive ground campaign.

But its efforts to stop the government "dismantling marriage-centred families" seem to have fallen on deaf ears in much of the Christian community.

Vicar for St Matthew-in-the-city Glynn Cardy says Destiny's policies simply don't appeal to many Christians.

According to him, parties like

Destiny do a disservice to Christians by representing them purely as a group of right wing zealots.

"They're using the word 'Christian' and attaching it to a very conservative outlook," he says. "I hope they go down the tube."

Nigel Heslop, Destiny Party's candidate for Northcote, says his party has made a commitment to stick around "for the long haul".

He says the party is considering its options, but a coalition with the Christian Heritage party is on the cards.

"We have a tremendous amount of respect for (Christian Heritage leader) Ewan McQueen. It's a case of ironing out our differences."

This year Christian Heritage had little support and never really recovered from the conviction of former leader Graham Capill on rape and other sex charges.

Heritage's 0.12 per cent of the party vote placed it behind

Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis party — a far cry from its result in the 1996 election, when it fell just 0.7 per cent short of the 5 per cent threshold.

Baptist national leader Brian Winslade doesn't think there is a future in overtly Christian parties.

He wants to see Christians in religiously neutral parties rather than in organisations like Destiny or Christian Heritage.

"We don't want Christian parties any more than we want Muslim parties, or gay parties."

In a letter to New Zealand's Baptist churches earlier this year, Winslade called the Destiny movement unbiblical and counterproductive to the mission of the church.

He says the party lost out in the election due to its inexperience and failure to judge mainstream Christian sentiments.

"I think they were a victim of their own naivety," he says. "They were ill informed about a number of issues."

National's ethics questioned over billboard campaign

by Emma Page

The National Party's advertising campaign has been hailed by some commentators as clever and slick, but others question it as unethical.

Dr Joe Atkinson, deputy head of political studies at Auckland University, says while it is difficult to gauge the impact of National's ads the party skilfully targeted particular audiences.

He found one of National's billboards particularly unethical. The billboard featured the phrase "Dial 111 for...Cabs/Cops" with the word cabs sitting next to a picture of Helen Clark.

Using Clark's picture on the billboard implied a cab being sent to answer a 111 call was her fault despite the fact it was a police matter, says Hope.

"That billboard was reprehensible. I think that was one of the most unethical and tasteless pieces of advertising I've seen in a while."

Joyce says he is surprised that a commentator has labelled the billboard unethical and he rejects the claim "entirely".

"It is something some left-wing commentators have chosen to highlight."

He also says it is commonly thought that "ultimately politicians are responsible for what happens in public service".

Atkinson says the billboards can be seen as unethical in that they are an oversimplification of the differences between the parties but that is often true of all political advertising.

He agrees the implication in the cabs/cops billboard is that Clark is to blame but it can also be interpreted in multiple ways making it difficult to label as strictly unethical.

"There was an attempt to win the hearts and minds via advertising technologies over policies, this was especially the case for National but Labour did the same".

Hope says National's advertising campaign was slick but also "crude" and "dirty" and the message was hard to counter.

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Two-horse race dominates closest election in 20 years

by Jonathan Williams

This year's election race was the closest in more than two decades.

Political commentator Colin James described the race to be the next government as "a two-horse race with a few extra jockeys".

National and Labour were leapfrogging in the polls in time with the country's channel surfing, with even the most seasoned and biased political commentators hesitating before putting their money where their mouth is.

Dr Raymond Miller, political scientist at the University of Auckland, believes it was the two major issues that kept the race so close: student loans and tax cuts.

"Both those issues affect two major parties around 65 per cent of the vote."

Labour's support barely faltered, but National almost doubled its party vote over the weekend.

"National ate up a large chunk of the vote, particularly in that centre-right area which is crucial for them being able to form a coalition. With only ACT's two seats guaranteed for a coalition National has far less options than Labour at this stage," says Miller.

Associate Professor Jack Vowles from the University of Auckland agrees, saying this election is not a classic MMP scenario.

"When New Zealand opted to adopt MMP in 1996, the whole point was to make our elections and therefore our parliaments more representative of our diverse political views, rather than just a fight to the death between the heavyweights of the New Zealand political scene," he says.

"This result is almost a relic from the days of FPP."

In the previous two elections, the minor parties played a significant role in Parliament, with the Greens, New Zealand First, ACT and United Future collecting between 32 (1999) and 42 (2002) seats collectively.

The splintered effect of the new Parliament is indicative of how important the major issues were to the electorate, says Vowles.

"People stuck to voting for the major parties because they wanted to see the policy that would benefit them get through," he says.

"While in some areas there was tactical voting — like in Epsom and the Maori — I don't know if people elsewhere were thinking about possible coalition partners and splitting their vote."

ILLUSTRATION: FIONA PEAT

