

Democracy is defined as government by all the people - direct or representative. New Zealand's political processes are underlined by principles of democracy and representation at all levels of governance. This chapter explores levels of participation and representation in democratic processes, at community, local government and national level, by citizens of the six largest cities.

Why this is important...

The participation of citizens in the governance and decision making processes, at community, local government and national level, is a key factor in democracy in New Zealand. It is important that citizens exercise their right to elect representatives and that their concerns and opinions are heard and considered by those elected representatives.

The Treaty of Waitangi underpins relationships between tangata whenua and central and local government. This relationship is of great importance to effective governance and the enactment of democracy.

Furthermore, Section 37k of the Local Government Act states that council's responsibilities toward communities include "effective consultation to enable people within communities to participate in local government". It is important that participation at community and individual level is encouraged.

What's in this chapter?

- Councils and the Treaty of Waitangi
- Voter turnout at general elections
- Voter turnout at local body elections
- Community involvement in decision making
- Composition of school boards of trustees
- Composition of local councils and community boards

Impact and relationships in other areas of this report

There may be links between socio-economic status and education levels and participation in local body elections and processes. For example, Wellington City has a high proportion of professionals, with a generally higher level of academic qualifications and has relatively high proportions of voter turnout. 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. Other factors which may impact on participation in democratic processes are socio-economic and language barriers.

Key points

The Councils of the six cities are all developing their relationships with tangata whenua and/or mana whenua and have special procedures, bodies or staff in place to guide the relationships.

While the proportion of voters who turn out at national elections is relatively high, the proportion of voters at the local authority level is smaller, with only about half of eligible voters turning out for regional and local council elections. Local government may wish to consider further exploring the motivations (or lack of) that lie behind voter behaviour in order to better understand the relatively low levels of voter turnout.

A survey undertaken among citizens of the six largest cities found that there was a variance in levels of satisfaction with the way local authorities involve people in decision making. In all six cities, over a third of those surveyed were not satisfied. This ties in with other findings from that survey that about two thirds of respondents felt they had only a 'slight' or 'no' understanding of how their council makes decisions. The findings suggest that perhaps many citizens are unaware of the role and processes of local government.

Representation at local government level is disproportionately European. Similarly, it was found that there is an imbalance in representation on school boards of trustees. This raises issues of true representation of and by different cultures and ethnicities at that level. Motivation and willingness to stand for election among non-European citizens are issues that warrant further exploration.



Councils and the Treaty of Waitangi

What this is about...

Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi underpins relationships between central and local government and tangata whenua.¹⁷⁸ The Councils of the six largest cities in New Zealand are all committed to developing their relationships with tangata whenua under the Treaty of Waitangi. While all have expressed commitment to this, they are at different stages in the development and implementation of these relationships.

What did we find ?

Auckland City Council consults with eight tangata whenua groups on all resource management issues through their Tangata Whenua Consultative Committee, to ensure that Council decisions reflect the views of iwi and comply with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, its statutory obligations and the kaitiaki role of tangata whenua.¹⁷⁹ As part of measuring Council's performance and progress on strategic outcomes, iwi satisfaction with Council consultation and communication will be measured. As part of its commitment to working in partnership, Auckland City Council has established a bicultural unit - Pae Herenga Tangata.

Christchurch City Council has a strategic objective in its Annual Plan that Council will recognise the Treaty of Waitangi through maintaining mutually acceptable consultation procedures with the tangata whenua. Christchurch has established a Maori Liaison Officer position to implement this.

Manukau City Council has been working with tangata whenua since the time of the Manukau claim in 1986. More recently Council has been holding discussions with six mana whenua groups with the aim of developing formal relationships with these groups.¹⁸⁰ One of Council's key goals in its Annual and Strategic Plan is to improve its response to tangata whenua and to the Treaty of Waitangi and the quality of this response is one of Council's key performance indicators. There is also a focus within Manukau City Council on developing organisational understanding of the Treaty and of Maori needs and culture in order to provide better services and build on existing relationships with Maori groups. This is being done through means such as Council's Treaty of Waitangi Team (an internal staff team focusing on Treaty issues), staff training and the work of the Maori Liaison Officer.

North Shore City Council recognises five iwi as being tangata whenua of North Shore City. It established a tangata whenua Working Group in 1999, which aims to establish a memorandum of understanding with iwi. The Council's Annual Plan contains a key objective of ensuring that Council policy and services incorporate the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. North Shore City Council also works with Awataha Marae on community projects.

Waitakere City Council has formal agreements in place with two iwi, Te Kawerau a Maki and Ngati Whatua. Council also works with Te Whanau o Waipareira Trust and other Maori organisations in Waitakere, including funding and service contracts to facilitate Maori input into Resource Management Act processes. In addition, Waitakere City Council has established a Maori standing committee, Te Taumata Runanga, to help ensure that the needs of Maori citizens are addressed. Te Taumata Runanga includes representatives from iwi, marae, urban Maori authorities, and key Maori organisations. In its Annual Plan, Waitakere City has specific measures for assessing iwi and pan-tribal Maori organisations' satisfaction with Council's performance.

Wellington City Council has passed a resolution recognising that it has moral and ethical obligations under the Treaty. The Council has memoranda of understanding with the Wellington Tenth Trust and Te Runanga o Toa Rangitira, through which mana whenua groups are resourced to provide advice on issues. The Council has a Maori standing committee, Te Taumata o Poneke, which assists it in dealing with issues relevant to Maori. Wellington's Strategic Plan also contains specific outcomes around Council and mana whenua partnerships. Wellington City Council has recently appointed a Maori Issues Director, reporting to the Chief Executive.

178 Tangata whenua refers to people of the land.

179 Kaitiaki refers to guardian.

180 Mana whenua refers to Maori who are tied culturally to the area by whakapapa and ancestors who lived and died there.

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%.

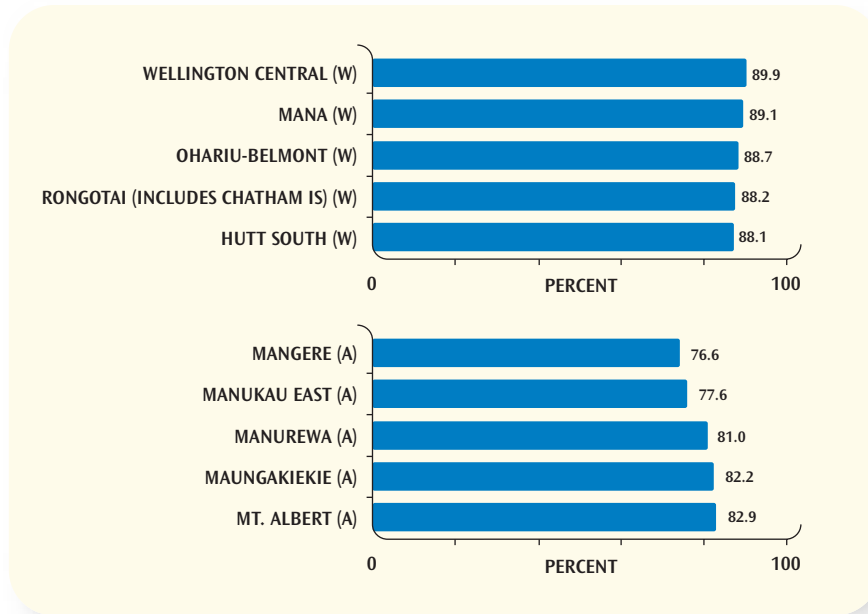
VOTER TURNOUT AT LAST GENERAL ELECTION (1999)

	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

181 Electoral boundaries do not match City Council boundaries.

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

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.

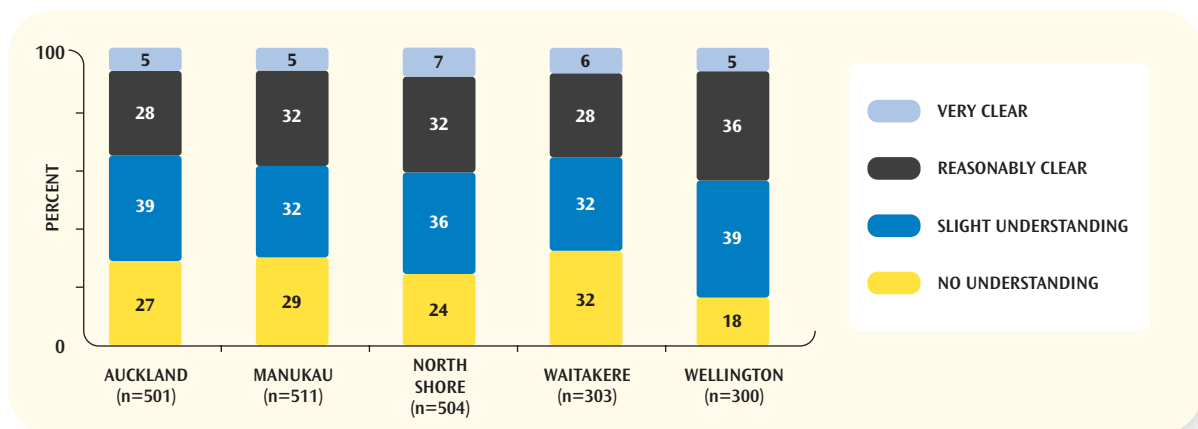
What did we find ?

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

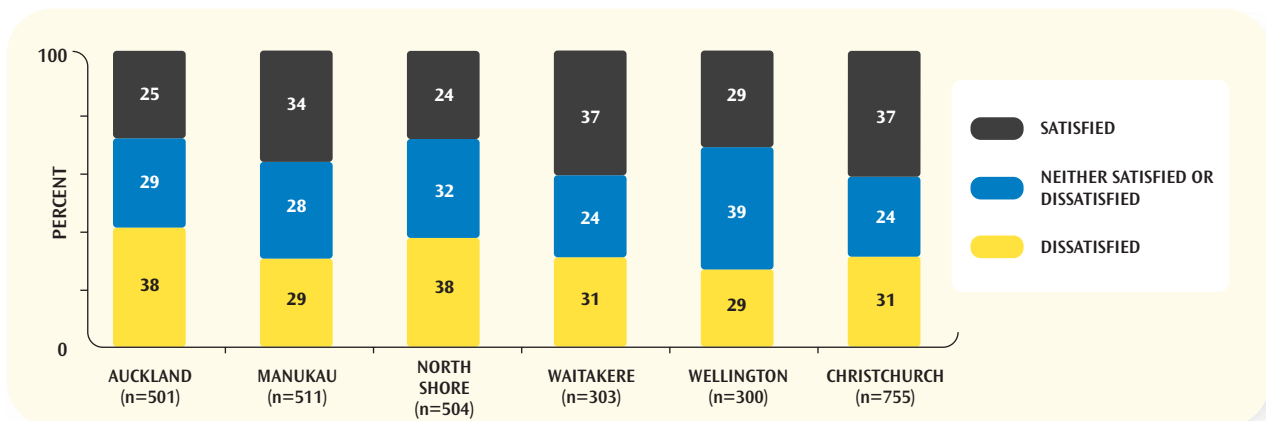
182 The Christchurch survey used a different measurement scale for this question. While most surveys asked their respondents to indicate "To what extent do you understand how Council makes decisions?", on a scale of very clear, reasonably clear, slight to none at all, Christchurch City asked its respondents 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'.

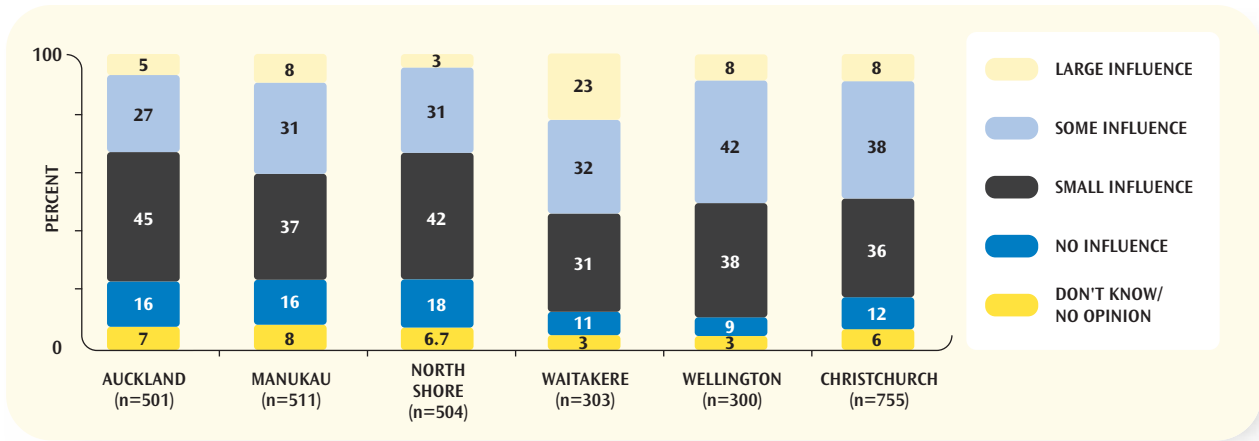
183 There were very slight differences in wording across surveys with regard to this question. Namely, Manukau City asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with "the way the Council involves the public in the decisions it makes" whereas other Councils asked respondents to rate satisfaction with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

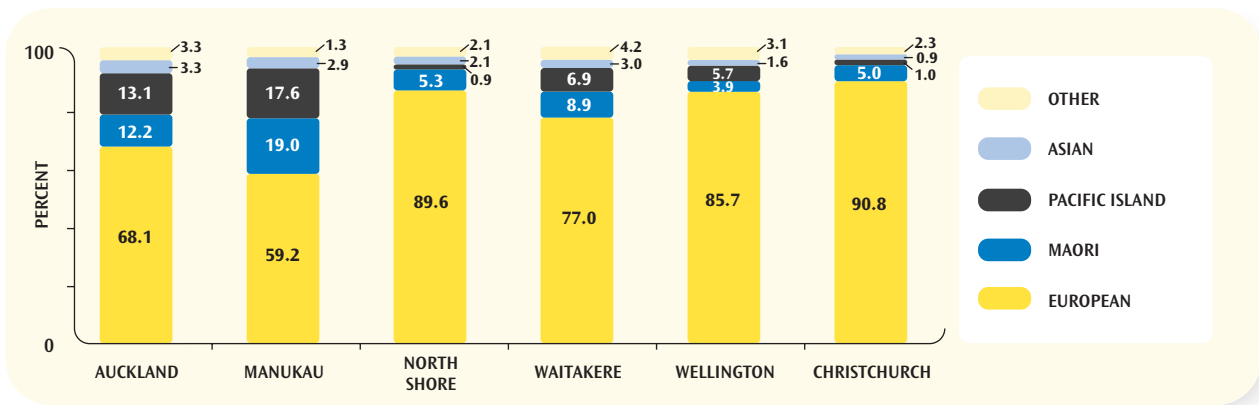
School boards of trustees play a significant role in the governance of schools and the relationship between the school and its students' families. The composition of school boards of trustees (primary and secondary state schools) is therefore an indicator of public involvement in decisions that affect 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.