

Community Involvement in Decision Making

What this is about...

Section 37k of the Local Government Act states that council's responsibilities toward communities include:

- recognising that different communities exist and they have their own identities and values,
- delivering facilities and services to communities that meet their needs, choices and preferences; and
- effective consultation to enable people within communities to participate in local government.

It is important that citizens feel that they can have their concerns and opinions heard and considered by their local government representatives.

This indicator measures citizen satisfaction with involvement in decision making by local councils and indicates whether a healthy democratic process is at work. To assess this, respondents to a citizens' survey conducted in the six cities were asked a series of questions regarding involvement in the democratic process.

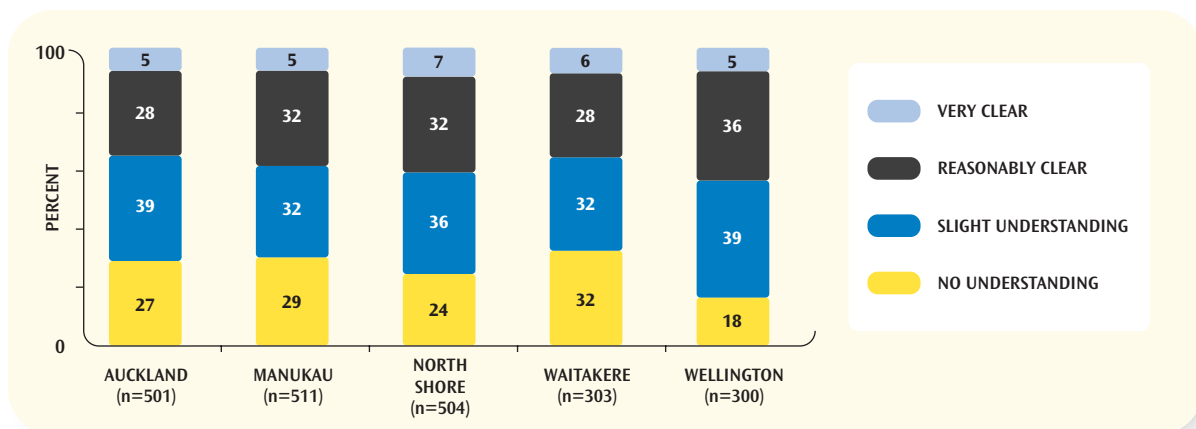
What did we find ?

CITIZENS' UNDERSTANDING OF HOW COUNCIL MAKES DECISIONS

Respondents to the citizens' surveys were asked to rate the extent to which they understood how (their) council makes decisions. Responses from the Christchurch City survey could not be compared directly with responses from other surveys but a consistent pattern was found in the other five cities.¹⁸² About one third of respondents to the surveys felt that they had a reasonably clear understanding, another third felt that they had a slight understanding while approximately a quarter felt they had no understanding. Only a small proportion felt that it was 'very clear'.

A relatively high proportion of respondents from Wellington felt they had a 'slight' or 'reasonably' clear understanding.

CITIZENS' UNDERSTANDING OF HOW COUNCIL MAKES DECISIONS, BY CITY (2000)



Data Source: Citizens' Surveys

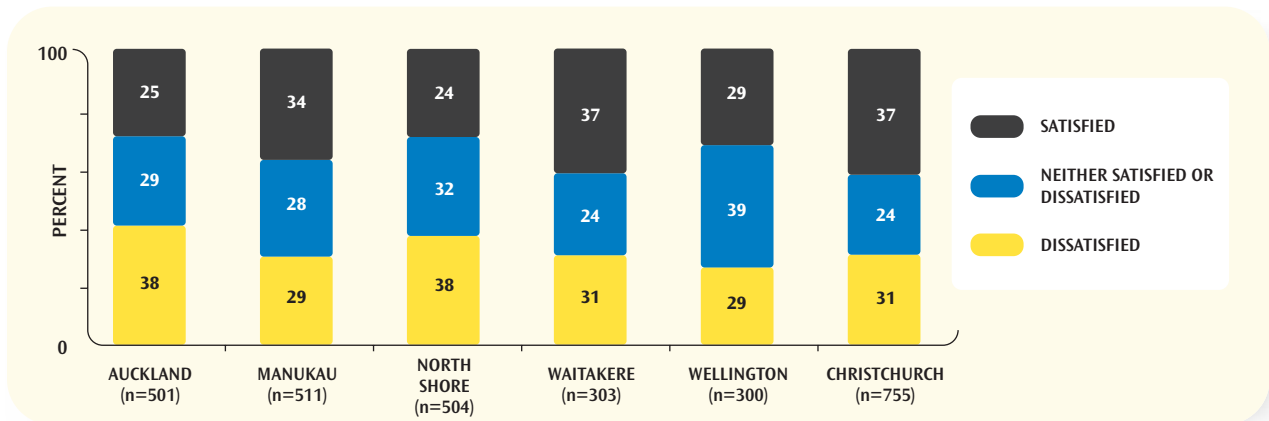
182 The Christchurch survey used a different measurement scale for this question. While most surveys asked their respondents to indicate "To what extent do you understand how Council makes decisions?", on a scale of very clear, reasonably clear, slight to none at all, Christchurch City asked its respondents to agree or disagree on a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" whether they understood how their Council makes decisions. It was found, however, that the majority of respondents to the Christchurch survey (42%) strongly agreed or agreed that they understood how Council makes decisions while a quarter (25%) were neutral. A further quarter of respondents (26%) did not agree with the statement.

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

Respondents to the surveys were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the way their local council involves people in decision making, from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'.¹⁸³

- Overall, there were similar patterns of response in all six cities, with approximately a third of respondents indicating they were satisfied, a third dissatisfied and a quarter were neutral on the issue.
- Smaller proportions of Auckland and North Shore City respondents were satisfied than respondents from other cities (25% and 24% respectively).¹⁸⁴
- Only 29% of respondents to the Manukau and Wellington City surveys were dissatisfied with the way their council involves people in decision making.¹⁸⁵

CITIZEN SATISFACTION WITH THE WAY COUNCIL INVOLVES PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING, BY CITY (2000)



Data Source: Citizens' Surveys

COMMUNITY INFLUENCE IN DECISION MAKING

Respondents to the surveys were asked to rate the public's ability to influence their local council decision making on a scale of "large influence" to "no influence".¹⁸⁶

- Overall, a similar pattern was found in all six cities, with most respondents indicating that they felt the public had 'some' or a 'small' influence over council decision making.
- A substantial proportion of respondents to the Waitakere survey felt that the public had 'large influence' over council decision making.
- Half (50%) of all respondents to the Wellington survey and 55% of those from Waitakere felt the public had a large or some influence.
- Larger proportions of respondents from Auckland, Manukau and North Shore chose 'none' or 'small' influence than 'some' or 'large'.

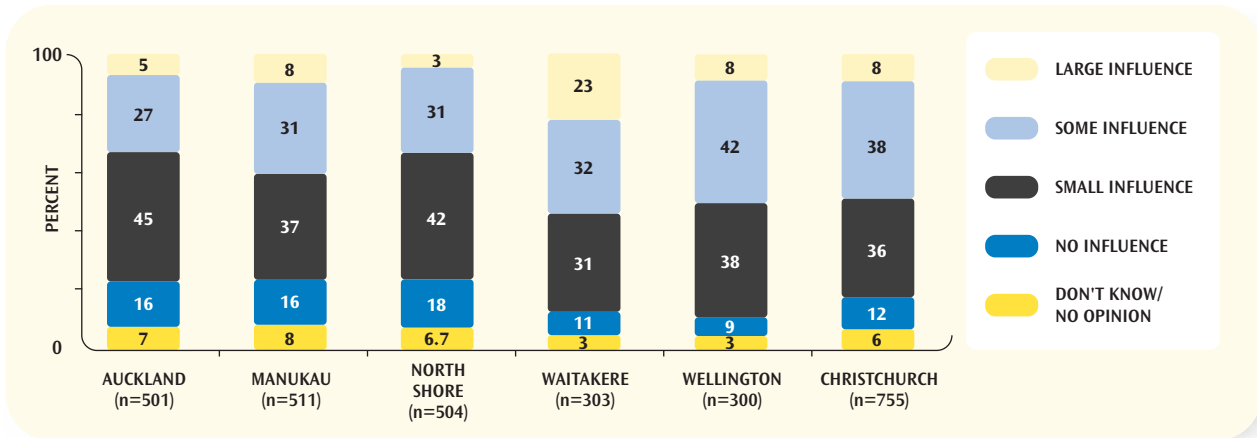
183 There were very slight differences in wording across surveys with regard to this question. Namely, Manukau City asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with "the way the Council involves the public in the decisions it makes" whereas other Councils asked respondents to rate satisfaction with "the way Council involves people in decision making".

184 Where "satisfied" equals combination of very satisfied and satisfied responses.

185 Where "dissatisfied" equals combination of very dissatisfied and dissatisfied responses.

186 There was a difference in wording between Manukau City's survey and other surveys with regard to this question. Manukau City asked respondents "how much influence do you feel the public has on the decisions that Council makes?" while other surveys asked, "how would you rate the public's ability to influence Council's decision making?"

CITIZENS' PERCEPTION OF THE PUBLIC'S ABILITY TO INFLUENCE COUNCIL DECISION MAKING, BY CITY (2000)



Data Source: Citizens' Surveys

Our surveys found that overall there appears to be a perception among many citizens within the six largest cities that the public does not have a large influence over council's decision making. This ties in with earlier findings that citizens were divided on the question of whether or not they were satisfied with Council's involvement of people in decision making, and that many did not understand how council makes decisions. Reasons for this will be complex and will include the age and education levels of citizens, council methods of communicating and the extent to which citizens are aware of and understand their council's role in their city and its decision making processes.

Composition of School Boards of Trustees

What this is about...

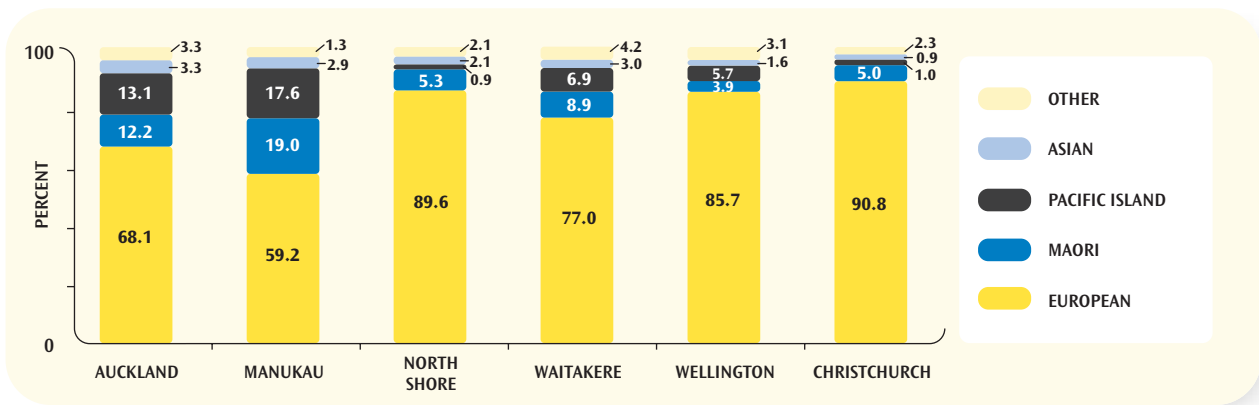
School boards of trustees play a significant role in the governance of schools and the relationship between the school and its students' families. The composition of school boards of trustees (primary and secondary state schools) is therefore an indicator of public involvement in decisions that affect them. It is suggested that if the makeup of a board reflects the makeup of the population it serves, then participatory democracy is in a healthier position. For the purpose of this report, gender and ethnicity are the critical factors measured in board composition.

Some cities had higher numbers of persons on school boards of trustees than others - for example, in 1999 Auckland and Christchurch Cities had the highest numbers of persons on school boards of trustees, while Waitakere and North Shore Cities had the lowest numbers.

What did we find ?

- Within all six cities, the highest proportion of school boards of trustees were of European ethnicity.
- In 1999, relatively high proportions of Pacific Islands people and Maori were on boards of trustees in Auckland and Manukau Cities.
- There do not appear to be any significant changes to representation over the previous four years.

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL BOARDS OF TRUSTEES, BY ETHNICITY (1999)



Data Source: Ministry of Education

There has been around the same number of men and women serving on boards of trustees since 1996 except in North Shore and Wellington which reported slightly more men than women.

COMPOSITION OF SCHOOL BOARDS OF TRUSTEES, BY SEX (1996 TO 1999)

	1996 (no.)		1997 (no.)		1998 (no.)		1999 (no.)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Auckland	324	324	329	316	366	336	335	338
Manukau	230	242	231	237	285	257	272	245
North Shore	169	148	153	143	182	151	184	154
Waitakere	161	156	152	148	164	157	160	144
Wellington	182	176	187	169	199	199	192	192
Christchurch	351	316	339	326	352	349	347	339

Data Source: Ministry of Education

Composition of Councils and Community Boards

Local Government New Zealand states that “local government is local democracy in action” and “local democracy is about having the right mix of people ... to best represent a particular community”. But what does “the right mix of people” mean? And how representative is local government, both within the six largest cities and throughout the rest of this country? Indeed, what constitutes representation? These are complex questions, with no hard and fast answers. However, it was felt that as part of this chapter on democracy it was important to broach the issue of representation within councils and community boards with regard to demographic factors such as ethnicity, age and sex.

Data on the ethnic identity of elected representatives at local government level is not collected. However, a quick overview of members of council and community boards across the six largest cities would suggest that Europeans are over-represented in community boards and at council level, in relation to the ethnic population in the area. This is the case with all of the six local authorities. Similarly, data concerned with age is not collected. Available data on sex indicates that representation is equal by men and women.

This report has also noted relatively low rates of voter turnout at local government level, and there may be a link between appropriate representation and voter motivation.