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Between Culture and Context: What Shapes Māori Perspectives on Capitalism and Government Regulation?

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Abstract: This study examines the way Māori (Indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand) attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation of business vary across the population, challenging homogeneous representations of a single "Māori perspective". While previous research has explored Indigenous economic models (Anderson et al., 2008) and emphasised the tensions between Indigenous values and market economics, these studies often imply a monolithic Indigenous economic perspective. Using data from Wave 2 of the 2020 Māori Identity and Financial Attitudes Study, we examined 3,241 Māori participants through multiple regression analyses to assess the way cultural identity (iwi importance, cultural efficacy) and employment type (self-employed, paid worker) influence attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation of business. Our findings revealed significant associations between cultural identification, employment position, and economic attitudes. Māori with stronger iwi (tribal) affiliations expressed greater opposition to capitalism and support for business regulation. At the same time, self-employed Māori showed more favourable views toward capitalism and decreased support for government regulation of business. These patterns persisted after controlling for demographic factors. The findings moved beyond homogenising characterisations and towards a more nuanced understanding of the influence of individual circumstances on economic attitudes among Māori.

Keywords: Indigenous economics, Māori, capitalism, government regulation

Introduction

Cultural values represent shared conceptions of what is good, right, and desirable in society (Mead, 2003; Schwartz, 1999). Cultural identity denotes one's sense of belonging to a cultural group and the emotional significance of that membership (Phinney & Ong, 2007). It encompasses shared history, traditions, language, beliefs, and practices distinguishing one group from another, forming the foundation for how individuals and communities understand themselves in relation to others and navigate social contexts (Hall & du Gay, 1996; Mead, 2003). Cultural values and identity fundamentally shape economic development (Polanyi, 1944; Weber, 1930), profoundly influencing attitudes towards success, materialism, and resource utilisation (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). This relationship becomes particularly important when examining capitalism within different cultural contexts.

Capitalism is an economic system defined by private ownership of capital and means of production for profit (Piketty, 2014). Scott (2011, pp. i–xxxv) describes it as a three-level governance system: political authority, compliance-monitoring institutions, and competing firms. While nearly all major economies exhibit capitalism's hallmarks, they vary significantly in institutional arrangements, regulatory frameworks, and degrees of government intervention.

The shortcomings and excesses of capitalism have become apparent through rising inequality, environmental damage, and stagnating living standards for many across the world (Henderson, 2020; Jacobs & Mazzucato, 2016). Yet, capitalism can exist in many forms, from purely profit-maximising models to more socially conscious approaches that consider wider stakeholder interests (Baumol et al., 2007; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Mackey & Sisodia, 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Aotearoa New Zealand's economic system exemplifies this complexity, having evolved from a highly regulated welfare state in the mid-20th century to one of the world's most liberalised economies following economic reforms in the 1980s (Kelsey, 1995). The country now operates as a mixed-market economy, blending free market principles with significant government involvement through regulation (Te Tai Ōhanga│The Treasury, 2024), state-owned enterprises, and social welfare provisions, while maintaining a strong commitment to open international trade (Manatū Aorere│Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2025).

This economic framework provides the backdrop against which Māori perspectives on capitalism and business unfold.

Williams (cited in Moran, 2015, pp. 60–65) challenges both economic determinism, which relegates culture to a secondary position behind economic forces, and idealism, which treats ideas as independent drivers of change. Instead, Williams' approach positions culture as actively shaping social life while remaining embedded in historical and material conditions. Consequently, capitalism operates not simply through markets but through complex social behaviours, institutions, and ways of thinking that naturalise its logic (Polanyi, 1944). Culture thus functions as a material force that helps to shape, sustain, or challenge capitalist society.

In discussions of Māori economic participation, cultural narratives often mask four critical dimensions. First, they essentialise Māori culture and identity, presenting it as uniform despite evidence of significant diversity in values, priorities, and levels of cultural engagement (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). Second, they obscure growing class divisions within Māori communities, particularly the emergence of a professional middle class (Keane, 2011). Third, they downplay how poverty and inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand cut across ethnic communities, where class remains a vital analytical concept that should be considered alongside, rather than subsumed by, cultural and ethnic factors (van Meijl, 2020). Finally, they limit recognition of the way individuals navigate fluidly between cultural identification and economic realities.

Within this landscape, capitalism's tendency to commodify cultural identity creates further complexity. For example, the Māori haka—a traditional performing art that embodies "the passion, vigour and identity of the Māori race" and serves as a repository of iwi history and ancestral knowledge—has been transformed into commercial entertainment for global audiences (Wilson, 2020, p. 529). Companies worldwide have appropriated haka performances for advertising campaigns, from Italian car commercials to Irish beer promotions, stripping away Māori cultural protocols and spiritual significance while generating profits that flow to corporations rather than Māori communities (Wilson, 2020).

As Moran (2015) argues, market forces transform the struggles of marginalised groups into consumable products, repackaging differences as consumer choice rather than political resistance. This process simultaneously celebrates cultural distinctiveness while maintaining existing economic hierarchies, often individualising structural inequalities rather than systemically addressing them.

Our study examines variations in Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government intervention, revealing significant connections between cultural identification, employment status, and economic perspectives. This analysis moves beyond homogenising notions of "the Māori perspective", offering a nuanced understanding of how individual circumstances influence economic viewpoints. Following a review of Māori engagement with capitalism and Indigenous economic development, we present findings demonstrating meaningful associations between identity, employment, and attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation. These insights have significant implications for policy development and theoretical frameworks concerning Māori economic participation.

Changing from a Tribal Economy

Māori, who comprise approximately 17.3% of Aotearoa New Zealand's population today (Tatauranga Aotearoa│Stats NZ, 2023), navigated to Aotearoa from Eastern Polynesia in the late 13th century. Before European contact in the late 18th century, diverse iwi (tribes) had developed unique social structures, spiritual traditions, political systems, and economic practices (Anderson, 2016). As tribal people, Māori operated within a complex social milieu and maintained sophisticated trade networks among iwi. The traditional Māori economy operated through a mixture of socially constrained reciprocal exchanges and pragmatically oriented barter trades, with economic activities deeply embedded within and regulated by higher-level social and cultural practices. Unlike the British economy, which had undergone the "Great Transformation" that separated economic activity from social constraints, the Māori economy was rooted in kinship obligations. Exchanges served the dual purpose of strengthening social bonds through reciprocal obligations while facilitating the interchange of goods and services, governed by intricate tikanga (values and practices) (Hēnare, 2009, 2014; Tau & Rout, 2018).

Research on the "economy of mana" (meaning authority/prestige), a term first coined by eminent Māori academic Mānuka Hēnare (2009), describes the traditional Māori economic model as one that prioritised collective prosperity by centring on human dignity and relationships (Dell et al., 2018; Dell et al., 2022). An economy of mana emphasises wealth distribution over accumulation, with mana enhanced through sharing rather than hoarding resources for individual benefit (Scobie & Sturman, 2020).

Reid and Rout (2016) challenge romanticised views of the traditional Māori economy. They demonstrate that pre-European Māori maintained a sophisticated economic system with several key features: property rights managed by chiefs (rangatira) who functioned as title-holders, allocating resource rights to individuals and families rather than through purely communal ownership; reciprocal obligations (utu) that required surpluses to be returned with equivalent or greater value, creating economic circulation while strengthening social bonds; extensive trade networks spanning Aotearoa New Zealand to exchange valuable resources such as jade and obsidian, with evidence of specialised traders serving as intermediaries; and a culture valuing industrious leadership and openness towards beneficial new technologies. Importantly, the authors argue that colonisation distorted these economic traditions through "reactionary traditionalism" (Reid & Rout, 2016, p. 84), whereby Māori internalised colonial narratives that characterised Indigenous cultures as inherently non-commercial and spiritual, rather than entrepreneurial.

Corporate Colonisation, Economic Marginalisation

Māori were colonised by the British, after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) in 1840, fundamentally altering the economic landscape that had existed in New Zealand for centuries. Prominent New Zealand historian J. C. Beaglehole characterised the colonisation of Aotearoa as "chiefly an example of the expansion of British or Western capitalism" (cited in Hilliard, 1997, p. 103). Recent analysis by Comyn (2022) emphasises the way finance was at the centre of every stage of the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand. Comyn (2019) describes the way the New Zealand Company was chartered in the United Kingdom (UK) in the first half of the 19th century and focused on the systematic colonisation of New Zealand via financial instruments. In particular, it made use of the joint-stock system and speculation, rather than direct state power, to enable colonisation, with British capitalists collaborating to raise funds for colonial ventures when parliamentary support was initially denied in the period 1838 to 1839.

Land Loss and Economic Disruption

As settlers flowed from the UK to Aotearoa New Zealand seeking land, Māori society was transformed radically, with land and resources lost in varying ways across different iwi (Houkamau & Pouwhare, 2025; Tau, 2016; Williams, 1999). The Native Land Court's systematic conversion of collective land holdings to individual titles facilitated widespread land alienation, undermining Māori economic sovereignty and fracturing traditional economic structures that had sustained iwi for generations (Boast, 2008; Williams, 1999).

For Māori, the period between 1880 and 1980 was marked by significant economic marginalisation and cultural disruption. Māori land ownership declined precipitously, from approximately 27 million hectares in 1840 to less than 3 million by 1920 (Walker, 2004). Economically, Māori were increasingly relegated to rural areas and constrained to low-wage labour and seasonal work (Pool, 1991). Urban migration intensified from the 1950s onwards, with approximately 70% of Māori living in urban centres by 1980, often in conditions of economic deprivation, creating generational disconnection from traditional cultural knowledge and governance systems (Durie, 1998; Walker, 2004)

Economic Restructuring and Emerging Māori Development (1980s–2000s)

Aotearoa New Zealand underwent significant economic restructuring in the 1980s. This period marked a transition from a highly regulated economy towards one based on market principles (Evans et al., 1996). The rapid privatisation of state assets and elimination of government subsidies led to widespread job losses in sectors where Māori were heavily represented, particularly in forestry, railways, and manufacturing (Kelsey, 1995). Unemployment among Māori reached 25% by the early 1990s, more than triple the rate for Pākehā (New Zealand Europeans) (Te Puni Kōkiri | Ministry of Māori Development, 2000).

As Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document, Te Tiriti has two versions: te reo Māori (the Māori language) and English. Significant differences between the versions have created ongoing tensions over land rights, cultural recognition, and the interpretation of both documents (Orange, 2011, 2013; Walker, 2004). In recent decades, efforts to address these differences and acknowledge breaches of the Treaty by the Crown have seen Treaty settlements return significant assets to Māori. These settlements typically include historical acknowledgements, formal Crown apologies, financial compensation, and cultural redress (Hill, n.d.). Major settlements include the 1992 "Sealord" fisheries agreement ($170 million and shares in fishing companies) (Houkamau & Pouwhare, 2025), the 1995 Waikato–Tainui land settlement ($170 million), the 1998 Ngāi Tahu settlement ($170 million) for claims over 34.5 million acres, and the 2008 "Treelords" agreement returning $196 million worth of forest land plus $223 million in accumulated forestry rentals to seven central North Island iwi (Hill, n.d.).

In the years following these settlements, Māori-led economic development and collaborative networks grew with the goal of building prosperity in the face of ongoing inequalities. However, Consedine (2007) notes:

The paradox of this period was that while Māori organisations and iwi groups were increasingly seeking and developing Māori-led economic and social solutions, the result of economic reform within the economy meant the experience of individual Māori generally was negative. (p. 3)

The emergence of iwi corporations following Treaty settlements eventually created significant economic entities (Bargh, 2012), representing a shift toward local-level solutions and self-determination that has continued to evolve.

While the Crown frames settlements as an acknowledgement of historical grievances, high-profile Māori academic Professor Margaret Mutu (2019) notes that settlements typically return less than 1% of stolen lands, with the Crown dictating non-negotiable terms that divide communities. Bargh (2012) observes that although some iwi have gained significant economic ballast post-settlement, general Māori wellbeing indicators remain poor, with many Māori organisations developing their own initiatives while also advocating for constitutional change aligned with international Indigenous rights standards. Webb (2023) describes this as the "rangatiratanga paradox" (p. 1), where Māori must negotiate self-determination within the systems that have historically constrained it.

The Māori Economy – Te Ōhanga Māori

Defining Te Ōhanga Māori

While the term "Māori economy" has become a media (e.g., Andrews, 2025) and government (e.g., Manatū Aorere | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.) catchphrase in New Zealand, its definition remains complex. Since 2010, private company Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL) has been funded by government entities—including the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, Hīkina Whakatutuki | Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, and Te Puni Kōkiri (the government's principal policy advisor on Māori development)—to provide regular reports on the economic value of the Māori economy, or te ōhanga Māori. BERL has utilised a multidimensional framework, measuring the Māori economy as encompassing all self-identifying Māori economic entities, extending beyond Treaty settlement assets to include individual entrepreneurs, employers, self-employed individuals, and the wage contributions of Māori employees. This definition is operationalised through three key measurement dimensions: the total asset base (calculated through examining Māori self-employed assets, employer enterprises, and collectively owned entities); income and GDP contributions; and interconnections with the wider Aotearoa New Zealand economy (Nana et al., 2015). This methodology, which combines direct reporting with imputations where data gaps exist, provides quantifiable metrics for economic analysis (Nana et al., 2011; Nana et al., 2015).

BERL's definition of the Māori economy has evolved substantially over time. Initially defined through financial metrics in the period 2010 to 2011, by 2018 it had expanded to view the Māori economy as an integrated component of the wider Aotearoa New Zealand economy. The updated definition recognises Māori fulfilling multiple roles across paid and unpaid sectors, incorporating the Treasury's Living Standards Framework and a "people, planet, profit" approach with culture at the centre, acknowledging non-market activities, cultural values, and kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship) as legitimate economic contributions (Nana et al., 2020).

Economic Growth and Disparities

BERL's most recent Te Ōhanga Māori 2023 report reveals significant expansion of the Māori economy, with its economic contribution nearly doubling from $17 billion (6.5% of GDP) in 2018 to $32 billion (8.9% of GDP) in 2023. The Māori asset base has grown 83% to $126 billion, comprising $66 billion in business assets, $41 billion in collective assets, and $19 billion in self-employed assets. Professional services now outpace primary industries as key contributors, with Māori workers holding more high-skilled jobs (46%) than low-skilled jobs (40%) for the first time since 2006. Despite these advances, disparities persist in Māori households, with lower home ownership (52% versus 67% for non-Māori) and greater reliance on government support (33% versus 9% for non-Māori) (Schulze et al., 2025).

Contested Definitions and Critiques

These figures show divergent economic realities. While Māori business entities, collectives, and skilled workers are making significant economic advances, many Māori households remain economically vulnerable. Hence, the term "Māori economy" has been contentious, with some arguing that it creates a misleading impression of widespread Māori economic success while ignoring the inequalities and institutional barriers that limit Māori self-determination. For example, Tau and Rout (2018) assert that there is no genuine Māori economy today because Māori enterprises operate within, and are regulated by, the settler economy, with profits ultimately recirculating back into and reinforcing the dominant economic system.

In their article "Framing the Māori Economy", Amoamo et al. (2018) note that current definitions of the Māori economy focus on financial statistics and capitalist norms, obscuring the social, cultural, and environmental values that shape Māori business. Meanwhile, Dell et al. (2017) emphasise that Māori have increasingly integrated traditional economic principles into their contemporary business practices. More recently, Rout et al. (2025) have advanced a comparative analysis of the literature on Māori economic principles to identify the principles that are distinctively Māori (i.e., embedded, collective, empathetic, reciprocal, balanced, and localised) as contrasted with capitalist orientations (i.e., abstract, individual, rational, competitive, growth-oriented, and universal).

These different analytical frameworks reflect the complex historical trajectory of Māori history. Colonisation fundamentally transformed Māori economic systems (Comyn, 2022), and scholars have approached this from different analytical angles: quantitative approaches measure economic assets and growth metrics (Schulze et al., 2025); institutional analyses examine structural constraints within the settler economy framework (Tau & Rout, 2018); values-based perspectives highlight the distinctive cultural principles guiding Māori business practices (Amoamo et al., 2018; Rout et al., 2025); and integrative approaches document the way traditional Māori economic principles are being adapted within contemporary business settings (Dell et al., 2017).

Beyond a Singular Māori Worldview

Across discussions of the Māori economy, experiences, and people, Māori viewpoints are often presented through a cultural lens; however, the concept of a singular "Māori world view" simultaneously masks internal diversity and economic stratification. The term "Māori" itself serves an important function in cultural recognition and political advocacy, but it simultaneously masks the rich diversity of experiences, perspectives, and identities within this ethnic community (Durie, 1995; McIntosh, 2005). Bidois (2013) critiques traditional binary oppositions between Māori and Pākehā in Aotearoa New Zealand, arguing that both colonial structures and postcolonial resistance have reinforced portrayals of Māori as a homogeneous group with uniform perspectives and values, obscuring the significant internal diversity.

The Emergence of a Māori Middle Class

While statistical aggregation shows Māori facing disproportionate socio-economic challenges as an ethnic group (Easton, 2018), individual Māori hold diverse perspectives on economic development (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). Keane (2011) identifies the late 20th-century emergence of a Māori middle class through several pathways: the Waitangi Tribunal creating professional opportunities; iwi settlements establishing a corporate Māori infrastructure requiring professionally trained managers; increased representation in public service; and expanded educational attainment leading more Māori into professional fields. Himona (2013) demonstrates through demographic analysis that most Māori live urban lives that are deeply influenced by global culture, with approximately only 21% of them speaking te reo Māori and many confronting genuine financial challenges that may take precedence over cultural considerations.

This diversity is evident in patterns of Māori identification. Kukutai (2004) reveals that, while 93% of those who identify as Māori claim Māori ancestry, 20% of those with Māori ancestry do not identify ethnically as Māori. Moreover, those who have stronger Māori identification experience comparatively poorer socio-economic outcomes than those who identify primarily as European despite having Māori ancestry—differences that persist even when controlling for other variables.

The dynamic nature of Māori identity is captured in Rata's (2015) Māori Identity Migration Model, which conceptualises identity as being fluid rather than fixed. This research demonstrates the way urban Māori youth navigate between identity positions based on contextual and individual factors, and it acknowledges their agency in identity construction.

Political engagement patterns further illustrate this heterogeneity. Aotearoa New Zealand maintains two electoral rolls: a General roll for all voters and a separate Māori roll to ensure Māori parliamentary representation, with eligible Māori voters able to choose between them. Vowles and Gibbons (2022) document a gradual shift since 2006 in Māori registration on the electoral roll—away from the Māori roll and towards the General roll—with roll choice strongly predicted by factors including proximity to te reo Māori speakers, household composition, and occupational status. The impact of strong Māori identity on roll choice is counterbalanced by weaker identification among those who also identify as Pākehā and an increasing number of people acknowledging Māori descent without necessarily having a strong Māori identity.

Empirical research illuminates heterogeneity within Māori economic perspectives. Houkamau and Sibley (2014) document considerable variation within Māori communities regarding economic circumstances, geographical location, education levels, and engagement with both te ao Māori (the Māori world view) and mainstream economic systems. Their subsequent work (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019) leverages data from the longitudinal Māori Identity and Financial Attitudes Study (MIFAS) with 7,019 Māori participants, employing the Multidimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement (MMM-ICE3) to measure Māori cultural identity across eight dimensions (Matika et al., 2020; Sibley & Houkamau, 2013).

Through multiple regression analysis with demographic variables and identity dimensions, Houkamau and Sibley (2019) identified significant patterns predicting economic attitudes. They found that Māori with stronger cultural identification have a greater likelihood of expressing economic attitudes aligned with traditional Māori values, including preferences for protecting iwi assets rather than risking them for profit maximisation, and preferring workplaces that respect Māori values despite potential financial trade-offs. Specifically, those with higher scores on spirituality, socio-political consciousness, and authenticity beliefs were significantly more likely to favour asset protection over commercialisation, while those with stronger cultural engagement across seven of the eight identity dimensions preferred employment that promoted Māori development even when it offered lower pay. Crucially, while confirming the persistent influence of traditional cultural values on contemporary economic decision-making, the study also revealed significant heterogeneity in economic attitudes among Māori, providing empirical evidence that challenges monolithic characterisations of the Māori perspective (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). These findings directly prefigure our own research, which extends this analysis by examining how employment position and demographic factors interact with cultural identity to shape attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation.

However, despite this empirical evidence of diversity within Māori economic perspectives, public discourse continues to be shaped by oversimplified narratives. This paradox is further reinforced by problematic media representations of Māori economic activities. McCreanor et al. (2011) identify extreme under-representation of Māori business stories in New Zealand newspapers—less than 3% of all Māori-related news coverage. The researchers characterise this as “symbolic annihilation” (McCreanor et al., 2011, p. 51) of Māori commercial endeavours. This media environment creates additional challenges for Māori navigating economic systems, as both Māori and non-Māori audiences are exposed to distorted representations that shape public perceptions of Māori economic capabilities.

Moran (2015, pp. 139–154) argues that capitalism repackages differences in personal identity as expression through consumption rather than activism. This consumer-choice emphasis obscures class struggles, individualising inequality rather than recognising it as being systemic. This creates a dynamic tension where Māori individuals and communities engage with capitalism in varied ways: some becoming part of the middle class, others maintaining different relationships to the economic system, and many navigating complex positions in between.

Wāhine Māori (Māori Women)

The diversity in Māori economic perspectives is profoundly shaped by gender dynamics, with wāhine (i.e., women) Māori voices notably under-represented in research and discussions on Māori economic development (Simmons-Donaldson et al., 2018). Kuokkanen (2011) observes that contemporary Indigenous economies often function as “mixed economies” (p. 219) where traditional subsistence activities coexist with participation in the market economy. Within these frameworks, wāhine Māori economic contributions are systematically rendered invisible—despite their fundamental role in sustaining cultural, social, and economic life within their communities, particularly through unrecognised voluntary and community work (Simmons-Donaldson et al., 2018).

Traditional Māori society recognised complementary societal roles for wāhine and tāne (men), with wāhine holding significant economic authority in many contexts (Mikaere, 2017; Simmonds, 2011). While Māori entrepreneurship has been widely examined in contemporary research (Manganda et al., 2023), existing models, such as the “Māuipreneur” framework, predominantly focus on male experiences and perspectives. Although wāhine Māori have maintained entrepreneurial roles both historically and today, their specific contributions to the economy remain critically understudied (Simmons-Donaldson et al., 2018).

The recent BERL Māori women's economy report (Schulze et al., 2024) begins to address this gap by quantifying the economic contributions of wāhine Māori to the Aotearoa New Zealand economy between 2013 and 2022, examining both formal economic participation and previously undervalued unpaid work. The findings reveal that wāhine Māori generated $5.9 billion in production GDP (1.9% of national GDP), primarily in business and social services, with unpaid work contributing substantially more—an additional $6.6 billion.

The report further highlights persistent structural challenges: wāhine Māori earn on average 20% less than non-Māori women; they experience lower full-time work participation; and a quarter of them lead single-parent households. While entrepreneurship among wāhine Māori grew by 31% between 2013 and 2018 (compared to only 7% for non-Māori women), they remain significantly under-represented in business ownership and receive disproportionately less entrepreneurial income. Given these documented disparities and their marginalised position within capitalist structures, it follows that wāhine Māori could hold more critical perspectives on capitalism and mainstream economic models than those Māori who have benefited more directly from the current Aotearoa New Zealand economic systems. This critical stance may also be influenced by iwi affiliation/cultural identity, as wāhine Māori are more likely to be knowledge holders and intergenerational cultural champions, placing greater importance on values of culture and spirituality that often stand in contrast to mainstream economic paradigms (Manatū Wāhine│Ministry for Women, 2024).

Employment Type and Economic Attitudes

Employment position—as employer, self-employed, or employee—shapes people's experiences within economic systems and may influence their attitudes toward those systems, with research suggesting that those who benefit from a system are more likely to support it (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Research conducted by Houkamau, Lilly, Newth et al. (2024) with 2,378 Māori workers reveals that those who were employers reported higher satisfaction with living standards, future security, personal relationships, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and finances, when compared with employees and sole traders. They suggested that self-employment provides Māori with greater autonomy, flexibility, and alignment with values such as tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), potentially liberating them from hierarchical structures that have historically disadvantaged Māori. This indicates that economic positioning significantly influences people's perspectives on capitalism, with entrepreneurial success potentially fostering more positive views of market-based systems.

Iwi Affiliation

Iwi (tribal) affiliation represents a fundamental aspect of Māori identity that is rooted in traditional social organisation. Research consistently confirms the profound significance of iwi affiliation to Māori identity (Tatauranga Aotearoa│Stats NZ, 2020; Tūhono, 2004). Recent studies have begun to reveal the way the strength of this tribal identity connection directly shapes Māori political and economic attitudes. Houkamau, Bahamondes, Osborne et al. (2024) reveal that Māori with stronger iwi affiliations—those who consider their tribal connections central to their self-concept—show significantly lower levels of system justification, meaning they are less likely to endorse Aotearoa New Zealand's existing social and political systems as being legitimate or fair. This finding suggests that tribal connection shapes political consciousness and attitudes towards mainstream institutions.

Building on this relationship between identity strength and systemic attitudes, additional empirical analysis by Houkamau, Bahamondes, Osborne et al. (2024) shows that Māori with more conservative political views tend to express lower intentions to engage in collective action for Māori political causes, evaluate their Māori identity as less central to their sense of self, and report less belief in their ability to effect political change. Together, these studies establish a clear pattern: the strength of Māori tribal identity significantly influences the way individuals relate to and engage with mainstream economic and political systems, with stronger iwi identification associated with greater critical consciousness of systemic inequities.

Government Regulation of Business

Research examining Māori attitudes towards government regulation reveals how colonised peoples view state intervention in economic affairs. Despite research on tensions between Māori and the New Zealand Government regarding governance authority (Elias, 2017) and mechanisms, such as the Treaty of Waitangi, that give Māori greater political voice (Morris, 2014), there is only limited work specifically examining Māori perspectives on business regulation. Research by Grimes et al. (2015) finds that Māori hold distinctly different views compared to non-Māori; Māori are more likely to oppose businesses being run solely by owners or managers, more likely to view capitalists negatively, more supportive of government intervention, and more likely to favour environmental protection over economic growth. These differences persist after controlling for socio-economic factors, suggesting genuine cultural differences. However, Māori interests are multifaceted, encompassing both environmental protection and development concerns. For example, Māori responded negatively to Sir John Key's 2015 proposal to create a Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary because it impinged on Māori commercial fishing rights, resulting in its eventual abandonment by the current government (Houkamau & Pouwhare, 2025). This nuanced position demonstrates the way Māori economic perspectives balance cultural, environmental, and economic development considerations.

Exploring Diversity in Māori Economic Perspectives

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Indigenous economic perspectives by examining the demographic factors that shape Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation of business in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our central research question is: How do Māori attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation vary across the population, and what factors influence these attitudes? Building on previous research that has identified tensions between Indigenous values and market economics (Grimes et al., 2015; Houkamau & Sibley, 2019), our research specifically investigates the way three key variables—cultural identity, employment position, and demographic characteristics—influence economic attitudes within Māori communities.

Method

Sampling Procedure

This study drew on the existing data from Wave 2 in 2020 of Te Rangahau o Te Tuakiri Māori me Ngā Waiaro ā-Pūtea | The Māori Identity and Financial Attitudes Study (MIFAS), a nationwide longitudinal panel study of Māori identity and financial attitudes and behaviour (see Houkamau et al., 2019, for a comprehensive outline of the MIFAS research methodology).

Sampling for the MIFAS occurred in two waves. The inaugural wave in 2017 randomly sampled 100,000 people who had identified as Māori on the 2017 New Zealand electoral roll, yielding 7,019 participants (response rate = 7.02%). Participants were followed up for Wave 2 in 2020, resulting in a sample of 3,241 respondents (retention rate = 46.2%). Participants completed the MIFAS via a postal pen-and-paper questionnaire, with the option to complete the questionnaire online in either English or te reo Māori (te reo n = 23).

Participants

For this current study, we used all available data from Wave 2 in 2020 of the MIFAS (N = 3,241). Of this sample, 64.4% were women, 35.5% were men, and 0.2% were gender diverse. Most participants were born in Aotearoa New Zealand (98.2%) and employed (71.5%), and the average age was 52.61 years (SD = 14.13, range: 21–85). The participants resided in both rural (48.3%) and urban (51.7%) dwellings. In terms of ethnicity, most participants (61.5%) reported another ethnic affiliation besides Māori, including New Zealand European (58.7%), Pasifika (3.2%), and Asian (1.5%).

Measures

Independent Variables

Employment Type

Employment type was assessed by asking participants whether they were (1) a paid employee (n = 1,839), (2) self-employed and NOT employing others (n = 284), (3) an employer of persons in their own business (n = 121), or (4) working in a family business without pay (n = 27). For our analyses, we excluded participants working in a family business without pay, and we created dummy codes (0 = no, 1 = yes) for paid employees, sole traders, and employers. In our analyses, we used paid employees as the base for comparisons.

Iwi Importance

Iwi importance was assessed by asking participants, “How important is/are your iwi to how you see yourself?” on a 7-point scale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important).

Cultural Efficacy and Active Identity Engagement

Cultural Efficacy and Active Identity Engagement (CEAIE) was measured using the revised Multidimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement scale (MMM-ICE3; Matika et al., 2020). The MMM-ICE3 is designed to assess the subjective experiences and different facets of identity for Māori. The CEAIE dimension measures the extent to which an individual perceives that they have the personal resources required to engage appropriately with other Māori in Māori social and cultural contexts. For this aspect, the scale uses the mean of 5 items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree): (a) "I don't know how to behave on a marae" (reverse-scored); (b) "I try to kōrero (speak) Māori whenever I can"; (c) "I can't do Māori culture or speak Māori" (reverse-scored); (d) "I know how to behave the right way when I am on a marae"; and (e) "I have a clear sense of my Māori heritage and what it means for me" (ω = .77).

Demographic Covariates

We controlled for eight core demographic variables: gender, age, sole Māori ethnic affiliation, household income, education, conservatism, and whether participants were employed (0 = no, 1 = yes) or living in rural or urban areas (0 = rural, 1 = urban). For gender, we asked, "What is your gender?" (open-ended), which was dummy coded for our analyses (0 = woman, 1 = man). We measured age using participants' reported date of birth. To assess ethnic affiliations, we asked, "Which ethnic group(s) do you belong to?", with participants able to select one or more responses from Māori, New Zealand European, Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Chinese, Indian, and Other (such as Dutch, Japanese, Tokelauan). Responses were dummy coded based on whether or not participants identified with multiple ethnic groups or as solely Māori (0 = sole Māori, 1 = Māori and another ethnicity).

We measured household income by asking participants, "Please estimate your total household income (before tax) for the year 2020". Because of the high variance in responses, we divided household income by $100,000 for our analyses. For education, we asked, "What is your highest level of qualification?" and coded the responses into an 11-level ordinal variable according to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, from 0 (no qualification) to 10 (doctoral degree or equivalent). Finally, we assessed conservatism by asking participants, "Please rate how politically liberal versus conservative you see yourself as being", on a scale of 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative) (Jost, 2006).

Dependent Variables

Opposition to Capitalism

Opposition to capitalism was measured using a single item, "Capitalism has generally had a negative impact on the way that we live", rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Support for Government Regulation

Support for government regulation was measured using the mean of three items: (a) "Government regulation of business is needed to stop business owners from becoming too greedy"; (b) "Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off"; and (c) "Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good" (reverse-scored). Items were rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (ω = .77).

Results

We examined attitudes among Māori towards capitalism and government regulation, specifically investigating differences between employment types (sole traders, employers, and paid employees) and the influence of cultural identity factors. Using multiple regression analyses in SPSS 29.0 statistics software, we tested whether "iwi importance to identity" and "cultural efficacy (CEAIE)" predicted (1) opposition to capitalism and (2) support for government regulation, while controlling for demographic variables.

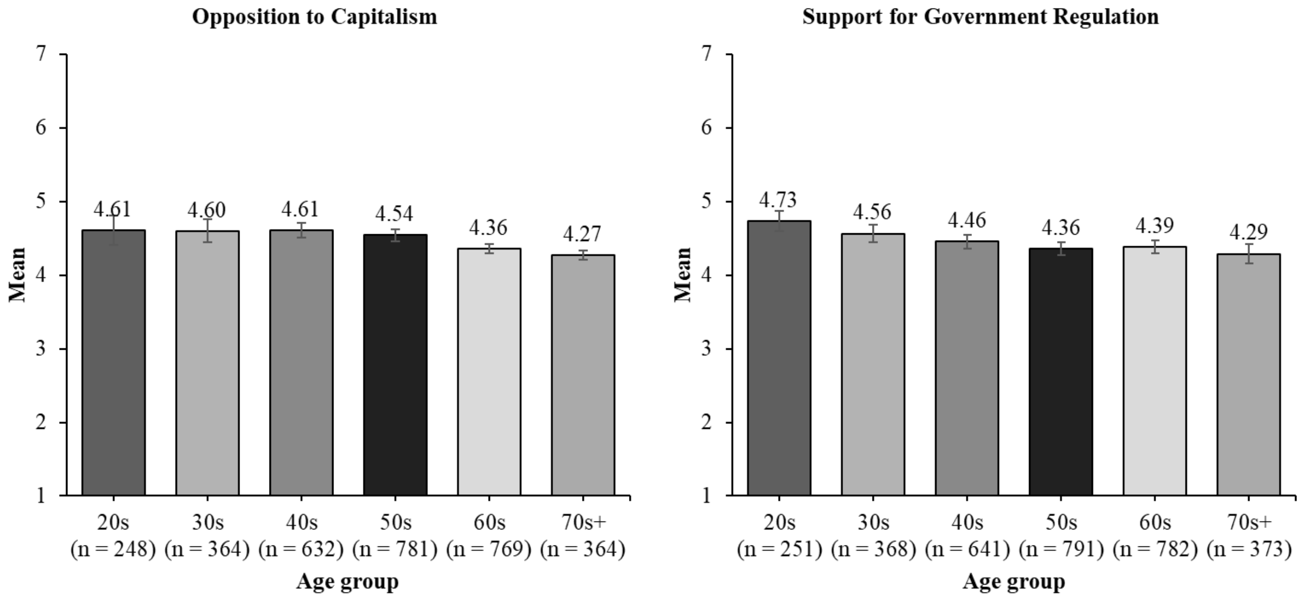
Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all variables and shows that, on average, participants reported moderate opposition to capitalism (M = 4.49, SD = 1.64) and support for government regulation (M = 4.43, SD = 1.22; i.e., above the midpoint on a 1–7 scale). Figure 1 compares the mean levels of our focal outcomes across gender, urban and rural dwellings, and ethnic affiliations.

Women reported greater opposition to capitalism (t(1906.44) = 4.38, p < .001; Cohen's d = 0.18) and support for government regulation (t(1927.08) = 3.38, p < .001; d = 0.13) than their male counterparts, suggesting gender-based differences in economic perspectives. This gender gap may reflect broader patterns wherein women often advocate for economic systems that prioritise community wellbeing and social equity.

Māori with sole Māori ethnic affiliations reported greater opposition to capitalism (t(3157) = 5.34, p < .001; d = 0.20) and support for government regulation (t(2917.06) = 6.36, p < .001; d = 0.22) than Māori with multiple ethnic affiliations. This suggests that stronger identification with singular Māori identity may align with more collectivist economic perspectives.

There was no evidence to suggest that Māori living in rural dwellings or urban dwellings differed in their attitudes towards capitalism (t(2893) = −0.25, p = .805; d = −0.01) or government regulation (t(2939) = −1.72, p = .086; d = −0.06), indicating that identity and socio-economic factors transcend spatial contexts in shaping Māori economic perspectives.



Note: Higher scores reflect higher opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation.

Figure 1: Mean Levels of Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation by Age Group

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Between Variables Included in our Analyses

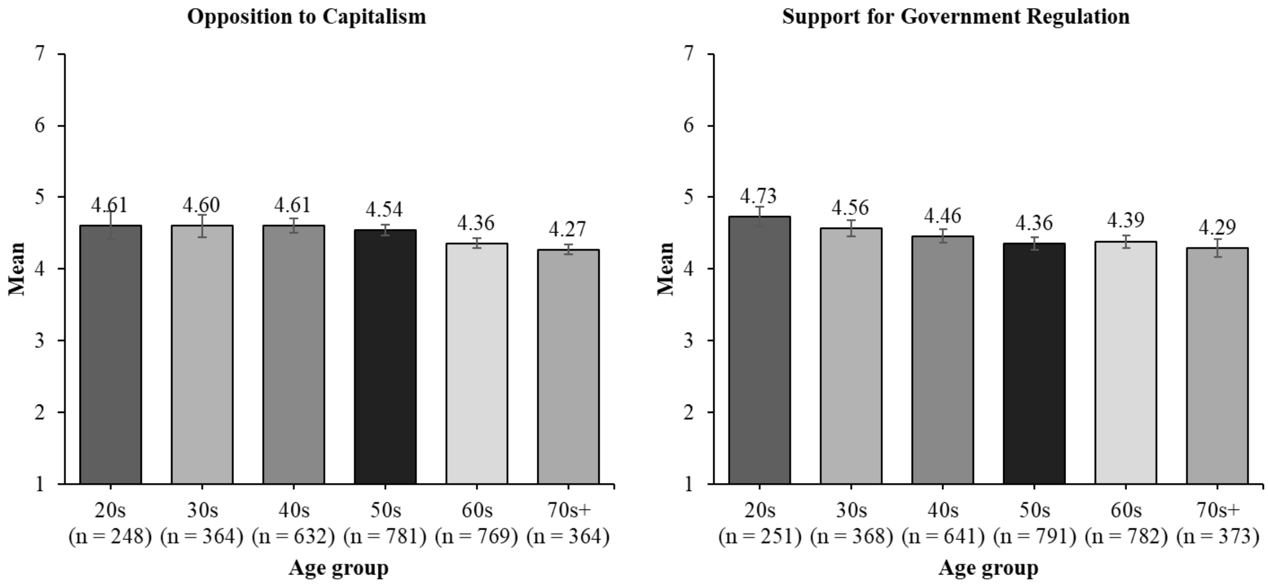
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Gender	--												
Age	0.14***	--											
Sole Māori affiliation	0.02	0.16***	--										
Household income[a]	0.09***	−0.20***	−0.10***	--									
Urban	0.01	−0.15***	−0.05*	0.17***	--								
Sole trader[b]	0.06**	0.14***	−0.06**	−0.01	−0.01	--							
Employer[b]	0.10***	0.09***	−0.04	0.13***	−0.04	−0.09***	--						
Education	−0.12***	−0.24***	−0.11***	0.29***	0.12***	−0.01	−0.06***	--					
Conservatism	0.06**	0.15***	0.10***	−0.04	−0.08***	−0.01	0.03	−0.20***	--				
Iwi importance	−0.07***	0.10***	0.34***	−0.07**	−0.02	−0.02	−0.07***	0.04	−0.02	--			
CEAIE	−0.12***	−0.03	0.28***	−0.04	−0.03	−0.06**	−0.07***	0.13***	−0.05***	0.52***	--		
Opposition to capitalism	−0.08***	−0.07***	0.10***	−0.15***	0.00	−0.08***	−0.12***	0.07***	−0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	--	
Support for government regulation	−0.06***	−0.08***	0.11***	−0.11***	0.03	−0.09***	−0.17***	0.10***	−0.26***	0.23***	0.19***	0.37***	--
N	3,080	3,240	3,241	1,475	2,974	2,281	2,281	2,724	2,952	3,117	3,231	3,159	3,207
Mean	0.36	52.61	0.38	1.02	0.52	0.13	0.05	4.69	3.66	4.98	4.64	4.49	4.43
SD	0.48	14.13	0.49	0.92	0.50	0.33	0.23	2.86	1.28	1.91	1.46	1.64	1.22
Range	0–1	21–85	0–1	0–11.44	0–1	0–1	0–1	0–10	1–7	1–7	1–7	1–7	1–7
ω	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.77	--	0.77

Notes:

[a] Divided by $100,0000. [b] Dummy coded (0 = no, 1 = yes).

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

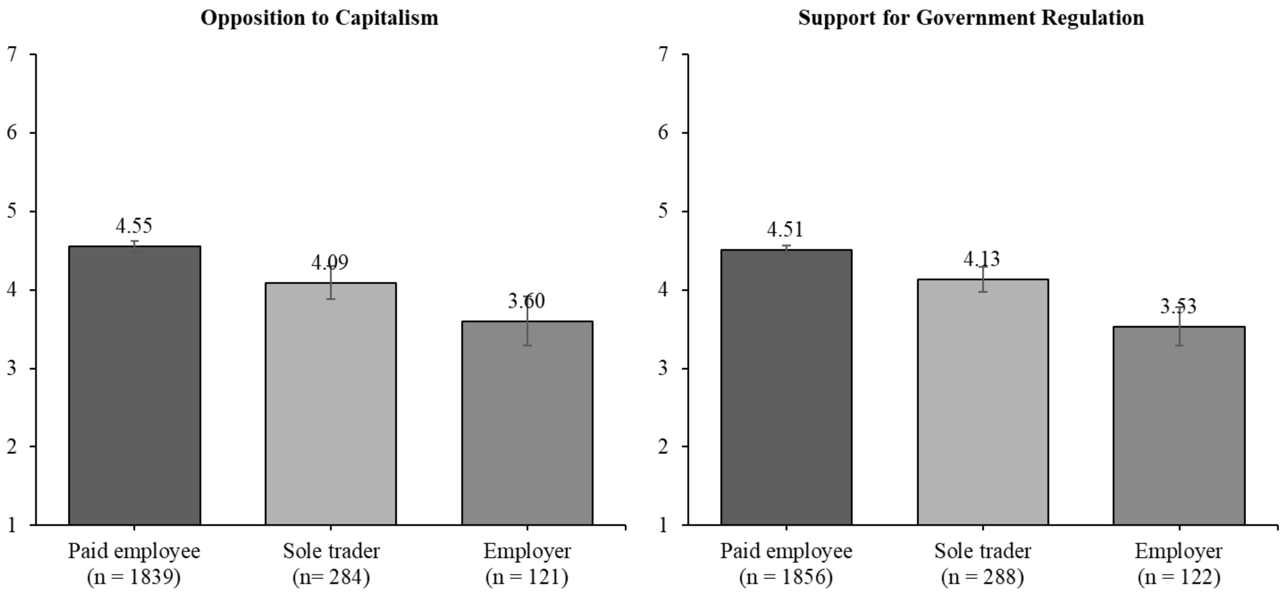
Figure 2 displays attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation by age. These results revealed a small difference in opposition to capitalism ($F(5) = 3.75$, $p = .002$; $\eta = 0.08$) and support for government regulation ($F(5) = 5.73$, $p < .001$; $\eta = 0.09$) across age groups, with younger age groups reporting greater opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation than their older counterparts. This generational difference may reflect the changing economic conditions, educational experiences, and political climates that have shaped younger Māori perspectives on economic systems.



Note: Higher scores reflect higher opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation.

Figure 2: Mean Levels of Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation by Age Group

Figure 3 displays attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation across employment types. Attitudes towards capitalism ($F(2) = 27.96$, $p < .001$; $\eta = 0.16$) and government regulation ($F(2) = 45.45$, $p < .001$; $\eta = 0.20$) differed significantly across employment types, with paid employees reporting greater opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation than sole traders and employers. This pattern likely reflects employees' experiences within hierarchical economic structures where they have limited control over resources and decision-making processes.



Note: Higher scores reflect higher opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation.

Figure 3: Mean Levels of Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation by Employment Type

Multiple Regression Analyses

Opposition to Capitalism

Table 2 displays the results of our multiple regression analyses. Our results for opposition to capitalism revealed that people with lower annual household incomes ($b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$) reported greater opposition to capitalism than those with higher household incomes. This finding aligns with research on economic vulnerability and redistributive preferences, suggesting that material circumstances shape perceptions of economic systems.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation

	Opposition to Capitalism					Support for Government Regulation				
Variable	*b*	SE	*ß*	*t*	*p-value*	*b*	SE	*ß*	*t*	*p-value*
Intercept	4.89	0.31	—	15.92	< .001	4.79	0.22	—	21.58	< .001
Gender[a]	−0.07	0.10	−0.02	−0.71	.481	0.01	0.07	0.00	0.13	.894
Age	−0.01	0.00	−0.06	−1.78	.076	0.00	0.00	−0.05	−1.59	.113
Sole Māori affiliation[b]	0.14	0.10	0.04	1.39	.165	0.13	0.08	0.05	1.74	.082
Household income[c]	−0.27	0.05	-0.15^{***}	−5.01	< .001	−0.15	0.04	-0.11^{***}	−3.79	< .001
Urban[d]	0.02	0.09	0.01	0.24	.810	0.04	0.07	0.02	0.64	.519
Sole trader[e]	−0.38	0.14	-0.08^{**}	−2.67	.008	−0.31	0.10	-0.09^{**}	−3.05	.002
Employer[e]	−0.60	0.21	-0.08^{**}	−2.84	.005	−0.71	0.15	-0.13^{***}	−4.65	< .001
Education	0.03	0.02	0.05	1.57	.116	0.02	0.01	0.06	1.82	.070
Conservatism	−0.21	0.04	-0.16^{***}	−5.55	< .001	−0.23	0.03	-0.24^{***}	−8.42	< .001
Iwi importance	0.10	0.03	0.11^{***}	3.34	< .001	0.11	0.02	0.17^{***}	4.97	< .001
CEAIE	0.08	0.04	0.07^{*}	2.19	.029	0.05	0.03	0.05	1.64	.102
R^2	0.12^{***}					0.17^{***}				

Notes: [a] Dummy coded (0 = women; 1 = men). [b] Dummy coded (0 = no; 1 = yes). [c] Household income divided by $100,000. [d] Dummy coded (0 = rural; 1 = urban). [e] Dummy coded (0 = no, 1 = yes).
$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

Political conservatism was negatively associated with opposition to capitalism ($b = -0.21$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$); that is, political conservatives held more positive attitudes towards capitalism than liberals, consistent with right-wing economic ideologies that emphasise market freedom and minimal state intervention.

After adjusting for these associations, our results revealed that paid employees reported greater opposition to capitalism than sole traders ($b = -0.38$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .008$) and employers ($b = -0.60$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = .005$). Sole traders and employers, as economic actors with greater autonomy and direct engagement with market systems, may foster perspectives that value entrepreneurial independence and fewer regulatory constraints.

Moreover, higher iwi importance ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$) and CEAIE ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .029$) positively predicted opposition to capitalism. This suggests that deeper connections to tribal identities align with economic perspectives that challenge individualistic market approaches and favour systems that protect collective interests. Cultural confidence strengthens critical perspectives on capitalist systems, indicating that Māori who deemed their iwi as important to their self-concept, or who had the resources to appropriately engage with Māori culture, reported greater opposition to capitalism than Māori who did not.

Support for Government Regulation

Turning to government regulation, Table 2 shows that household income ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$) and political conservatism ($b = -0.23$, SE = 0.03, $p < .001$) predicted lower support for government regulation. Lower-income Māori expressed greater support for government regulation, while conservative political views correlated with less support for government regulation.

After adjusting for these associations, Māori who were paid employees reported greater support for government regulation than sole traders ($b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .002$) and employers ($b = -0.71$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < .001$). The employment position emerged as a robust predictor of attitudes toward regulation, with paid employees demonstrating significantly stronger support for government regulation compared to both sole traders and employers.

Moreover, Māori who deemed their iwi important to their self-concept reported greater support for government regulation than those who did not ($b = 0.11$, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$). However, CEAIE was not significantly associated with support for government regulation ($b = 0.05$, SE = 0.03, $p = .102$), suggesting differential effects of cultural confidence on economic perspectives. While cultural identity significantly influenced support for government regulation, this relationship was specifically tied to iwi identification rather than cultural efficacy.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate the complex interplay of cultural, occupational, and demographic factors that produce heterogeneous economic attitudes among Māori, challenging monolithic representations of Māori perspectives. Our analyses revealed multifaceted patterns in the way Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation vary across different population segments, with three primary domains of influence emerging from the data: cultural identity factors, employment position, and demographic characteristics.

Discussion

Cultural Identity and Economic Attitudes

Contemporary discourse frequently presents Māori experiences through a cultural lens, suggesting relatively uniform perspectives and values within the group. However, our findings demonstrate that while cultural identity shapes Māori economic perspectives, these attitudes vary considerably based on employment position, gender, age, and ethnic affiliation.

Participants who rated their iwi as more important to their identity expressed stronger opposition to capitalism and greater support for government regulation. This aligns with the economy of mana framework (Dell et al., 2022; Hēnare, 2009), which suggests that stronger cultural connections may orient individuals toward collective prosperity rather than individual accumulation. Similarly, higher cultural efficacy—confidence in cultural knowledge and practices—correlated with perspectives on capitalism that were more critical, supporting research by Grimes et al. (2015) indicating that Māori tend to prioritise environmental concerns over economic growth.

Employment Position as Economic Mediator

Employment position emerged as a particularly robust predictor of economic attitudes. The significant differences between the categories of paid employees, sole traders, and employers highlighted the way economic positioning mediated perspectives on capitalism. Māori employees demonstrated considerably stronger opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation compared to self-employed individuals and employers. This pattern reflects the finding in Houkamau, Lilly, Newth et al. (2024) that self-employment offers Māori greater autonomy and alignment with cultural values such as tino rangatiratanga, potentially explaining why self-employed Māori hold more favourable views of market systems than their employed counterparts.

Demographic Influences on Economic Perspectives

The significant influence of demographic characteristics further illustrates the heterogeneity of Māori economic perspectives. The gender gap in attitudes—with women expressing more critical views of capitalism—may reflect broader societal patterns identified by Seguino (2020), while also suggesting specific Māori contexts where, as Mikaere (2017) argues, colonial disruption of traditional gender balances continues to shape economic experiences. Age-based differences indicate generational shifts in economic outlook, with younger participants demonstrating more critical perspectives than older generations. The relationship between sole Māori ethnic affiliation and stronger opposition to capitalism suggests that strength of identification with Māori identity may influence economic attitudes, although this relationship merits further investigation.

Our results empirically support Himona's (2013) critique that essentialised representations of a singular Māori world view fail to capture the diversity of lived experiences among contemporary Māori. In this current study, the substantial variation in economic attitudes reflects the concept that the BERL data illustrates: there are diverse economic realities for Māori, where different positioning within economic structures shapes perspectives on those very structures.

While recognising this diversity, our findings suggest that cultural identity factors influence economic attitudes for many Māori, though not universally or uniformly. This indicates that traditional Māori values may remain relevant to contemporary economic thinking for some individuals, while others may prioritise different values based on their unique circumstances and experiences.

Limitations

This study provides insights into the diversity of Māori attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation of business, but with some limitations. First, while our sample size was substantial (*N* = 3,241), the response rate for the original MIFAS sample was relatively low at 7.02% (Houkamau et al., 2019), followed by a retention rate of 46.2% for Wave 2. This raises concerns about self-selection bias, where those with stronger opinions about economic systems or stronger cultural identification might have been more likely to participate in the MIFAS survey.

Our measure of opposition to capitalism relied on a single item ("Capitalism has generally had a negative impact on the way that we live"), which may not have captured the multidimensional nature of attitudes toward economic systems. Capitalism encompasses various aspects—free markets, private ownership, profit motives, and competition—and participants might hold nuanced views about different elements rather than opposing or supporting the system as a whole. Similarly, while our measure of support for government regulation used three items, it primarily focused on business regulation and income redistribution. This approach may not fully capture the breadth of regulatory preferences, particularly regarding environmental protection, cultural safeguards, or treaty-based regulations that may be especially relevant to Māori.

These methodological limitations reflect a trade-off that we made in our research design. Māori have been found to participate in surveys at much lower rates than other New Zealanders (Fink et al., 2011; Manatū Hauora│Ministry of Health, 2017) and are more likely to remove themselves from survey-based studies over time (Satherley et al., 2015). Because of these factors, we carefully considered every item in the 2020 MIFAS and aimed to reduce response fatigue in our participants, in the hope that they would complete our entire survey. The length and breadth of our questionnaire meant we allocated single items to measure certain variables, including attitudes to capitalism. While this approach leaves our study open to criticism, it has been argued (Hoeppner et al., 2011) that a short scale might represent an improvement on a lengthy scale, particularly where there are ethical reasons to reduce scale items, such as minimising participant burden in time-consuming surveys. Others have acknowledged that single-item measures provide a balance between practical needs and psychometric concerns when longer scales are not feasible (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Jovanović & Lazić, 2018).

Another limitation is that in the MMM-ICE framework (Matika et al., 2020; Sibley & Houkamau, 2013), the CEAIE measure primarily assesses confidence and capability in Māori cultural contexts, rather than dimensions of cultural identification that could influence economic attitudes, such as political consciousness or engagement with contemporary Māori economic institutions. Additionally, in this study, our measure of iwi importance asked about its subjective importance but did not assess actual engagement. Stronger associations might emerge if we were to measure active participation in iwi economic development rather than just psychological identification.

Further, our categorisation of employment status (paid employee, sole trader, employer) may overlook important variations within these groups. For instance, employees in different sectors or with varying levels of job security might hold diverse economic perspectives.

Lastly, our findings are specific to the Aotearoa New Zealand context and may not generalise to Indigenous populations in other countries with different colonial histories, treaty arrangements, and contemporary economic circumstances. Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution by empirically demonstrating the diversity of Māori economic perspectives and identifying key factors that shape these attitudes.

Conclusion

This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Māori economic perspectives by empirically demonstrating the heterogeneity that exists within Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation. Our findings challenge oversimplified cultural narratives in three critical ways.

First, we provide evidence against the essentialisation of Māori identity in economic discourse. The variations in economic attitudes based on cultural identity factors (iwi importance and cultural efficacy), employment position (employee, sole trader, employer), and demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnic affiliation) reveal that Māori navigate capitalism through diverse and complex frameworks that cannot be reduced to a singular cultural perspective.

Second, our findings highlight the way the current discourse obscures class divisions within Māori communities. The significant differences between paid employees, sole traders, and employers demonstrate that economic positioning fundamentally shapes perspectives on capitalism and regulation.

Third, our results illuminate the fluid ways individuals navigate between cultural identification and economic realities. The complex interplay between iwi importance, employment position, and economic attitudes challenges Moran's (2015) observation that capitalism repackages identity-related differences as a personal choice. For many Māori, economic attitudes remain meaningfully connected to cultural identification, suggesting that identity continues to function as a framework for critiquing and engaging with economic systems.

While recognising diversity within Māori communities, we acknowledge the strategic value of collective identity in political contexts. This is not contradictory; rather, it reflects the way Māori identity operates at multiple levels simultaneously: the broader ethnic category remains relevant for Treaty relationships with the Crown, while diverse expressions within it reflect the richness of Māori realities. This approach, termed strategic essentialism, enables both protection of collective rights and recognition of diverse economic expressions. By recognising diversity within Māori economic perspectives, we can move beyond binary frameworks that position Māori as either entirely aligned with or opposed to capitalist systems. Instead, this research supports emerging scholarship that views Indigenous economic engagement as creative adaptation, where Māori transform economic systems to reflect their values and collective aspirations while navigating the realities of contemporary capitalism in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Professor Jason Mika is Tūhoe, Ngāti Awa, Whakatōhea, Ngāti Kahungunu. Jason is a Professor of Māori Management, Associate Dean Māori, and Co-Director of the Dame Mira Szászy Centre at the University of Auckland Business School. Jason's research, teaching, writing, and practice centres on Indigenous business philosophy in multiple sites, sectors, and scales, including Indigenous trade, tourism, agribusiness, and the marine economy. In 2015, Jason completed a PhD in Māori entrepreneurship at Massey University. In 2019, Jason was a Fulbright-Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga senior scholar at Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment and the University of Arizona's Native Nations Institute. Jason is a member of the Academy of Management, Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management, and Te Apārangi Royal Society of New Zealand. Prior to academia, Jason was a management consultant and policy analyst in Māori economic development. Jason's research has influenced several areas of public policy, including trade, environment, and statistics.

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