

When politicians make decisions, what experiences do they bring to bear? This report considers the experiences of ACT Members of the Legislative Assembly when it comes to tenure and property investment, contrasting Members with the broader ACT population. It finds that renters are underrepresented and that landlords are overrepresented in the Legislative Assembly. This helps us to understand which perspectives are likely influencing decisions in the parliament.

Introduction

Around Australia, there is growing demand for housing reform. At a federal level, tax concessions for property investors are being debated. At the level of states and territories, other levers are available, including rental policy reform.

While politicians will draw upon multiple sources in forming their views, inevitably their own experiences will play a role. When our elected representatives look at rental policy reform, what experiences and perspectives do they bring to bear? We sought to answer this question to better understand the extent to which the ACT Legislative Assembly reflects the population it is elected to represent.

Method

Every ACT Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) is required to declare their interests on the public record, including property ownership. We reviewed this data for each MLA to ascertain their property ownership circumstances.

In addition, we contacted MLAs directly to verify the information and obtain further details, particularly with regard to renting. For our analysis, an MLA is considered to have a property interest even if a property is owned by a spouse, consistent with the approach taken in other similar analyses.

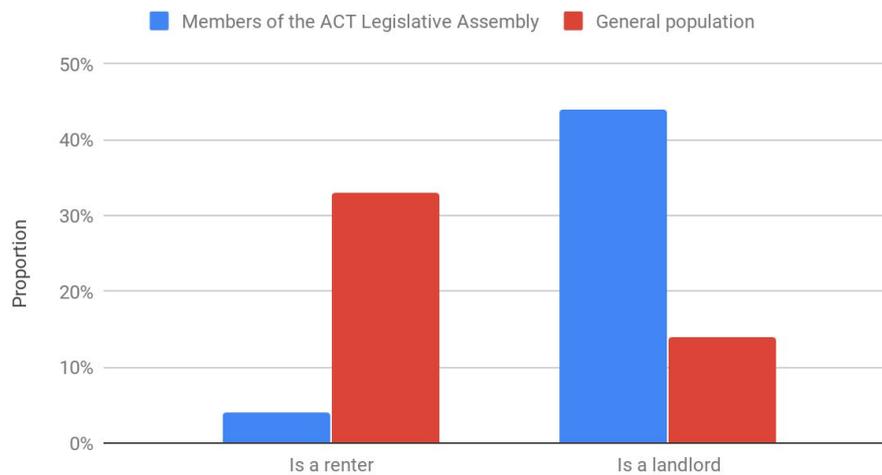
Results

Our results show that MLAs are landlords at a rate *higher* than that of the general population and that MLAs are renters at a rate much *lower* than the general population. In total, eleven of twenty-five MLAs, or 44%, own at least one investment property. Around Australia, only 11.3% of persons aged 18 and over own an investment property - MLAs are landlords at a rate four times this.¹ More strikingly, only one of twenty-five MLAs is currently renting, or 4% of MLAs. In contrast, almost one in three ACT households is renting, or 33%.²

A full table of results is available in the appendix and online at:

https://www.betterrenting.org.au/act_mla_renters_property_investors

Renting and landlord rates for MLAs and general population



Discussion

While striking, these results are not unpredictable. MLAs are typically older and have a higher income, two attributes positively associated with property ownership. It follows that MLAs would be more likely to own property than people who might be younger and earn less.

Further, these results are not necessarily a problem. MLAs are not expected to divest themselves of property before taking public office; earning an income from property investments doesn't prevent an MLA from championing fairer laws for renters. Research doesn't show that owning property has a clear effect on policy decisions.³

However, it is concerning that so few MLAs have personal experience of challenges like applying for rental properties, requesting repairs, or attempting to make an inefficient rental property liveable. To address this gap, MLAs should make every effort to hear the voices of people who rent and to understand their circumstances.

Similarly, it is concerning that so many MLAs are in a position to identify as landlords. It is important that MLAs can understand how rental policy affects property investors, yet there is a risk that MLAs may too readily see issues from this point of view, instead of considering the needs of the great proportion of citizens who depend upon private renting for shelter.

Conclusion

We sought to see what experiences and perspectives ACT Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) bring to bear when considering rental policy reform. Our analysis of data from declared interests suggests that MLAs are highly unlikely to be renting and particularly likely to own investment properties. This should give MLAs pause for thought and prompt them to make a redoubled effort to listen to the voices of people who rent, whose perspectives might otherwise be absent from the parliament.

References

- [1] At June 2016, there were 18,751,964 Australians aged 18 years and over. (ABS, Australian Demographic Statistics, Cat. no. 3101.0, March 2018, Table 59). 2,116,755 individuals reported rental income in 2015-16 (Taxation statistics 2015-16, ATO).
- [2] 29.7% of households were "rented" at the 2016 census. As a proportion of households that stated a tenure type, this is 32.5%.
- [3] Rogers, D, 'Politicians hold \$300m in property, so how should they influence housing policy?' in The Conversation, 2014, <<https://theconversation.com/politicians-hold-300m-in-property-so-how-should-they-influence-housing-policy-30206>>.

Appendix 1: Table of Results

Electorate	Name	Party	Renter?	Landlord?*
Kurrajong	Andrew Barr	ALP	No	No
Murrumbidgee	Bec Cody	ALP	No	No
Murrumbidgee	Chris Steel	ALP	No	No
Ginninderra	Gordon Ramsay	ALP	No	No
Brindabella	Joy Burch	ALP	No	No
Yerrabi	Meegan Fitzharris	ALP	No	Yes - 1 property
Yerrabi	Michael Pettersson	ALP	Yes	No
Brindabella	Mick Gentleman	ALP	No	No
Kurrajong	Rachel Stephen-Smith	ALP	No	Yes - 1 property
Yerrabi	Suzanne Orr	ALP	No	No
Ginninderra	Tara Cheyne	ALP	No	No
Ginninderra	Yvette Berry	ALP	No	No
Murrumbidgee	Caroline Le Couteur	Greens	No	Yes - 2 properties
Kurrajong	Shane Rattenbury	Greens	No	Yes - 2 properties
Yerrabi	Alistair Coe	Liberals	No	Yes - 2 properties
Brindabella	Andrew Wall	Liberals	No	Yes - 1 property
Kurrajong	Candice Burch	Liberals	Unclear.	No
Ginninderra	Elizabeth Kikkert	Liberals	No	Yes - 1 property
Kurrajong	Elizabeth Lee	Liberals	No	Yes - 1 property
Murrumbidgee	Giulia Jones	Liberals	No	Yes - 2 properties
Yerrabi	James Milligan	Liberals	No	No
Murrumbidgee	Jeremy Hanson	Liberals	No	No
Brindabella	Mark Parton	Liberals	No	Yes - 2 properties
Brindabella	Nicole Lawder	Liberals	No	No
Ginninderra	Vicki Dunne	Liberals	No	Yes - 1 property

*Includes properties owned by a spouse.