

Modernising our approach to the 2028 Census: Summary of submissions





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Citation

Stats NZ (2025). *Modernising our approach to the 2028 Census: Summary of submissions*. Retrieved from www.stats.govt.nz.

ISBN 978-1-991307-50-7

Published in June 2025

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Purpose and summary

Purpose

Modernising our approach to the 2028 Census: Summary of submissions summarises the feedback we received for our public consultation on proposals to modernise our approach to the next census. Public consultation ran from 8 May to 19 June 2024, supported by the discussion document on [Modernising our approach to the 2028 Census](#).

Summary

In the discussion document, we asked a range of questions to help us understand how New Zealanders feel about using more administrative data for the census.

Administrative data (admin data) is data collected by government agencies as part of their day-to-day work. It is collected for things like providing services (eg, healthcare), registering events (eg, births and deaths), or keeping records of transactions (eg, tax payments and overseas travel).

‘Admin data first’ means prioritising the use of admin data to deliver census data. Where admin data is not available or not of high enough quality, we will continue to use surveys and other custom solutions to collect the information we need.

Over the six weeks of public consultation, we received a total of 467 submissions. This report summarises these submissions and describes their key themes. In addition to the formal submissions received through our online form or via email, we engaged with a range of stakeholders, including central and local government organisations, iwi, community groups, and other organisations we have relationships with.

Introduction

The census gives us some of the most important information we have about our country. It tells us about our homes and families, how we live, our cultures, the kinds of education we have, and how we get to work and school. This helps us see how people in New Zealand are living, and guides how billions of dollars are spent.

Stats NZ wants to find better ways of collecting and sharing data and statistics. Our world and New Zealanders' needs are changing. There's a growing demand for data and statistics that are more timely, comprehensive, and detailed. At the same time, like many other countries, we face challenges with our traditional data collection methods. We can only produce high-quality data from surveys if enough people fill them out, and it's getting harder to reach the right number of people to represent society through surveying.

Our census must evolve to continue to deliver 'for Aotearoa, about Aotearoa' for generations to come. As we develop the census, it's important to hear from New Zealanders and anyone who calls New Zealand home, so we've invited people to have their say about what matters to them, their family and whānau, and their communities. In particular, we wanted to understand how people feel about changing the way we do the census, including reusing existing data supported by surveys.

As we look to modernise our approach to the next census, we will continue to consult New Zealanders on how the census can better serve New Zealand.

Part 1: Overview

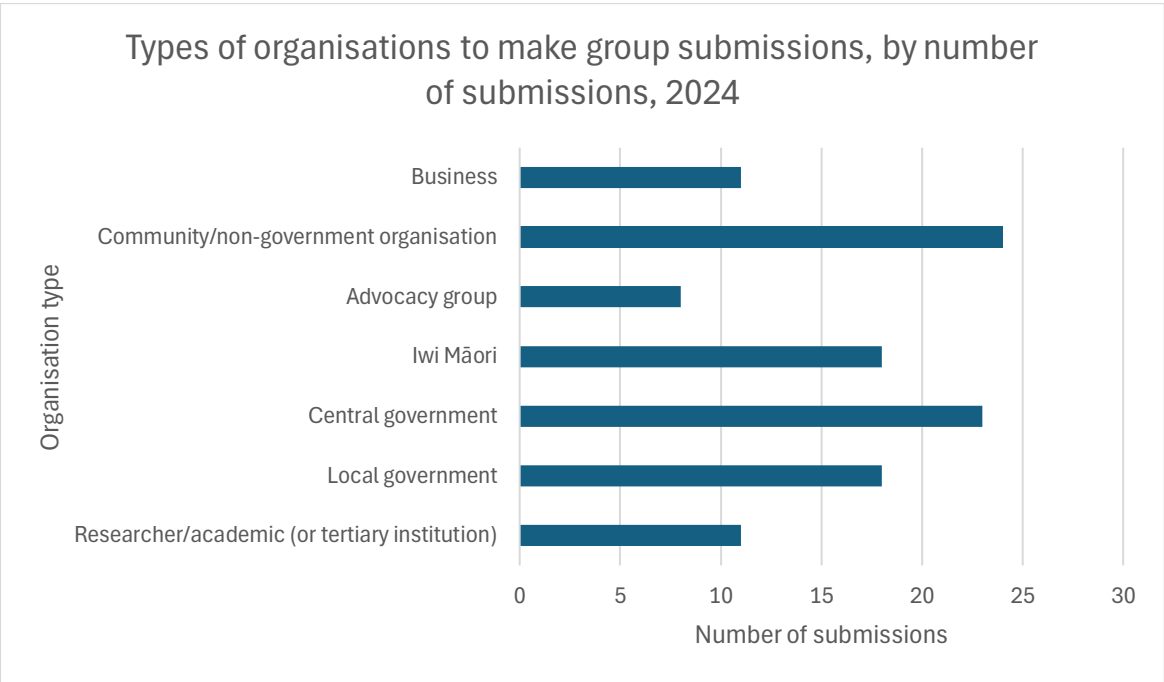
Submissions

We received a total of 467 submissions during the consultation period, of which:

- 378 submitters filled out our online form
- 34 submitters responded via email
- 55 submitters responded to shorter surveys as part of targeted engagement events
- 76 percent of submissions (354) were from individuals
- 24 percent of submissions (113) were on behalf of, or from within, groups or organisations.

Group/organisation submissions were received from:

- businesses – 10 percent (11 submissions)
- community/non-government organisations – 21 percent (24 submissions)
- advocacy groups – 7 percent (8 submissions)
- iwi Māori – 16 percent (18 submissions)
- central government – 20 percent (23 submissions)
- local government – 16 percent (18 submissions)
- researchers/academics (or tertiary institutions) – 10 percent (11 submissions).



Text alternative for Types of organisations to make group submissions, by number of submissions, 2024

Bar graph with breakdown of types of organisations to make group submissions, by number of submissions. Numbers are fully described in text.

Questions at a glance

The discussion document asked submitters 10 key questions. We provide a summary of the responses to each of these questions in 'Part 3: Online form'.

Question 1a: Trust

How much do you agree with this statement: 'I trust Stats NZ to keep my information safe.'?

Options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- I'm unsure.

Question 1b: Trust

What would you need to see to know that Stats NZ will keep your data safe?

Question 2: Reuse of data

How much do you agree with this statement: 'I am okay with Stats NZ reusing information (like tax or housing information) I have given to other organisations so that Stats NZ can produce data, statistics, or research that would benefit me and my community.'?

Options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- I'm unsure.

Question 3: Use of admin data

How much do you agree with this statement: 'I would prefer to not answer some questions in the census if Stats NZ can get this information by reusing information I have already shared with other organisations (like my country of birth or the city I live in).'?

Options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- I'm unsure.

Question 4: Survey burden

How much do you agree with this statement: 'I want Stats NZ to ask different questions in the census, not questions other government agencies have already asked me.'?

Options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- I'm unsure.

Question 5: Important factors

What is most important to you about the data and statistics produced through census? Please choose the things that are most important to you:

- Frequency – I want data/statistics from census to be published more often.
- Timeliness – I want there to be less time between when information is collected and when data/statistics are published.
- Accuracy – I want data/statistics from census to be as close to error-free as possible, even if it takes longer to collect and publish them.
- Accessibility – I want data/statistics from census to be easy to find, use, and understand.
- Scope – I want more information to be collected through census.
- Detail – I want data/statistics from census to be as detailed as possible, for example breaking an age range down into single years.
- Survey burden – I want to answer fewer census questions.
- Cost – I want the cost of running a census to be lower for taxpayers.
- Other.

Question 6: Change impact

How would these proposed changes affect you and your information needs? (If you are answering about a community or group that might be impacted by the change, please let us know what that community or group is and what the impacts may be.)

Question 7: Data sharing

If Stats NZ, for the census, reuses data about you that you shared with other organisations, what extra things (for example, protections and safeguards) would you like to see? Please choose what matters to you:

- I want to know what my information is being used for.
- I want to know when other organisations plan to give my information to Stats NZ (for example, through a privacy statement, which tells people how organisations will collect, use, and share their information).
- I want an easy way to tell Stats NZ if things (like my address) have changed.
- I'm okay with my information being reused, as long as my data remains deidentified, and I cannot be recognised by others in the data.

- I'm okay with my information being reused, but only for official statistics and for Stats NZ-approved research.
- Other.

Question 8: Data collection

Do you have any ideas about how Stats NZ might work with your community to collect data and statistics that cannot be found anywhere else?

Question 9: Information needs

What (if any) statistics or information about our society or population would be the most useful to you, your organisation, or your community, and why? Please tell us with as much detail as possible.

Question 10: Anything else

Is there anything else you want to say or share with us?

Part 2: Summary of key themes and sentiment analysis

We have summarised the key themes from across submissions in the following sections of this report. Many of these themes covered a wide variety of views.

We also categorised submissions based on how people seemed to feel about Stats NZ shifting to an admin-data-first approach for census – we have called this ‘sentiment analysis’, which is outlined in the next section.¹

Summary of key themes

Keeping people and their data safe

Data shared with Stats NZ needs to be safe from security breaches, including being appropriately anonymised so that individuals cannot be identified. Privacy and security are key concerns, with some submitters believing that data cannot be kept safe no matter how it is stored. Submitters want clear accountability should there be any breaches, and assurance that the state cannot use their data to target them. Not meeting these requirements could impact participation in providing data.

Transparency

Submitters want to see how the processes for data sharing, security, and privacy are managed, through accessible, publicly available documents. There should be documented guidance on how Stats NZ can and cannot use personal data.

Consent and choice

For any data that will be shared with Stats NZ, submitters want to know how their data will be used and have a choice as to whether they consent to it being used that way. We heard that some submitters may avoid using government services or provide false data if they can’t opt out of data sharing.

Accuracy, data quality, and the right to correct

There is uncertainty about whether an admin-data-first census can provide the same level of accuracy and quality as a full data-collection census. Collected data should be widely accessible for people to use, and personal data shared with Stats NZ should be easy to correct.

Specific data needs

There are many specific areas of data needs across the population, whether currently collected or not. Submitters are asking Stats NZ to ensure that these are increasingly available, and that nothing is lost. There should be a focus on ensuring that Stats NZ collects quality data about population groups.

¹ The responses to engagement surveys, which were provided as part of targeted engagement events, are not included in this analysis, given differences in survey design. More information about these surveys is in ‘Part 5: Responses to engagement surveys’.

Providing population-wide education

Submitters want Stats NZ to support individuals and communities to understand the importance and benefit of the census, what 'admin data first' means, and what Stats NZ intends to do to keep people and their data safe.

Iwi and Māori data needs

Changes to census design need to account for iwi and Māori data needs to support trust and participation in providing data.

Mistrust in government and the data system

There are varying levels of mistrust, which have impacted how submitters feel about this proposal. Mistrust can be exacerbated for some submitters by the inclusion of census questions that conflict with their personal values, which can include specific variables or a general feeling of invasiveness.

Decision-making process

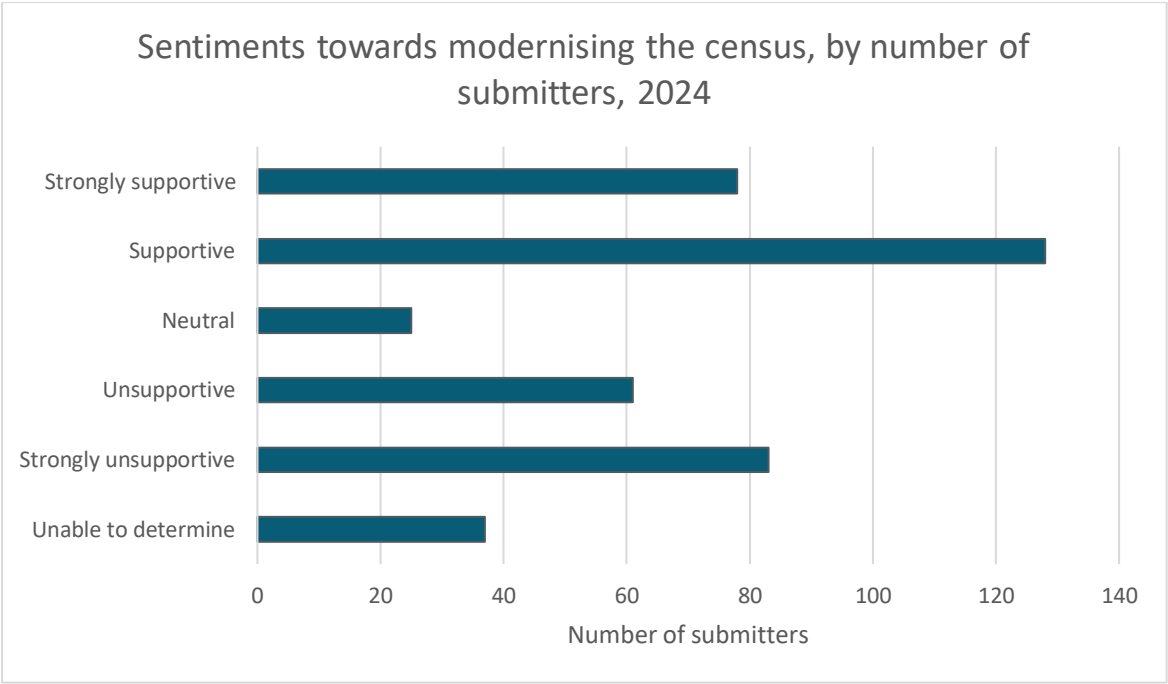
Cost and efficiency are important to people but should not be the primary driver behind change. When making a decision about the best way to collect census data, Stats NZ needs to carefully consider and address concerns raised.

Sentiment analysis

We used a combination of how people responded to the Likert-scale questions (agree, disagree, etc), and their general sentiments (where provided) to decide each submitter's sentiment. When analysing the free text, we looked at people's overall feelings towards an admin-data-first approach for census and their overall trust in Stats NZ to make the right decision. We used 'unable to determine' if submissions had both supportive and unsupportive text, or if they were supportive in some ways and not in others.

Half of the submissions we analysed (50 percent) showed support for Stats NZ and a shift to an admin-data-first approach (76 strongly supportive, 128 supportive). This includes 55 percent of organisations (33) and 49 percent of individuals (171). However, most submitters included caveats alongside their support; they wanted assurance that Stats NZ is considering the right things in deciding on a shift towards an admin-data-first census, as summarised in the key themes above.

Thirty-five percent of submitters were unsupportive in their responses (85 strongly unsupportive, 60 unsupportive). Fifteen percent of submitters were neutral about the change (25), or their sentiment was difficult to determine (38).



Text alternative for Sentiments towards modernising the census, by number of submitters, 2024
Bar graph showing sentiment towards modernising the census, by number of submitters. Numbers are fully described in the text.

Part 3: Online form

In this section we break down the responses to each question in the online form.

Question 1a: Trust

How much do you agree with this statement: ‘I trust Stats NZ to keep my information safe.’?

Response

We received 380 responses to this question. Of these:

- 54 percent broadly agreed (94 strongly agreed, 110 agreed)
- 28 percent broadly disagreed (30 disagreed, 78 strongly disagreed)
- 18 percent were neutral (48) or unsure (20).



Text alternative for Level of trust in Stats NZ to keep personal data safe, by number of submitters, 2024

Bar graph showing responses to question 1. Numbers are fully described in the text.

Question 1b: Trust

What would you need to see to know that Stats NZ will keep your data safe?

Response

Support for the proposed approach

Some submitters said they did not have any suggestions for improvement.

I trust that if you say you won't share my personal details, you won't.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

I have enough to do with Stats to know my data is safe.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Submitters who had suggestions broadly said they would like to see:

- transparency about existing systems and processes
- secure data infrastructure and robust protocols
- Stats NZ building and maintaining relationships with communities
- data practices that work better for iwi and Māori
- assurance that data will not identify individuals
- education about the value of data.

Transparency about existing systems and processes

Many submitters would like to see more information about how their data is used, stored, and shared. Some submitters said this information should be more accessible, such as being written in plain English and easy to find.

[I need to see] detailed examples of the processes used to keep my data safe. Examples of safety breaches, the resulting actions taken to mitigate harm, and actions taken to prevent future breaches.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Secure data infrastructure and robust protocols

Though around half of the submitters told us that they trust Stats NZ with their data, we heard that trust relies on people not hearing about security breaches in the news. Some told us that they believe data can never truly be safe, particularly in digital environments. Though full data-collection and admin-data-first approaches both rely on digital storage of data, some people perceive that data collected via paper forms will be safer. A few submitters asked for transparent and clear communications if data breaches do happen.

I'm sure you are rigorous with privacy and internet security but hackers are always catching up and sometimes staff can deliberately or accidentally release data. I expect you to be properly resourced for IT and have proper background checks on staff.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

To feel safe, submitters want to see robust, internationally recognised security and privacy processes in place for the collection, storage, and sharing of their data.

Stats NZ building and maintaining relationships with communities

Some submitters said they want to see Stats NZ building relationships with communities and maintaining those relationships over time.

Continue to build good relationships – be present, not just come and take our info every 5 years.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

A few submitters told us that they see government mistrust throughout their communities and asked us to be mindful not to exacerbate that mistrust.

Data practices that work better for iwi and Māori

Some submitters would like to see data practices that better serve iwi and Māori, including a significant focus on obtaining the trust and confidence of Māori in the management and use of data. Data practices that work better for iwi and Māori could lead to increased trust in Stats NZ and the government data system.

[I need to see] data-handling policies that work for an iwi, hapū & whānau context, and policies to apply to anyone contracted to collect data.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

A small number of submitters said they would have more trust in Stats NZ if personal data was stored in New Zealand.

Assurance that data will not identify individuals

Some submitters wanted to know that the data Stats NZ holds would not be used to identify them.

I think that 'safe' means different things to everyone so it's not a blanket promise you can make – but if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say complete anonymity and encryption at the gathering stage, and data destruction once compiled into the broader data set.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Education about the value of data

Some submitters suggested that we could support people to trust and take part in the census process by providing information to the public about the census and what it is used for.

Younger people are very unlikely to answer a phone call for a survey from an unknown number and hesitant to open the door for strangers. There likely needs [to be] some incentive, perhaps even an advertising campaign that lets people know the value of filling out surveys. If there were focus on the importance of surveys to determine need in the community to decide which hospitals might get funding to expand for example.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Other comments

During the period of public consultation, news about the alleged misuse of census forms and data was covered by several media outlets. In response, Stats NZ appointed an independent investigator to investigate the claims. Some submitters mentioned these allegations in their responses and suggested that in light of these events, people may be less likely to trust Stats NZ with personal data, for a period of time.

Some submitters indicated that they do not trust or value the census. When providing reasons for this, some submitters told us that specific variables that are asked about in the census conflict with their personal values, some said they feel the census is too invasive, and some said they have not enjoyed their experiences with census collections processes.

A few submitters indicated that they do not (and will never) trust government.

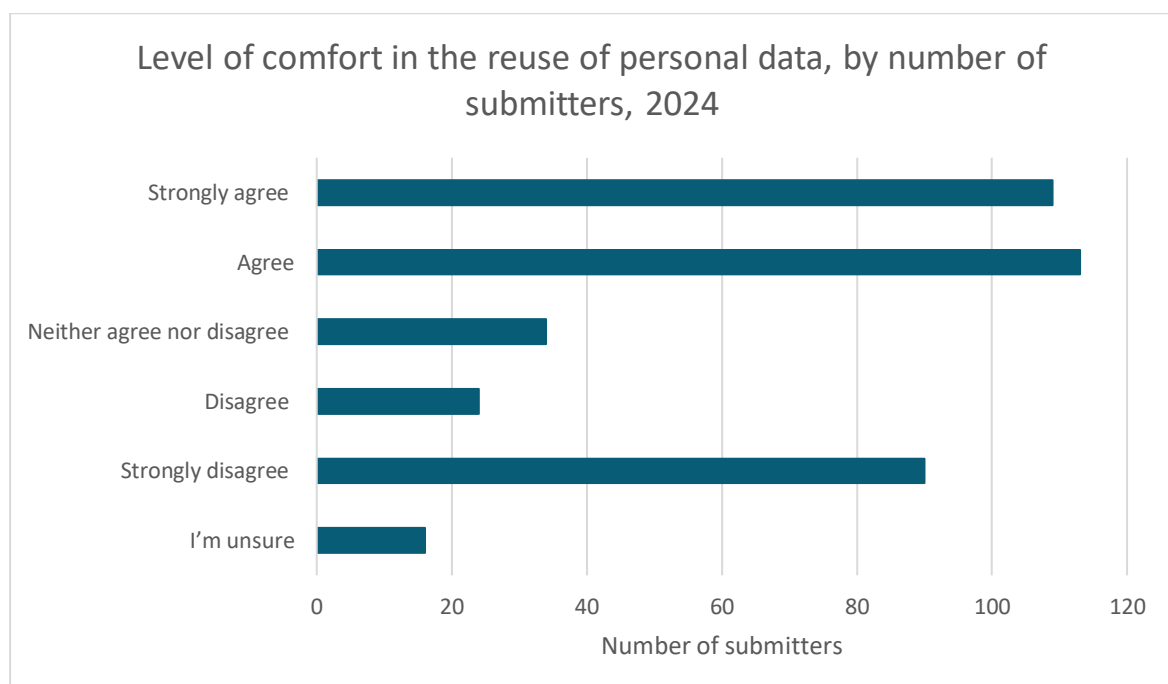
Question 2: Reuse of data

How much do you agree with this statement: 'I am okay with Stats NZ reusing information (like tax or housing information) I have given to other organisations so that Stats NZ can produce data, statistics, or research that would benefit me and my community.'?

Response

We received 386 responses to this question. Of these:

- 58 percent broadly agreed (109 strongly agreed, 113 agreed)
- 30 percent broadly disagreed (90 strongly disagreed, 24 disagreed)
- 13 percent were neutral (34) or unsure (16).



Text alternative for Level of comfort in the reuse of personal data, by number of submitters, 2024
Bar graph showing responses to question 2. Numbers are fully described in the text.

Views of those who agreed

Some submitters highlighted the importance of data for good decision-making, and noted data wasn't being reused enough across government. Several submitters said when they provide information to one agency or department, they expect that other agencies will have access to it, and that government as a whole will use their data for their benefit. Some submitters were particularly supportive of Stats NZ reusing data if it would save time and money and potentially reduce the need for people to fill out long surveys.

Other submitters supported Stats NZ reusing data, provided certain conditions were met. This includes seeking informed consent before reusing data, anonymising data before sharing, establishing adequate privacy controls, and taking steps to reduce the risk of privacy breaches.

Several submitters said they want full transparency, including details of when their information may be shared, which agencies are using shared data, and what information is being held about them across government.

If admin data is to be used then each government agency that shares data needs to tell the people that they share data. 100% transparency.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Views of those who disagreed

Most submitters who did not want Stats NZ reusing data had concerns about privacy. Some felt that Stats NZ reusing and sharing data would be overstepping and would lead to excess data being collected.

Gathering data in this manner means more private information will be collected, which I would no longer have any say over. This feels extremely invasive.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

A smaller number told us that they would not want their data reused by any organisation, noting that information provided for a specific purpose shouldn't be used for another purpose. Some highlighted concerns about false or inaccurate data being reused across multiple organisations.

Views of those who were neutral or unsure

Submitters who were neutral or unsure wanted assurance that data would be kept safe and confidential, and would be checked to ensure accuracy. For a few submitters, it was important to know what data might be reused and for what purpose.

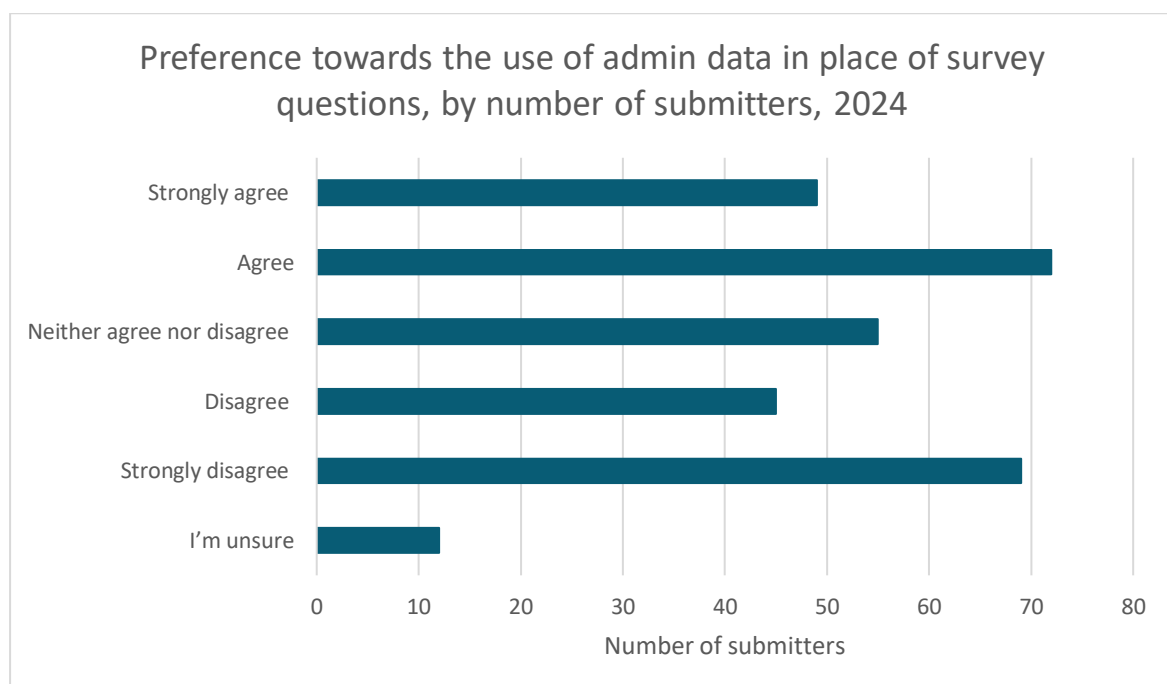
Question 3: Use of admin data

How much do you agree with this statement: 'I would prefer to not answer some questions in the census if Stats NZ can get this information by reusing information I have already shared with other organisations (like my country of birth or the city I live in).'?

Response

We received 302 responses to this question.² Of these:

- 40 percent broadly agreed (49 strongly agreed, 72 agreed)
- 38 percent broadly disagreed (69 strongly disagreed, 45 disagreed)
- 22 percent were neutral (55) or unsure (12).



Text alternative for Preference towards the use of admin data in place of survey questions, by number of submitters, 2024

Bar graph showing responses to question 3. Numbers are fully described in the text.

Views of those who agreed

Submitters who agreed with this statement said it could enable Stats NZ to ask different questions in the census that would better meet their information needs. Some said it would be more efficient and could save people and agencies time and money.

[I] support an admin-data-first approach if it enables different questions to be answered and an increased data publishing rate.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

² The number of responses to this question is slightly lower due to a technical issue that may have prevented some submitters from seeing it on the online form. This issue was discovered eight days into the consultation period and was addressed immediately.

Views of those disagreed

Submitters who disagreed were concerned about the accuracy of information being reused. Some said they see the census as an opportunity to provide the government with their personal information directly, on their terms. Others felt that answering the census questions was not a burden and was important for achieving good outcomes.

Some submitters noted that reusing inaccurate information could also lead to poor-quality data and statistics, particularly for priority populations.

Pacific populations in Aotearoa New Zealand have been systematically undercounted in official statistics for decades. Inaccurate population statistics have had significant consequences for funding, delivery of, and access to, public services for the NZ Pacific population and contribute thereby to the long-standing inequities in health outcomes.

— PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES

Some submitters pointed out that other government agencies and organisations collect their information in a different context, and the data may not always be suitable for census purposes.

Views from those who were neutral or unsure

Around half of submitters who provided comments and were neutral or unsure discussed the accuracy of information being reused. Some said they would like to be able to check accuracy, while others said they were comfortable with some census data being sourced from other places, provided the data is high quality and Stats NZ could ensure its security.

As a user of census data, [I] want it to be accurate first and foremost. So as long as it is accurate, use the method which is most efficient – if that is data mining from other sources, go for it.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

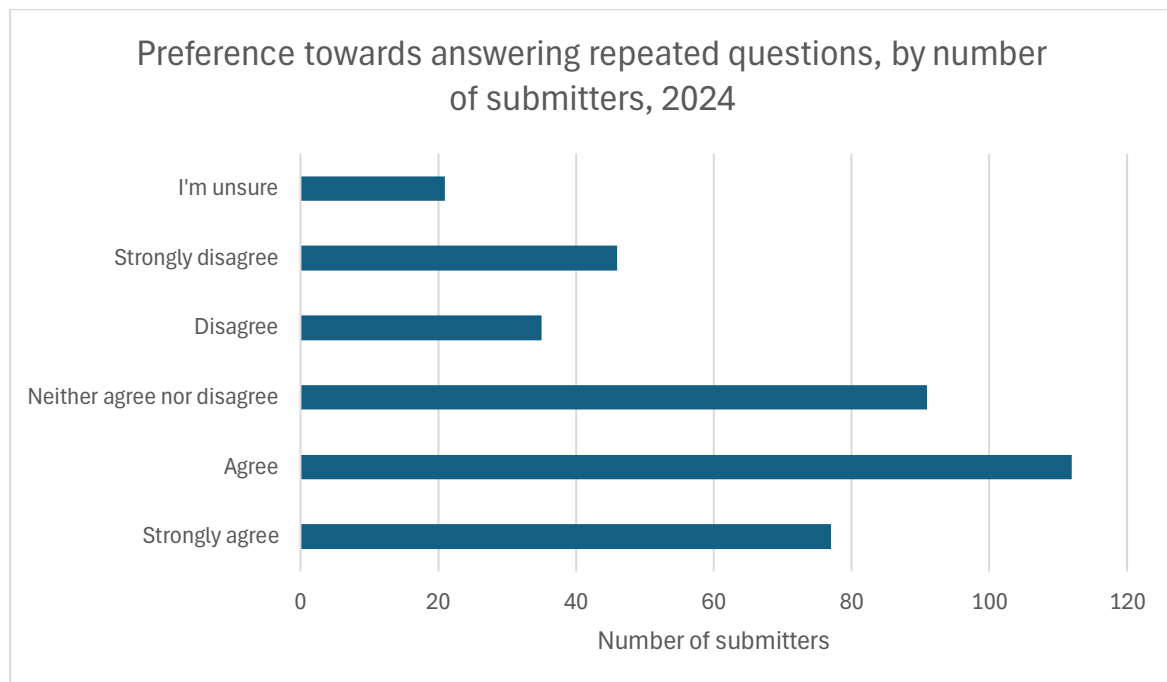
Question 4: Survey burden

How much do you agree with this statement: 'I want Stats NZ to ask different questions in the census, not questions other government agencies have already asked me.'?

Response

We received 382 responses to this question. Of these:

- 49 percent broadly agreed (77 strongly agreed, 112 agreed)
- 21 percent broadly disagreed (46 strongly disagreed, 35 disagreed)
- 29 percent were neutral (91) or unsure (21).



Text alternative for Preference towards answering repeated questions, by number of submitters, 2024

Bar graph showing responses to question 4. Numbers are fully described in the text.

Views of those who agreed

Over one-third of submitters who agreed said that an increase in the use of admin data to answer some questions would enable the census to ask interesting, new, or different questions that could address key data gaps. A few submitters wanted assurances that specific variables would still be available at the same or better quality than they are currently. Around 20 percent noted it could significantly reduce survey burden.

I need better data about te reo Māori. We still don't know basic things about language revival, and we can't track anything over time because the questions keep changing.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

A small number of submitters who agreed with this question did so because they did not want to participate in the census at all.

Views of those who disagreed

The majority of those who disagreed showed concern about the accuracy and granularity of admin data.

Some submitters who disagreed said that the current model of the census is not a burden. Some indicated they were happy to answer the same questions from different agencies.

Others told us that they do not like being contacted about participating in surveys like census at all, that they have had negative experiences participating, or that they do not trust government generally.

Views from those who were neutral or unsure

Those who were unsure shared similar views with both those who agreed and those who disagreed.

Question 5: Important factors

What is most important to you about the data and statistics produced through census? Please choose the things that are most important to you:

- Frequency – I want data/statistics from census to be published more often.
- Timeliness – I want there to be less time between when information is collected and when data/statistics are published.
- Accuracy – I want data/statistics from census to be as close to error-free as possible, even if it takes longer to collect and publish them.
- Accessibility – I want data/statistics from census to be easy to find, use, and understand.
- Scope – I want more information to be collected through census.
- Detail – I want data/statistics from census to be as detailed as possible, for example breaking an age range down into single years.
- Survey burden – I want to answer fewer census questions.
- Cost – I want the cost of running a census to be lower for taxpayers.
- Other.³

Response

We received 378 responses to these question through the online form, with a further 11 email submissions. The email submissions didn't specify which of these factors were most important, so we've included the key considerations in the 'Email submissions' section of this document and have excluded them from the overall count below.

Top factors chosen

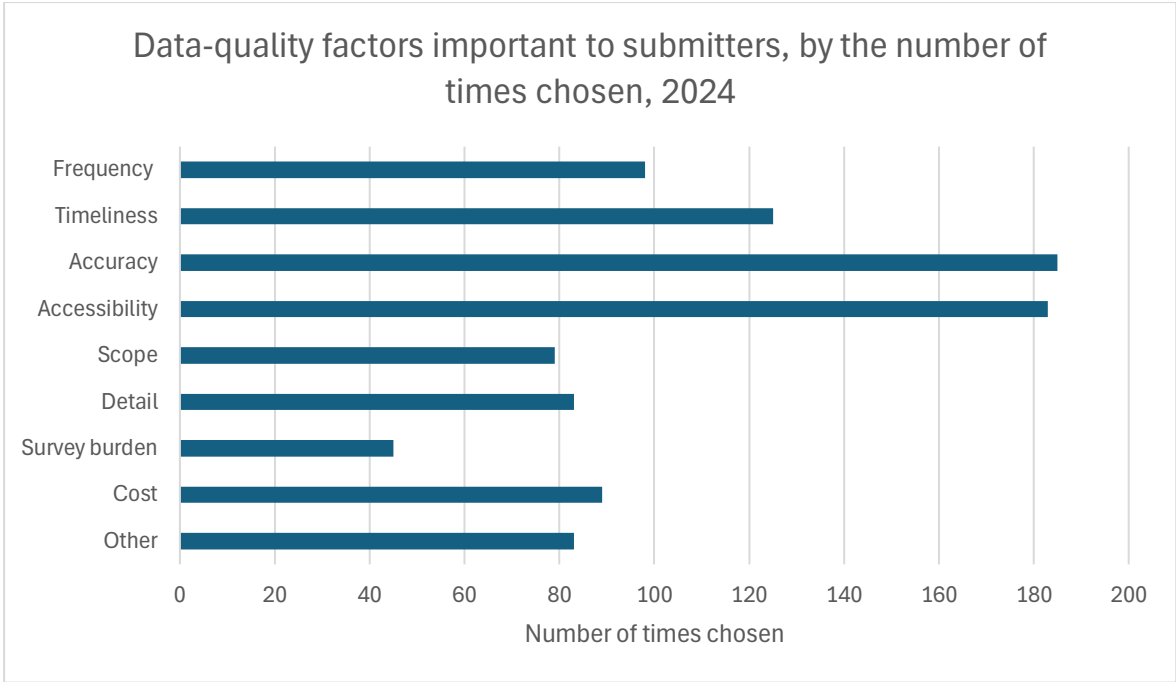
Online submitters were asked to select up to five factors. Of these, the highest number of submitters chose:

- accuracy (185)
- accessibility (183)
- timeliness (125)
- frequency (98).

These were followed by:

- cost (89)
- detail (83)
- other (83)
- scope (79)
- survey burden (45).

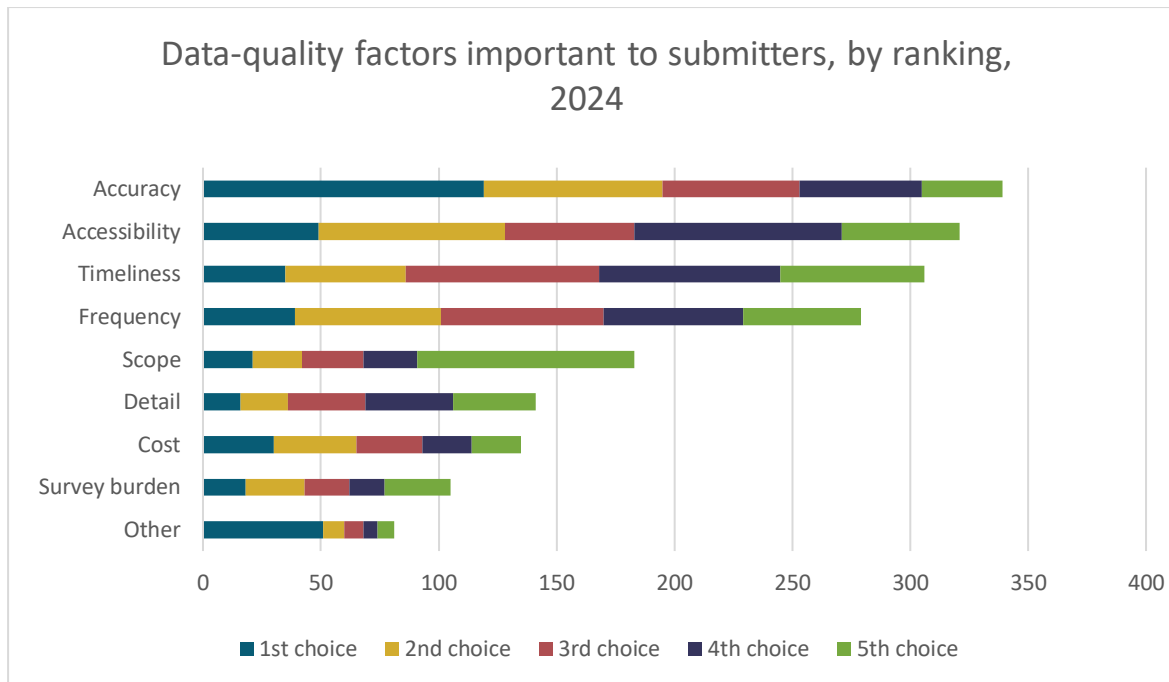
³ During the consultation period, we revised this question to better capture responses. Originally, the mandatory question had a default arrangement of factors, which could skew results if submitters didn't answer. To address this, we added a second question for submitters to select and then rank factors by importance. As a result, data in this section may appear slightly different, but we believe the overall findings were not impacted.



Text alternative for Data-quality factors important to submitters, by number of times chosen, 2024
Bar graph showing responses to question 5. Numbers are fully described in the text.

Order of importance

We also asked submitters to rank which factors were most important to them. Accuracy, accessibility, timeliness, and frequency were selected as the highest-ranked options for the largest number of submitters. The graph below shows the spread of submitters’ top five ranked factors. Accuracy, accessibility, timeliness, and frequency were ranked within submitters’ top five choices the most times. Scope, detail, cost, and survey burden were selected nearly half as many times.



Text alternative for Data-quality factors important to submitters, by ranking, 2024

Bar graph showing responses to ranking question.

Each option was ranked by submitters' top five choices. The following text outlines how many times each option was chosen in order from first to fifth:

- Accuracy: first, 119; second, 76; third, 58; fourth, 52; fifth, 34.
- Accessibility: first, 49; second, 79; third, 55; fourth, 88; fifth, 50.
- Timeliness: first, 35; second, 51; third, 82; fourth, 77; fifth, 61.
- Frequency: first, 39; second, 62; third, 69; fourth, 59; fifth, 50.
- Scope: first, 21; second, 21; third, 26; fourth, 23; fifth, 92.
- Detail: first, 16; second, 20; third, 33; fourth, 37; fifth, 35.
- Cost: first, 30; second, 35; third, 28; fourth, 21; fifth, 21.
- Survey burden: first, 18; second, 25; third, 19; fourth, 15; fifth, 28.
- Other: first, 51; second, 9; third, 8; fourth, 6; fifth, 7.

Most factors were evenly spread across the five ranking options. The 'other' option, however, while selected the least number of times overall, was selected as submitters' first choice 51 times (13 percent), second only to accuracy (119 times).

Key themes from free-text responses

Many submitters who selected 'other' also provided insight into other factors that are important to them. We gave submitters the opportunity to comment further on the overall question. The key themes from these responses are outlined below.

Quality and detail

Data quality and granularity were raised repeatedly as being of high importance, with some submitters expressing a desire for more disaggregated census data.

Please disaggregate your data so it is more useful. For example, ethnic groups and communities – neurodivergent, Rainbow, Pacific people – they’re not homogenous groups, so make sure what information you’re collecting is actually useful to them.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Some submitters highlighted the importance of high-quality data and noted that cost should not influence how the census is conducted.

In contrast, other submitters felt that the census asks for too much data and suggested reducing the number of questions.

There were also requests to make sure that historical data is accessible and consistent so researchers can track information over time.

Equity considerations

A few submitters stressed the importance of accessibility and coverage as equity considerations. These submitters emphasised that improved accessibility enhances trust. They advocated for better inclusion of marginalised or underserved groups in the census count.

Coverage was highlighted as crucial for ensuring that communities are accurately represented. This includes reaching a broad-enough segment of the population through surveys to provide detailed insights into communities.

Coverage is the most important. It doesn’t make sense to move to admin first if this new model does not achieve at least the same coverage as survey first.

— CHINESE NEW SETTLERS SERVICES TRUST

Privacy

Some submitters told us that privacy was most important to them. Most of these submitters indicated that they are not supportive of the shift to an admin-data-first census. Some submitters told us that they want the right to access and remove their data.

Census relevance

A small number of submitters told us that the census is not helpful or relevant to them. Some recommended continuing with a full data-collection census, while others suggested discontinuing the census altogether.

Engagement and learning

Submitters emphasised the need for increased public engagement on census, including doing more with the data to demonstrate its value and secure public support.

Collection of transgender and non-binary population data

A few submitters specifically requested that gender-identity data continues to be actively gathered. Some of these submitters told us that the recent change to these questions encouraged them to participate in the 2023 Census and increased their trust in Stats NZ and other government agencies.

Conversely, a similar number of submitters raised concerns about the inclusion of new gender-identity questions in the 2023 Census.⁴ These submitters consider that when the census conflicts with personal values, it may impact on trust.

⁴ These submitters held the view that only sex (male and female) should be counted in official statistics and were uncomfortable with the inclusion of the new gender-identity questions.

Question 6: Change impact

How would these proposed changes affect you and your information needs? (If you are answering about a community or group that might be impacted by the change, please let us know what that community or group is and what the impacts may be.)

Response

We received 372 responses to this question. Of these, 89 percent were from individuals and 11 percent were from organisations. For this question we noted a difference in how individuals and organisations responded, so we have split the analysis below.

Individual responses

Equity considerations

Many submitters suggested that surveys should continue to play an important role in Stats NZ's data collection. Submitters expressed concern that some groups (such as Rainbow communities, disabled people, or people experiencing homelessness) would be less visible if Stats NZ used more admin data. The reasons given for this include the following:

- Some groups are less likely to interact with government agencies and will not be well-represented in admin data.
- Organisations don't always ask the right questions to accurately capture the experience of underserved groups.
- People's responses to questions may vary depending on the context in which questions are asked.
- Existing data and statistics already don't represent some groups well, and relying more on admin data could exacerbate existing inequities.

I am part of the Rainbow community. The move to an admin-data-first approach will/may affect variables that are collected to help members of my community. These variables include (but are not limited to) sex, gender, variation of sex characteristics, and sexual orientation. Admin data sources for these variables may not be correct, due to timeliness, method of collection, ignorance or bias/prejudice, or other factors. Furthermore, decisions about how that admin data is processed and transformed into outputs may be made without the full understanding of or input from our community.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Risk to data quality

Other submitters said that people may omit information when interacting with government agencies, because telling the truth can have negative consequences. Some were concerned that using admin data over survey data could lead to worse data quality, particularly when the data is collected for the purpose of delivering immigration services, income benefits, and healthcare.

[M]any of our whanau are not truthful for fear of retaliation. Eg, grandchildren staying with nana but mum still having the benefit, these things were passed on during this census because we trusted what the Community team said about removing any identifiable information. You wouldn't have got that otherwise.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Limited impact

A few submitters suggested that the proposed changes wouldn't impact them. Some submitters said they were confident that they would be represented in admin data, and Stats NZ using more admin data would make things easier for them.

A few submitters highlighted that using more admin data could increase how much time people need to spend doing surveys, rather than decrease it, due to the potential for new, more detailed questions to be added.

Finally, some submitters told us they didn't know what impact the proposed changes would have for them, or that they didn't understand the question.

Organisation responses

Equity considerations

Organisations said lots of similar things to individual submitters. Like individual submitters, organisations have concerns that some population groups would be less represented in admin data, and that data quality would decline under an admin-data-first approach. Engaging with communities on a new approach came across as a high priority.

Support for the proposed approach

Some organisations were supportive of moving to an admin-data-first approach, but most provided caveats to their support. Organisations want assurance that they will still get high-quality data from Stats NZ, and that Stats NZ will work with communities on any new approach. Some highlighted that more frequent, timelier data would be beneficial.

We believe that the proposed changes (if implemented well and informed by disabled people) would improve disability data and make a meaningful difference in the lives of disabled people. Regular and robust data would make it easier to adequately fund disability funding that's based on population size. Presently there's far too long between disability specific surveys and disability data collection, and the data that is collective isn't realistically representative of the disability population. Much of the data that we as an organisation have has been sourced from customised data requests or our own research, having better disability data from Stats NZ would be very beneficial for our organisation.

— CCS DISABILITY ACTION

For submitters in the disability sector, there was also interest in how a different approach to census might impact on the post-censal disability survey and Te Kupenga.⁵

Concerns about the proposed approach

Some organisations had significant concerns and didn't believe it was the right time for Stats NZ to make a move to an admin-data-first approach. These submitters were mostly concerned with data quality and the context in which data is collected. Some had suggestions for how Stats NZ should engage with communities going forward. Some said that they would possibly support an admin-data-first approach in the future, but believed New Zealand is not ready yet.

⁵ Te Kupenga is Stats NZ's survey of Māori wellbeing. A post-censal survey of almost 8,500 adults (aged 15 years and over) of Māori ethnicity and/or descent, Te Kupenga gives an overall picture of the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of Māori people in New Zealand. [Te Kupenga: 2018 \(final\) – English](#) has more information.

We do not support conducting a census using only administrative data, especially when it comes to representing ethnicities and Pacific communities. Administrative records, while useful, often lack the depth and nuance needed to accurately reflect the diverse experiences and identities within these groups.

— GROUP SUBMISSION

Question 7: Data sharing

If Stats NZ, for the census, reuses data about you that you shared with other organisations, what extra things (for example, protections and safeguards) would you like to see? Please choose what matters to you:

- I want to know what my information is being used for.
- I want to know when other organisations plan to give my information to Stats NZ (for example, through a privacy statement, which tells people how organisations will collect, use, and share their information).
- I want an easy way to tell Stats NZ if things (like my address) have changed.
- I'm okay with my information being reused, as long as my data remains deidentified and I cannot be recognised by others in the data.
- I'm okay with my information being reused, but only for official statistics and for Stats NZ-approved research.
- Other.

Response

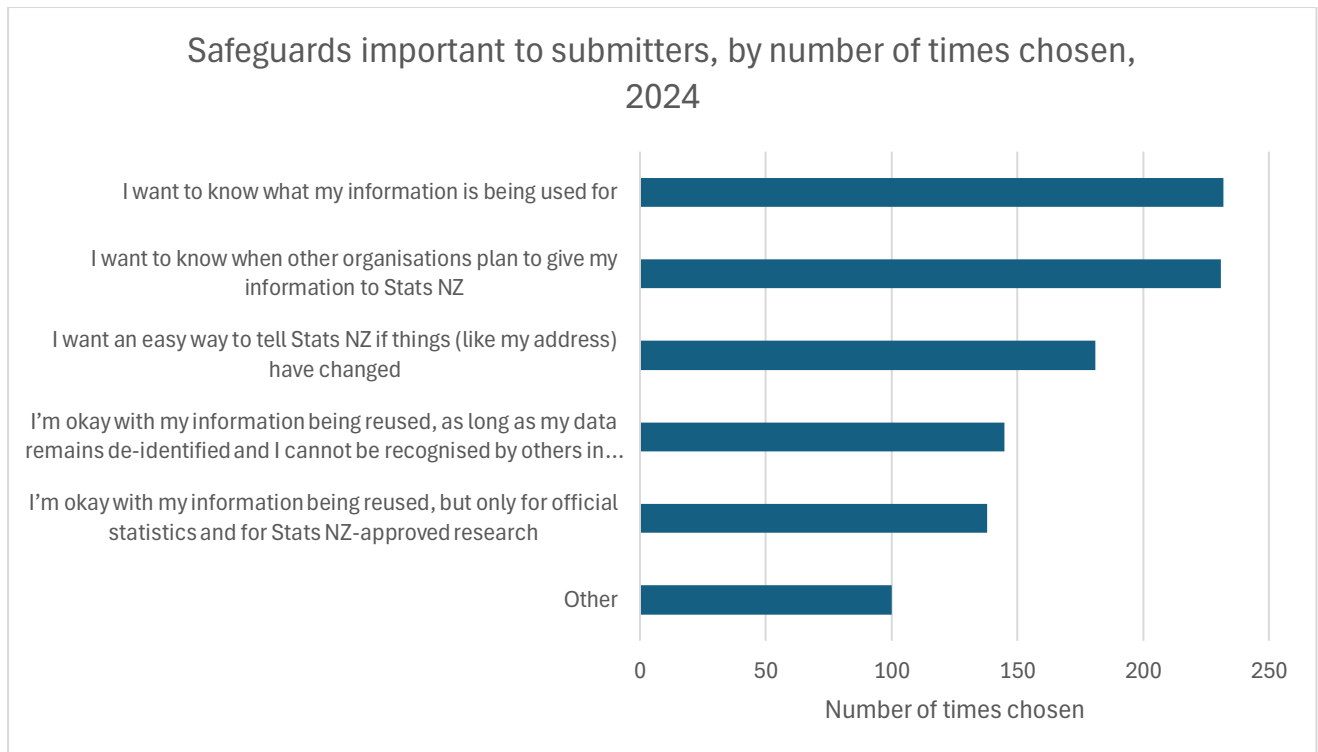
We received 378 responses to this question. Submitters could select more than one option.

The top three additional safeguards that submitters wanted to see were:

- knowing what their information is being used for (selected 232 times)
- knowing when other organisations plan to give their information to Stats NZ (selected 231 times)
- deidentification of their data (selected 181 times).

These were followed by:

- data only being used for official purposes (selected 145 times)
- having an easy way to let Stats NZ know if their information has changed (selected 138 times)
- other (selected 100 times).



Text alternative for Safeguards important to submitters, by number of times chosen, 2024

Bar graph showing responses to question 7. Numbers are fully described in text.

Key themes from free-text responses

Submitters who selected 'other' could also provide a free-text answer to elaborate. Around one-quarter of submitters chose to do so. These responses are outlined below.

Comfort with data sharing

Of the submitters who provided free-text responses, around half told us that nothing would make them comfortable with Stats NZ or other organisations sharing their data.

In contrast, other submitters told us that they were comfortable with Stats NZ reusing their data without any extra protection or safeguards from those we already provide.

Consent

Consent continued to be a common theme. For example, a few submitters said that they would want to know when other organisations plan to give their information to Stats NZ, and/or would want the option to consent to data being shared when they provide it. Some submitters stipulated that informed consent should also include the right to opt out.

I want to have a choice about where information about me is used and for what purpose. A privacy statement doesn't cut it if I can't opt out.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Privacy for personal data

Submitters want assurance that data will be deidentified before being shared with Stats NZ. Submitters also said that their concerns were focused specifically on personal data being shared and with whom.

[We recommend] that Stats NZ and other government agencies outline on any official forms that any data would be de-identified by Stats NZ or the agency concerned before passed on for analysis, meaning that any personal details would be stripped off any data prior to doing so.

— DISABLED PERSONS ASSEMBLY

Risk to data quality

Similar to the responses received for Question 6, a small number of submitters mentioned that they sometimes withhold information when interacting with other government agencies due to fear of negative repercussions when accessing government services. However, they felt more comfortable answering truthfully in census surveys. These submitters were concerned that if data from other government agencies replaced census survey data, it would be less accurate and increase disparities within their communities.

Question 8: Data collection

Do you have any ideas about how Stats NZ might work with your community to collect data and statistics that cannot be found anywhere else?

Response

We received 210 responses to this question. Of these:

- 13 percent were from organisations
- 87 percent were from individuals.

Community engagement

Around one-quarter of those who answered this question commented on the need to engage with communities. Suggestions included working with communities and empowering people and leaders from those communities to drive participation.

Consult more widely with Māori, acknowledging the diverse positions various iwi and hapū; have more input from Tāngata Whaikaha; seek input from the rangatahi and encourage their participation.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Survey burden

Several submitters suggested Stats NZ should make it easier to fill out surveys. For example, some mentioned supporting older people in person, and others said they would like to see more opportunities to utilise alternative modes for completing surveys (such as filling out the survey online or via an app). We heard that submitters wanted a range of ways to engage with the census.

Adopting a multi-mode approach that combines face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys, online forms, and mail-in questionnaires allows respondents to choose the method that best suits their preferences and circumstances. This flexibility enhances coverage and response rates.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

A few submitters would prefer to be left alone, with some submitters suggesting there is no need to collect data. This was expressed both in support of admin data and through questioning why we should collect any data in the first place.

Most large organisations, councils etc, run surveys often, to understand their community. Just use that data.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Community engagement

A few submitters suggested we needed to increase publicity to ensure people knew about the census, and also provide education so people feel connected to the census and the benefits that data collection can have on them and their communities. Additionally, a few submitters suggested community events and incentives worked well previously, and in other contexts.

Work with your communities to gather information. The pop ups were awesome. The generators and kai cooks post-cyclone Gabrielle was such a great initiative.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Partnering with communities

A few submitters mentioned the importance of considering Māori-led data collection, including recognising the risk of data gaps with an admin-data-first approach.

In our view, for Stats NZ to use Māori administrative data with trust and confidence in an 'admin-first' approach, it needs to implement Māori data governance.

— TE MANA RARAUNGA, MĀORI DATA SOVEREIGNTY NETWORK

Some submitters suggested engaging with communities more, especially hard-to-reach and/or marginalised groups.

It shouldn't be about meeting once and leaving a link. It should be about enduring engagement. A series of engagements. Also engagement that meets the varying levels of literacy and language capability. Make it easy. Make it educational.

— COMMUNITIES ACTION TRUST NZ

Question 9: Information needs

What (if any) statistics or information about our society or population would be the most useful to you, your organisation, or your community, and why? Please tell us with as much detail as possible.

Response

We received 202 responses to this question. Of these:

- 15 percent were from organisations
- 85 percent were from individuals.

Housing and homelessness data

Many submitters told us that housing and homelessness data would be most useful to them, with a focus on high data quality.

I didn't live in a house during the last census. There was no way to indicate this in a meaningful way on the form. People live in vehicles, sheds, garages, or stay with family and friends. Please include more questions that could surface this data.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Health data

Across questions, submitters expressed concerns that health data could be further impacted by a shift to an admin-data-first census. Health data is highly valued, and submitters want more, highly complex health data about specific populations.

[I would like] information that can help all of Aotearoa understand the determinants of wellbeing, and how life journeys are impacted through involvement with housing, health, education, justice, and other agencies and service providers.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Disability data

Many submitters mentioned they would like to see better, more frequent data about disabled people.

If Stats NZ decides to proceed with an admin-data first approach to the census, the risk is that while it may capture some aspects of disabled people's lives well, this new approach might still miss out or minimise other aspects of our lives altogether. [Disabled Persons Assembly NZ] does not want to see the continuation of the status quo either where there is always a lack of disability data as this means that our voices, experiences and health and wellbeing outcomes remain uncaptured. This lack of data means that disabled people are not present in system priorities, policies and accountabilities. This situation is only intensified for disabled Māori, Pacific and other intersectional communities.

— DISABLED PERSONS ASSEMBLY NZ

Region-specific data and disability and diversity data were strong focuses for both individuals and organisations.

Intersectional data

Submitters also told us that it's important to be able to cross-reference data for intersectional impacts.

More data, more often, about more things, which includes more people. Allow people to identify more comprehensively and accurately, instead of trying to force them into one of 6 aggregate groups. And report on total ethnicity as well as prioritised ethnicity for everything so it's more useful to people who rely on data for planning, funding and policy.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Granularity (level of detail)

A number of submitters said they want to see better, more detailed ethnicity data. This included more granular breakdowns for Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, African, and Pacific peoples, more data that can be disaggregated by ethnicity, and different categories and groupings used for ethnicity.

I would like you to stop using Eurocentric ethnic categories, for example conflating the New Zealand Chinese into 'Asians' and 'Chinese' without regard for their different circumstances over the past century that has resulted in different identities and needs.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Other data

Other data mentioned were data on priority populations, socio-economic and employment data, and core demographic data such as age and ethnicity.

Out of scope

Finally, a few submitters highlighted other information needs (including data about national security and crime), which are outside the scope of census.

Question 10: Anything else

Is there anything else you want to say or share with us?

Response

We received 196 responses to this question. Of these:

- 13 percent were from organisations
- 87 percent were from individuals.

Support for the proposed approach

Many submitters used this question to confirm their support for the project. They cited reasons like the need to transition to a more digital census, the availability of technology to enable such a shift, and opportunities to increase efficiency. Submitters also said that reusing information presents an opportunity to collect important data that isn't currently gathered (for example, perspectives on social issues such as quality of life and happiness). Some submitters reiterated their specific data needs, which we have captured in the section on information needs (Question 9).

Access to data

Many submitters, whether they supported the proposed changes or not, requested options to check, update, and remove their data. They also asked for clear and easy-to-understand survey questions as well as improved access to data. We also received ideas on how data could be gathered in more user-friendly ways.

Community engagement

Many submitters wanted us to build on the strong community-engagement approach used in the 2023 Census, including hiring people from communities to work within those communities. Some recommended increasing public awareness of the importance of census data and its benefits for communities, including education in schools and public-awareness campaigns to improve public opinion.

*Continue to build enduring mana enhancing relationships with Treaty Partners.
Thanks to the community engagement team for supporting mana Motuhake in
the collection of 2023 Census data. The relationship agreements definitely helped
improve our understanding and the relationship with Stats NZ.*

— TE URI O HAU SETTLEMENT TRUST — RENAISSANCE GROUP

Equity and data quality

Some submitters, while supportive of the change, questioned if Stats NZ could maintain the current quality and coverage of census data. They were concerned about potential inequities for populations like those in poverty, specific ethnic groups, and disabled people. Some supported an admin-data-first approach but emphasised the need for targeted surveys with both digital and paper options.

Concerns about the proposed changes

Other submitters took the opportunity to reiterate their opposition to the proposed changes. Some submitters were concerned the proposed changes would increase existing mistrust. Others strongly felt that a new model would lower data quality. Some submitters questioned whether we could match the quality of a full data-collection census, and some were concerned about inadequate

consent processes for data sharing. Others told us that census is too important to be impacted by cost considerations.

The census is worth the cost and the information it provides is invaluable for research and informing policy. The census cannot be replaced by extrapolating out small sample surveys to the entire population without casting doubt on the integrity of Stats NZ data and further disadvantaging minority groups less likely to be surveyed or represented in administrative data.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Cost considerations

Not all submitters who mentioned cost were opposed to the changes. Many wanted assurance that cost, including recent savings initiatives, were not the key driver of this change.

[I would need] assurance that cost pressures were not causing delay to upgrades and needed maintenance on systems that keep data secure.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Amount of data collection

A few submitters believed we should collect only the minimum necessary data or none at all. Some mistrust the government and fear that an admin-data-first approach would result in the collection of more detailed personal information. In contrast, some submitters specifically requested that more detailed information would be available about themselves and their communities.

Out of scope

Finally, some submitters provided feedback on other work programmes that fall outside the scope of this consultation (for example, specific census design suggestions, how census data is accessed once it's available, and organisations requesting ongoing partnership throughout the design process). This feedback will be forwarded to relevant teams where appropriate.

Feedback on consultation approach

Some submitters provided feedback on our public consultation approach. For example, some suggested that the questions in the public consultation document were biased towards Stats NZ's aim of moving to an admin-data-first system, or were worded in a way that was confusing.

Some submitters said they would have liked the discussion document to go into more detail about the different options, and that Stats NZ could have done a better job of explaining the options and their trade-offs.

Of the survey options presented in the consultation paper, DDEAG would have appreciated more detail about the sampling for options 2 and 3. Members found it difficult to understand the potential impact of the options without more information, including current approaches used by Stats NZ.

— DISABILITY DATA AND EVIDENCE ADVISORY GROUP

TD has concerns about the way the discussion document structures this public consultation. We believe the issues are too complex for traditional survey rating and aggregative methods, which do not provide for the public deliberation required to work through value trade-offs and uncertainty.

— TRUST DEMOCRACY NZ

Feedback will be incorporated into the design of the second round of public consultation in 2025, where applicable.

Part 4: Email submissions

Some organisations and individuals chose to make their submissions via email rather than by filling out the online form. Where these submissions responded to the public consultation questions, or where insights were specifically relevant to the questions asked, we have included them in the question-by-question analysis above. However, some of these submissions did not follow the question format. As a result, we've summarised these submissions in the section below.

Data quality

Many email submitters stressed the importance of census data for a wide range of uses. They emphasised that changes to census could have significant impacts on their organisation and the country. Many were concerned that an admin-data-first approach could negatively influence data quality or reduce the granularity of data.

Immigrants who moved to Aotearoa recently will be missing vital information. Two examples are the education data required to ascertain qualification level and the health data required to have an immunisation history. Thus, getting a full and accurate picture of immigrants as a subpopulation group will not be possible. This will impact government functions such as workforce planning, community risk profiles regarding communicable disease etc.

— NICHOLSON CONSULTING

This was particularly a concern in relation to admin-data quality for underserved populations, such as Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, Rainbow communities, and ethnic communities.

We disagree with a shift to an admin-data-first approach to the census because we do not believe that the quality of ethnicity data on administrative datasets is currently sufficient, especially for Māori. We believe that accepting an admin-data-first approach would knowingly undercount Māori at the population level and compromise our ability to understand the accuracy of ethnicity data at the individual level (as the census is used as the reference standard for this).

— GROUP SUBMISSION FROM MĀORI HEALTH RESEARCHERS, EPIDEMIOLOGISTS, AND PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIANS

Partnering with communities

Some organisations suggested that Stats NZ needs to do more work to communicate the benefits and risks of an admin-data-first approach.

Partnering with community groups (eg, iwi/hapū, disabled community, LGBTQIA+ communities, etc) to create survey questions and methods that are useful and acceptable to these communities would be helpful.

— KOI TŪ: THE CENTRE FOR INFORMED FUTURES, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

Social licence

Some email submitters highlighted a need for transparency, and how this relates to the social license necessary to introduce an admin-data-first approach to census.

Another botched census in 2028 is likely to have a spillover effect onto how the public views the competence and quality of the Stats NZ's operations and further erode their willingness to participate in other important social surveys, not to mention their trust in the numbers being produced.

— TE NGIRA — INSTITUTE FOR POPULATION RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

Need for relevant and responsive data

Some email submitters said that obtaining census data through data collection is an investment and worth the cost.

In a time of rapid population and other forms of change, governments are expected to act decisively and to make sustainable choices. Population growth, climate change, housing crises and infrastructure renewal already stretch the fiscal capacity of our increasing but ageing population base. Given the scale of investment required in housing, infrastructure, health, education, or environmental policies, existing population statistics and methods are simply not fit for purpose. [...] Quality population projections and estimates are critical. [...] Statistical surveys and censuses gather information that has contemporary relevance. Administrative records are also important, although they are often the products of a world we have left behind. We need assurance that we can have the population statistics about people, places, communities and their demographic dynamics that are relevant and responsive. There are costs involved but they are likely to be small in comparison to the cost of potential investment failures.

— LEN COOK, FORMER GOVERNMENT STATISTICIAN

Desire for further information

Some organisations suggested that Stats NZ needs to do more work to communicate the benefits and risks of an admin-data-first approach.

There is little publicly available information on which to assess whether sufficient progress has been made to mitigate and manage these risks. Further, it is unclear whether there has been an assessment undertaken by Stats NZ as to the real-life impact that changing from the status-quo census process to an admin-data-first census will create. We recommend more transparency in relation to both fronts.

— NICOLSON CONSULTING

Priority populations

Many email submitters expressed that they were concerned about the impacts of an admin-data-first approach on priority populations.

Administrative data holds immense potential for informing policy decisions and understanding societal trends, especially concerning Pacific peoples in Aotearoa. However, its reliability and usefulness can be compromised by the lack of adequate oversight and transparency. Within this context, the government's handling of administrative data raises concerns about whose interests are truly being served. Without robust checks and balances in place, there's a significant risk of manipulation or bias in the selection and interpretation of variables, potentially perpetuating existing disparities faced by Pacific communities. This

lack of oversight opens the door for the government or those in power to cherry-pick data that aligns with their agenda or benefits certain dominant groups, distorting the true picture of social, economic, or demographic realities and leading to misguided policies.

— INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTER

Part 5: Responses to engagement surveys

During the period of public consultation, we continued to engage with a range of stakeholders, including government, community organisations, data suppliers, iwi, and businesses. Detailed analysis of the feedback from this engagement will be published in an engagement report later this year. During these events, we sought feedback from stakeholders on parts of the proposal through short engagement surveys, which were tailored to specific interests/needs.

A total of 55 responses were received from these surveys, echoing what we heard through the email submissions and the online submissions form. Some key themes from these engagement surveys are set out below.

Working with communities to collect data

Many respondents emphasised the importance of collaborating with communities in data-collection processes and leveraging existing community-gathered data. Respondents highlighted two primary benefits of this approach:

- enhanced data quality and relevance
- strengthened trust between data collectors and communities.

Some suggested that Stats NZ could do more to engage with young people to ensure participation.

Additionally, several respondents expressed a desire for more region-specific data, data with greater granularity, and improved access to personally relevant data.

Improving accessibility

Some respondents thought that Stats NZ could do more to improve the accessibility of the census, including supporting people in person when needed and allowing people to complete the census online or via a mobile app.

Education

Some respondents suggested increasing public education efforts to help people understand why sharing data is valuable and important.

Transparency

Many respondents said they would like more information and/or transparency around how data is protected, stored, and accessed.

Privacy

Respondents expressed preferences about how their personal data is handled. Some considered that privacy statements or disclaimers to accompany the information they provide would be helpful. Others wanted the ability to review, remove, or limit the use of their data to specific purposes. Several respondents also asked for the option to obtain copies of any information they provide.

Māori data

Some iwi and Māori organisations said they would like more access and involvement in the review, design, and control of Māori data.

Improving statistics

A few respondents had suggestions for different data and statistics that Stats NZ could produce in the future. Some raised concerns about Stats NZ's data practices. They felt that Stats NZ takes too long to provide information and collects more data than necessary. Some were concerned that data collection might be influenced by political goals.