

Voting and political participation





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Purpose

This article measures voter turnout in the 2014 New Zealand General Election and political participation using data from the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS). It looks at:

- the number of people who voted in the 2014 General Election
- the reasons why some people did not vote
- the political activities people were engaged in other than voting
- how New Zealanders view parliament.

Political participation is a basic right of all people in New Zealand and is essential for a healthy democratic society. High levels of political participation help ensure that political structures are representative of society. By participating in government process, people can influence living conditions and shape their community's future. Measuring political participation helps us understand how healthy a democracy is.

Political participation includes voting in national elections, communicating with a local member of parliament, signing petitions, and participating in protests and advocacy groups. Political participation and institutional trust go hand in hand. People or communities with low levels of trust in governing institutions are less likely to engage with them.

Key points

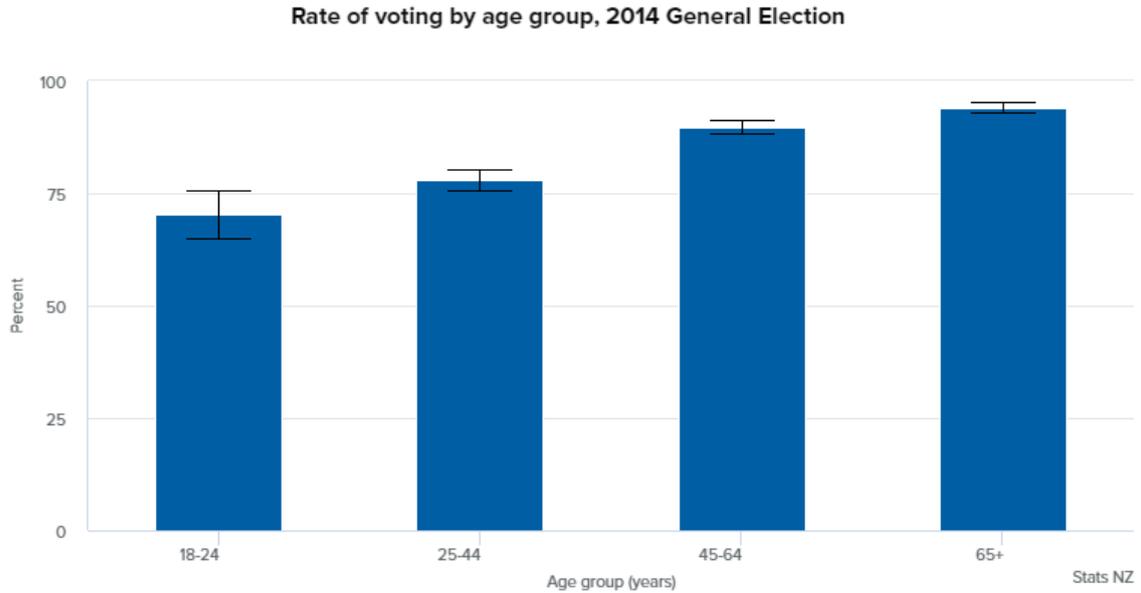
- An estimated 85 percent of the eligible population voted in the 2014 General Election. The eligible population are people who were aged 18 years or over in the 2014 election year.
- People in the older age groups were more likely to vote than those in the younger age groups.
- The longer migrants had lived in New Zealand, the more likely they were to have voted in the general election.
- Disengagement was the main reason for not voting in the 2014 General Election.
- Of the total population, 29 percent rated their trust in parliament as low, and 37 percent felt the public had low influence on government decision-making.
- **Māori were more likely to have low trust in parliament than the total population.**

Voter turnout for the 2014 general election

The GSS estimated that 85 percent of the eligible voting population voted in the 2014 General Election.

Women (87 percent) were more likely to vote than men (83 percent). People in the older age groups were also more likely to vote than those in the younger groups. Seventy percent of people aged 18–24 voted, compared with 94 percent of those aged 65 and over (figure 1).

Figure 1

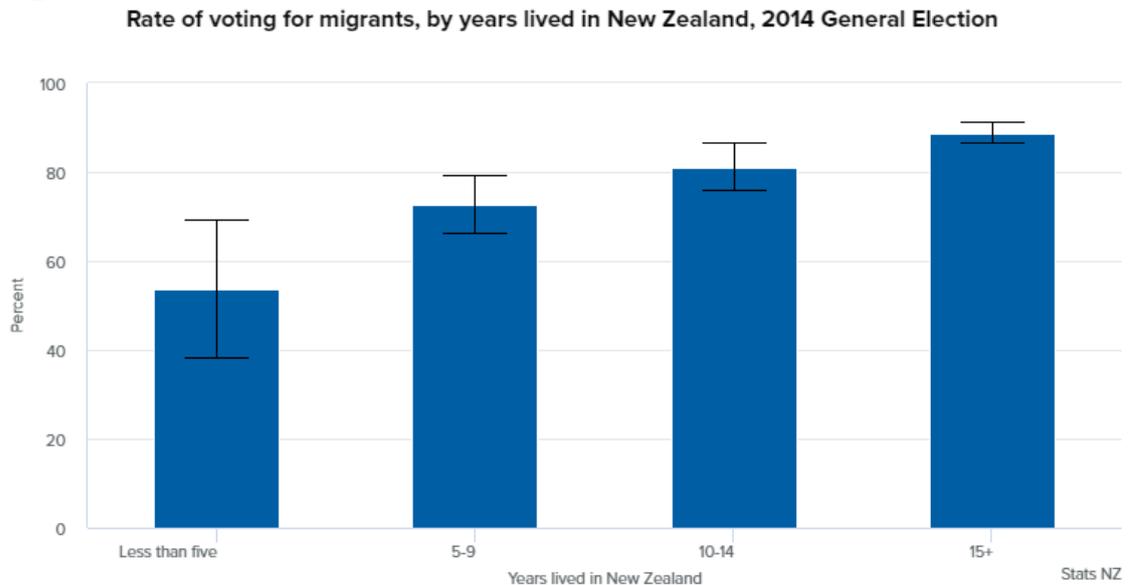


The GSS collects self-reported information about voting behaviour. Therefore, findings can differ from voter-turnout information from the [Electoral Commission](#).

Income is related to voter turnout. The more a person’s income meets their everyday needs, the more likely they were to vote. Of people who had more than enough money to meet their everyday needs, 91 percent voted. This compared with 76 percent of those who did not have enough money to meet their daily needs.

Migrants were more likely to have voted in the general election the longer they had lived in New Zealand. Only 54 percent of migrants who had lived in New Zealand less than five years voted, compared with 89 percent of migrants who had lived in New Zealand 15 years or more (figure 2).

Figure 2

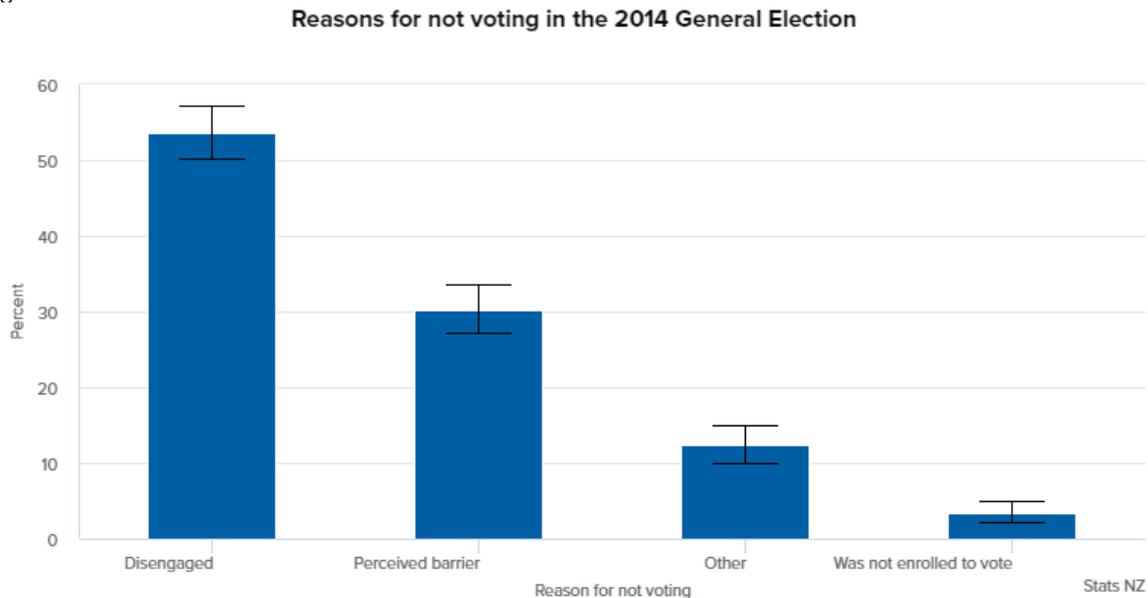


Most non-voters feel disengaged

The reasons eligible people did not vote were varied (figure 3), with the most-common reason being disengagement (54 percent of non-voters). **This proportion includes people who ‘couldn’t be bothered’ and ‘didn’t get around to it’.**

A perceived barrier was the second most-common reason (30 percent). This included being overseas and not knowing enough about the candidates.

Figure 3



Feelings of disengagement was the main reason 60 percent of men did not vote, compared with 47 percent of women. More women (37 percent) than men (25 percent) said they did not vote because of a perceived barrier.

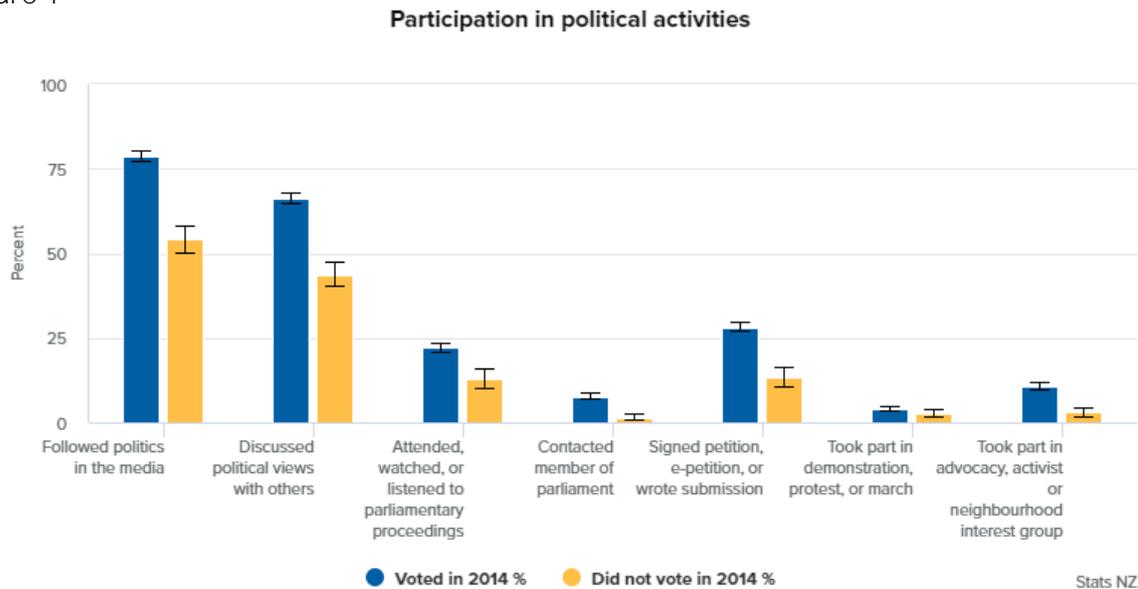
Not everyone in New Zealand is eligible to vote. About 7 percent of New Zealand’s population aged 18 or over stated they were ineligible to vote in the 2014 General Election.

In addition to those that were ineligible, 4 percent of the population were eligible to vote but were not enrolled. An eligible person must be enrolled and be listed on their electorate roll on election day to vote.

New Zealanders keep up with politics

Voting is not the only way of engaging with government. Of the total New Zealand population, 83 percent said they participated in at least one form of political activity in the previous year (figure 4). Following politics in the media was the most popular way to engage (71 percent) but about 25 percent reported that they signed a petition, an e-petition, or wrote a submission to a parliamentary select committee in the last year. (A submission is a written document of a person’s opinions or recommendations to a select committee).

Figure 4



People who voted were more likely than non-voters to participate in a political activity. Of total voters, 79 percent followed politics in the media, compared with 54 percent of eligible non-voters. People who voted were twice as likely as non-voters to sign a petition. They were also more than twice as likely to participate in an advocacy group or contact a member of parliament.

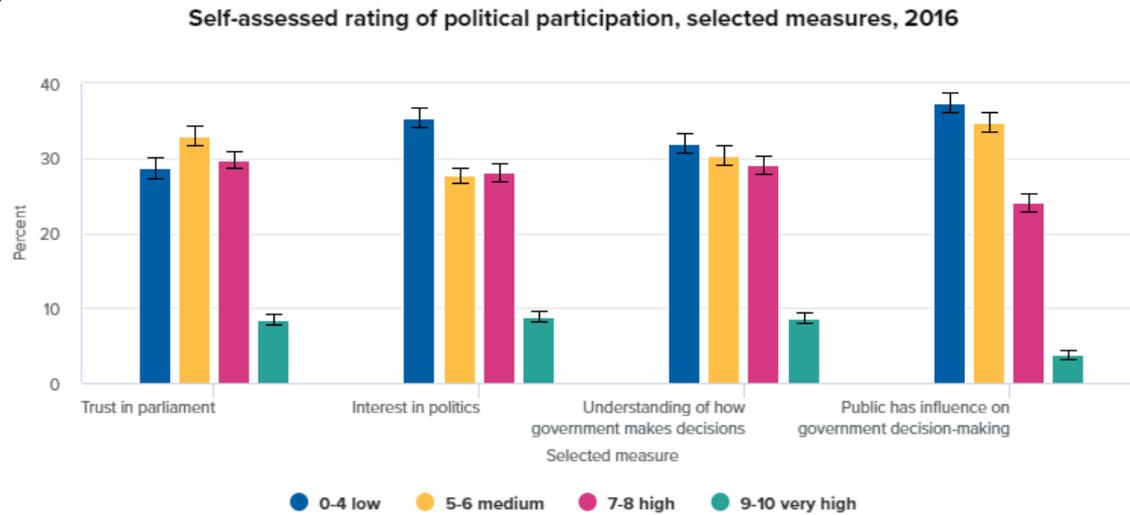
Older people's self-assessed trust and understanding of politics highest of all age groups

The GSS asked people to rate their trust in parliament; interest in politics; understanding of how our government makes decisions; and how much influence they feel the public has on government decision-making.

Older people were more likely than younger people to have very high interest in politics, with a higher self-assessed rate of understanding how the government makes decisions. Of those aged 65 years and over, 15 percent rated their interest in politics as very high, compared with 7 percent of those aged 15 to 24.

About 29 percent of the New Zealand population rated their trust in parliament as low (figure 5). Similarly, 37 percent of the population felt that the public had low influence on government decision-making.

Figure 5



Note: Based on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is low and 10 is very high.

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Non-voters were more likely than voters to feel that the public has low influence on government decisions. They were also more likely to have low interest in politics and have a low understanding of how the government makes decisions, compared with people who voted.

Māori (44 percent) were more likely than the total population (29 percent) to have low trust in parliament. Nearly half the Māori population (47 percent) also felt that the public had low influence on government decision-making compared with 37 percent of the total population.

Data quality

[New Zealand General Social Survey 2016 – data collection methodology – DataInfo+](#) details the methodology used for this release.

Further reading

Electoral Commission (2015). [Voter and non-voter satisfaction survey 2014](#). Retrieved from elections.org.nz.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017.) [How's life? 2017: Measuring well-being](#). Retrieved from www.keeppeek.com.

Stats NZ (2014). [Non-voters in 2008 and 2011 general elections](#). Retrieved from www.stats.govt.nz.