Protecting Māori Authority Over Data

Admin Only Census

Moving from a full-count Census to an admin-only model risks making Māori less visible in our data system. Admin records exist to deliver services, not to reflect identity, so ethnicity, descent and iwi fields are often missing, optional or coded differently between agencies. That creates coverage and linkage bias. some Māori are not counted at all, others are misclassified, and iwi populations become blurred. Over time, funding and accountability drift away from actual needs. Without Māori authority over how datasets are linked, stored and accessed, the decision also weakens rangatiratanga and breaks the whakapapa of the data.

Guided by Te Mana Raraunga, the path forward is partnership, not substitution. Co-govern the design with iwi and Māori organisations (Rangatiratanga). set Māori-designed standards for ethnicity, descent and iwi and require rich provenance metadata and quality audits (Whakapapa). and embed tikanga-based protections such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent, tapu/noa access settings and hosting in Aotearoa (Manaakitanga, Kaitiakitanga). Mitigation: adopt a hybrid approach use admin data as a backbone, but fund Māori-led enumeration and validation where gaps remain and pause retiring full enumeration until governance, standards, resourcing and legal levers are in place, with a public Māori benefit statement.