

Voter Turnout at General Elections

What this is about...

New Zealand is a democratic country in which the members of Parliament are chosen in free and fair elections. All citizens and permanent residents who are 18 years and over are eligible to vote in the elections. Every New Zealand citizen who is enrolled as an elector is eligible to be a candidate for election as a Member of Parliament. This indicator is about the proportion of eligible voters that turn out at national elections.¹⁸¹

It is compulsory to register on the electoral roll in New Zealand, but not compulsory to vote, either at national or local level. Voter turnout at elections is one indicator of citizen participation in democratic processes and can give a feel for citizen's awareness, willingness and ability to contribute to representative governance. Factors leading to participation levels are most often linked to the health and wellbeing of communities and the level of self-determination of citizens. For example, a poor turnout can indicate that some people feel non-empowered, that is, they perceive that they are unable to influence change.

What did we find ?

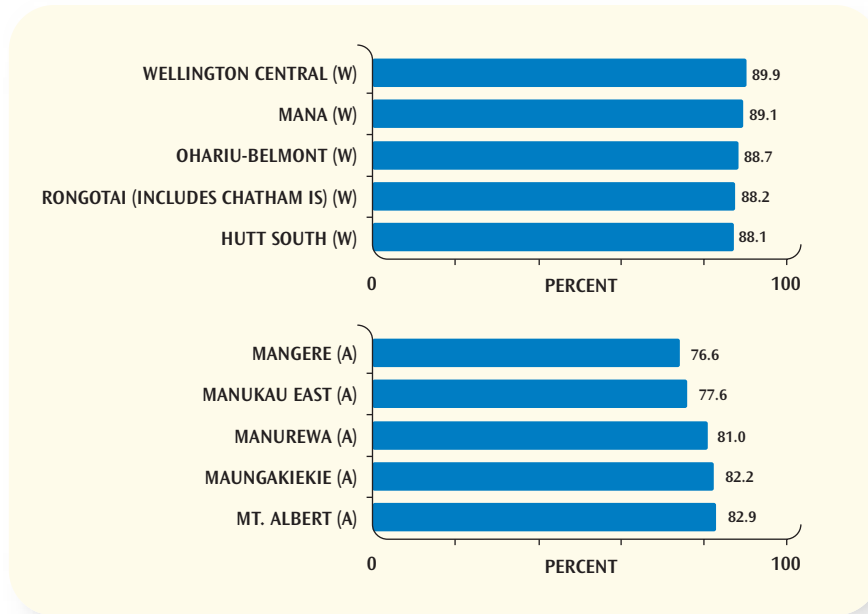
- Overall, the level of voter participation in general elections in 1999 was relatively high. This would, in part, reflect the compulsory nature of enrolment on the electoral roll.
- Proportions of voter turnout are highest among Wellington electorates over other regional areas.
- The Wellington Central electorate had the highest proportion of voters turn out overall (89.9%) and Mangere in Manukau City had the lowest proportion at 76.6%.

VOTER TURNOUT AT LAST GENERAL ELECTION (1999)

	Median voter turnout %	Regional electorate with highest proportion voter turnout %	Regional electorate with lowest proportion voter turnout %
Auckland	81.5	North Shore 86.4	Mangere 76.6
Wellington	88.7	Wellington Central 89.9	Rimutaka 87.6
Christchurch	86.4	Ilam 87.4	Christchurch Central 85.3

Data Source: Electoral Commission

FIVE ELECTORAL AREAS WITH LOWEST VOTER TURNOUT AND FIVE ELECTORAL AREAS WITH HIGHEST VOTER TURNOUT IN LAST GENERAL ELECTION (1999)



Data Source: Electoral Commission

Where A = Auckland Region, W = Wellington area

The last two national elections were held in 1999 and 1996. Electoral area boundaries have changed at each election and it is very difficult to compare voter turnout with previous elections. However, in the previous two elections the highest proportions of voters have been from the Wellington electorates.

The higher voter turnout levels in Wellington reflect the socio-economic, health and educational status of the citizens in that area. For example, Wellington has a high proportion of professionals, with generally higher level of academic qualifications. In addition, there may also be a relationship between the fact that central government is housed in Wellington - which increases the likelihood that Wellington Central residents are employed within central government departments (or know someone who is) - and higher voting patterns among Wellington Central residents.

In comparison, electorates within Manukau have a relatively youthful age structure, low levels of educational qualifications and higher levels of social deprivation - all factors that would negatively influence citizen's propensity to exercise their democratic right to vote.

Voter Turnout at Local Authority Elections

What this is about...

This indicator tells us about voter turnout at the previous three local authority elections (1998, 1995, 1992). A local authority election is the process used to elect city, district and regional councils and community boards, and is based on the geographical boundaries of the region, district or city. These boundaries differ from national electorate boundaries. Voter turnout at local authority elections indicates levels of participation in democratic processes at local community level. As with turnout at national elections, this is an indicator of an individual's perceptions that they can bring about change in the governance of their local community. Similarly, turnout is linked to the health and wellbeing of the voters in each local area.

Overall, smaller proportions of voters turn out for regional and local authority elections than for central government elections. Furthermore, there is a slight variance between proportions of voters by regions and cities, with slightly higher proportions turning out to vote at a regional level than local level.

REGIONAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

- Approximately half of all eligible voters have turned out for the previous three regional elections.
- Voter turnout dropped in the Auckland and Canterbury Regions in the 1995 elections, but rose again in 1998.
- Wellington and Canterbury Regions show higher levels of participation by voters than the Auckland Region. For example in the 1998 regional council elections, 42% of Auckland voters turned out compared with 56% of Canterbury voters.

PROPORTION OF VOTERS PARTICIPATING IN REGIONAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS (1992, 1995, 1998)

	1992 (%)	1995 (%)	1998 (%)
Auckland Regional Council	43.8	34.1	45.8
Wellington Regional Council	49.5	46.4	51.9
Canterbury Regional Council	47.3	38.0	53.7
Rest of NZ	51.1	51.9	48.1

Data Source: Department of Internal Affairs.

In this section 'voter turnout' and 'voter participation' are used interchangeably.

LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTIONS

- In the 1998 local authority elections, Auckland and Christchurch Cities had the highest voter turnout at 50.8% and 52.2% respectively, while Manukau City had the lowest proportion of voter turnout at 40.7%.
- In the last three local authority elections, the proportion of eligible voters who actually voted was lower in all six cities, than the proportion for the rest of New Zealand.
- Manukau City had the lowest proportion of voter turnout in the last three elections.
- The proportion of resident electors voting in Auckland City has risen consistently over the previous three elections, from 43.1% in 1992 to 45.2% in 1998. Although Manukau City had the lowest proportion of voter turnout in the last three elections, it also witnessed a small but steady increase in the proportion of residents who vote. This pattern is also reflected in numbers for the rest of New Zealand.

PROPORTION OF VOTERS PARTICIPATING IN LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTIONS

	1992 (%)	1995 (%)	1998 (%)
Auckland	43.1	49.0	50.8
Manukau	38.6	39.0	40.7
North Shore	46.0	46.0	45.2
Waitakere	44.7	41.4	45.4
Wellington	53.1	52.7	49.2
Christchurch	51.5	49.9	52.2
Rest of NZ	51.8	54.1	57.5

Data Source: Department of Internal Affairs