

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Civic engagement (participation in public decision-making) gives people a way of contributing to their communities, which is an important aspect of wellbeing. Civic engagement can also reflect a sense of being valued by community leaders and others in the community [1]. Electoral participation is the most well-established measure of civic engagement and the feeling that one has a moral obligation to vote (civic duty) has been shown to be the most powerful driver of engagement [2]. Civic duty is associated with citizens' confidence in their ability to influence local and national decision making, including their trust in the political process [3]. If people believe strongly in their ability to be heard and to make a difference, they are more likely to enrol and vote in elections [4]. Participation in public decision-making offers people a way to engage with, and contribute to, their communities [3,5,6].

## Key trends within civic engagement

Local trends in civic engagement should be considered within the context of the general decline in voter engagement across western democracies [6]. In the last 30 years, voter turnout in New Zealand has fallen from a high of 89 percent in the 1984 general election to a low of 70 percent in 2011 [7]. Greater Christchurch citizens' (New Zealand citizens or permanent residents) engagement with central government elections has generally followed this national pattern. Similar to general elections, there has also been a gradual decline in voter turnout for local government elections (now typically ≈40%) [7]. Along with declining turnout over the last three or more decades, this period has also shown declining levels of trust in political institutions, and in the political system; an important driver of 'civic duty' [7,8].

However, there is some variation in turnout in greater Christchurch, such as improved turnout in the 2010 local government elections. This increase in local voting in greater Christchurch has been partly attributed to the 2010 Canterbury earthquakes. Higher engagement for greater Christchurch residents was also apparent in the 2020 General Election: 86 percent of enrolled electors in greater Christchurch voted in 2020 compared with 82 percent across New Zealand as a whole (compared with the ≈65 percent OECD average in this period) [9].

Greater Christchurch residents appear relatively well engaged with the democratic processes of central and local government. However, the majority of residents appear to be less than satisfied with their level of influence on government agencies' actions (decreasing statistically significantly in 2022).

## Key equity issues within civic engagement

Although turnout for Māori electors increased between the 2014 and 2020 general elections, turnout rates for Māori are still lower than for non-Māori electors. In terms of citizens' sense of being able to influence the actions of central and local government agencies, there is no difference between Māori and European respondents to the Canterbury Wellbeing Survey in 2022. The proportion of Asian/Pacific/Indian respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are able to have enough say in central and local government actions is statistically significantly higher than the proportion of European and Māori respondents in 2022.

## What this means for wellbeing

There was a noticeable increase in civic engagement in greater Christchurch (above New Zealand levels) post- earthquakes. This suggests changes in attitudes, knowledge, awareness, political emotion and involvement in the post-earthquake context. Similarly, it is possible that the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts contributed to an increase in civic engagement in the 2020

general election.

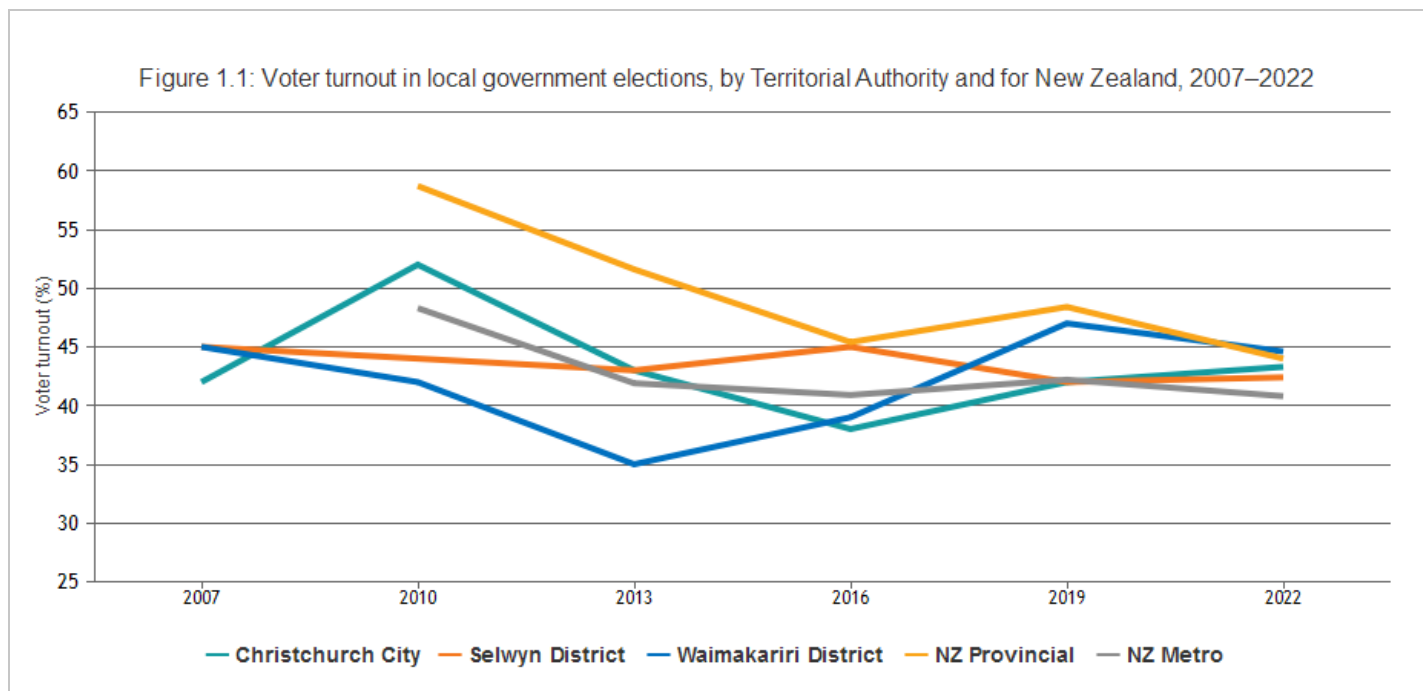
## Indicators in this domain

- **Voter turnout — local government elections**
- **Voter turnout — general elections**
- **Influencing central and local government**

## VOTER TURNOUT — LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Voter turnout rates help to show how people feel about local government. This includes the confidence people have in their local authorities, the importance they attach to them, and whether they feel their participation in the voting process can make a difference.

This indicator presents the voter turnout (proportion of all eligible electors who cast a vote) by election year, by Territorial Authority, and for New Zealand Provincial and Metropolitan, for the local government elections from 2007 to 2019.



The figure shows a slight overall downward trend in greater Christchurch in voter turnout for local government elections over the time-series shown. The 2010 peak in voter turnout for Christchurch City (52%) now appears to have dissipated and turnout at that election is likely to have been influenced by the September 2010 earthquake, which preceded the delivery of voting papers by two weeks. In 2016, voter turnout in Christchurch City had fallen to below pre-earthquake levels, at 38 percent, increasing slightly to 42 percent in 2019 and increasing further to 43 percent in 2022.

Voter turnout in the Selwyn District remains relatively steady, declining slightly from 45 percent pre-earthquake, to 42 percent in 2019 and 2022. Voter turnout in the Waimakariri District was similar to Selwyn District in 2010 at 42 percent, dropping to 35 percent in 2013, followed by an increase to 45 percent in 2022.

### Data Sources

**Source:** Local Government New Zealand.

**Survey/data set:** Administrative data. Access publicly available data from the Local Government New Zealand website [www.lgnz.co.nz/vote2019/voters/final-voter-turnout-2019/](http://www.lgnz.co.nz/vote2019/voters/final-voter-turnout-2019/)

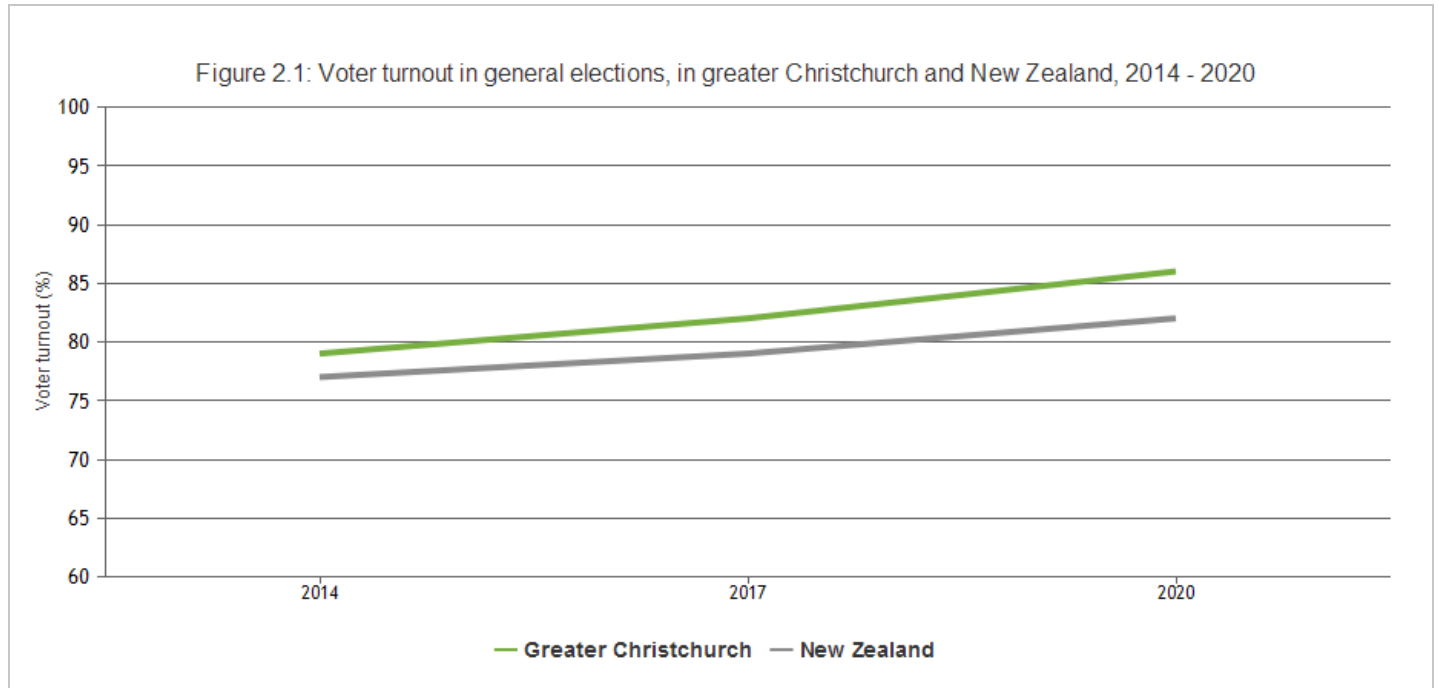
**Source data frequency:** Three yearly.

Metadata for this indicator is available at <https://www.canterburywellbeing.org.nz/index-data>

## VOTER TURNOUT — GENERAL ELECTIONS

Voter turnout rates help to show how people feel about central government. This includes the confidence they have in political institutions, the importance they attach to them, and whether they feel their participation in general elections can make a difference. In New Zealand, the enrolment of eligible electors is compulsory, but voting is not.

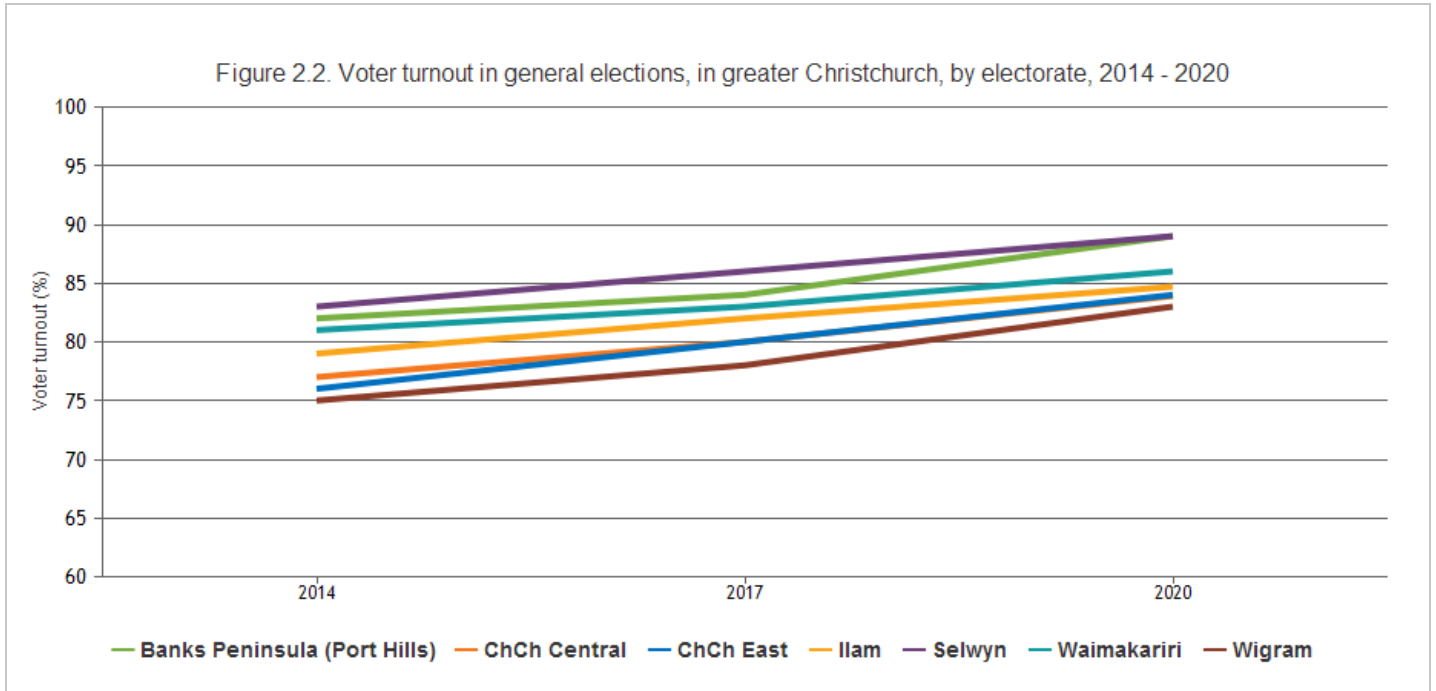
This indicator presents the voter turnout (proportion of eligible electors who cast a vote) in general elections, for greater Christchurch and New Zealand, for 2014, 2017, and 2020.



In 2020, 86 percent of enrolled electors in greater Christchurch voted in the general election (up from 79% in 2014 and 82% in 2017). Nationally, the voter turnout was slightly lower than in greater Christchurch at all three elections, for example at 82 percent of enrolled electors in 2020 [10].

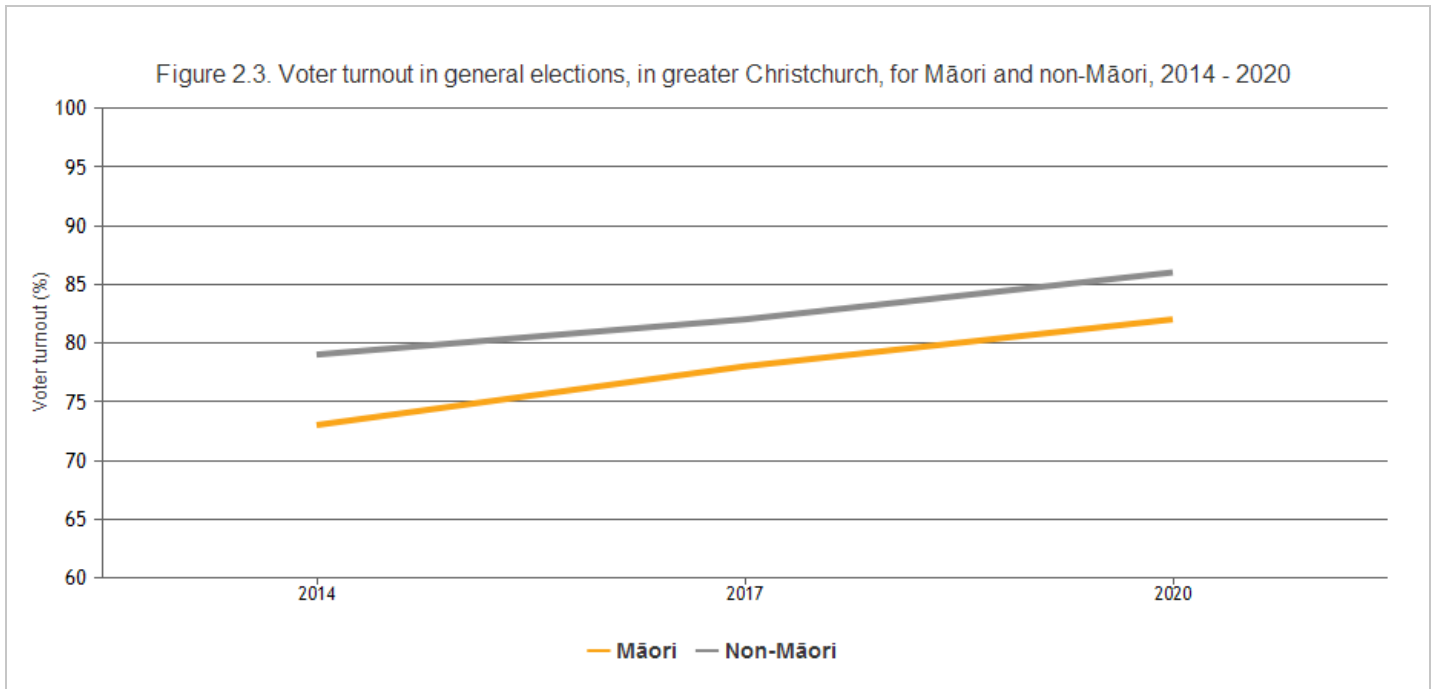
## Breakdown by electorate

In 2019 the Representation Commission reviewed the electorate boundaries and names across New Zealand for the 2020 and 2023 general elections [11]. Subsequently Selwyn, the fastest growing electorate, lost the Banks Peninsula area to the newly-named Banks Peninsula electorate (formerly Port Hills). Adjustments were also made to Ilam, Wigram, Banks Peninsula, Christchurch East and Rangitata electorates [11].



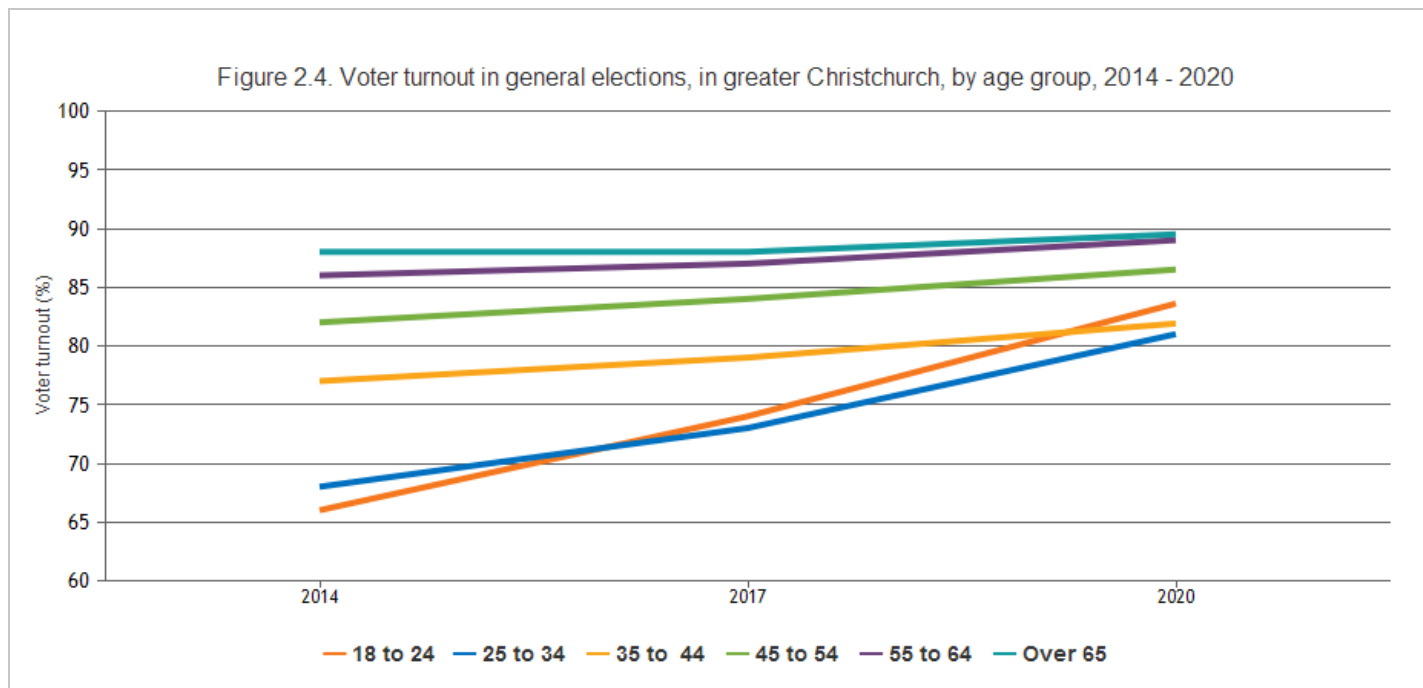
The figure shows increased voter turnout in the general elections for all electorates in greater Christchurch, from 2014 to 2020.

## Breakdown by ethnicity



The figure shows that in 2020, 82 percent of enrolled Māori electors in greater Christchurch voted in the general election compared to 86 percent of non-Māori. The voter turnout for Māori in greater Christchurch has increased at each election for which data are shown (73% in 2014 and 78% in 2017).

## Breakdown by age



The figure shows an increase in voter turnout for younger people in greater Christchurch between 2014 and 2020, with the largest increase being among those aged 18 to 24 years. Younger voters in greater Christchurch (84% turnout for 18 to 24 year-olds in 2020 up from 66% in 2014) had higher voter turnout than their peers nationally (78% turnout in 2020 - New Zealand data not shown in figure above).

### Data Sources

**Source:** Electoral Commission.

**Survey/data set:** Administrative data. Access publicly available data from the Electoral Commission website <https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/historical-events/2020-general-election-and-referendums/voter-turnout-statistics-for-the-2020-general-election/>

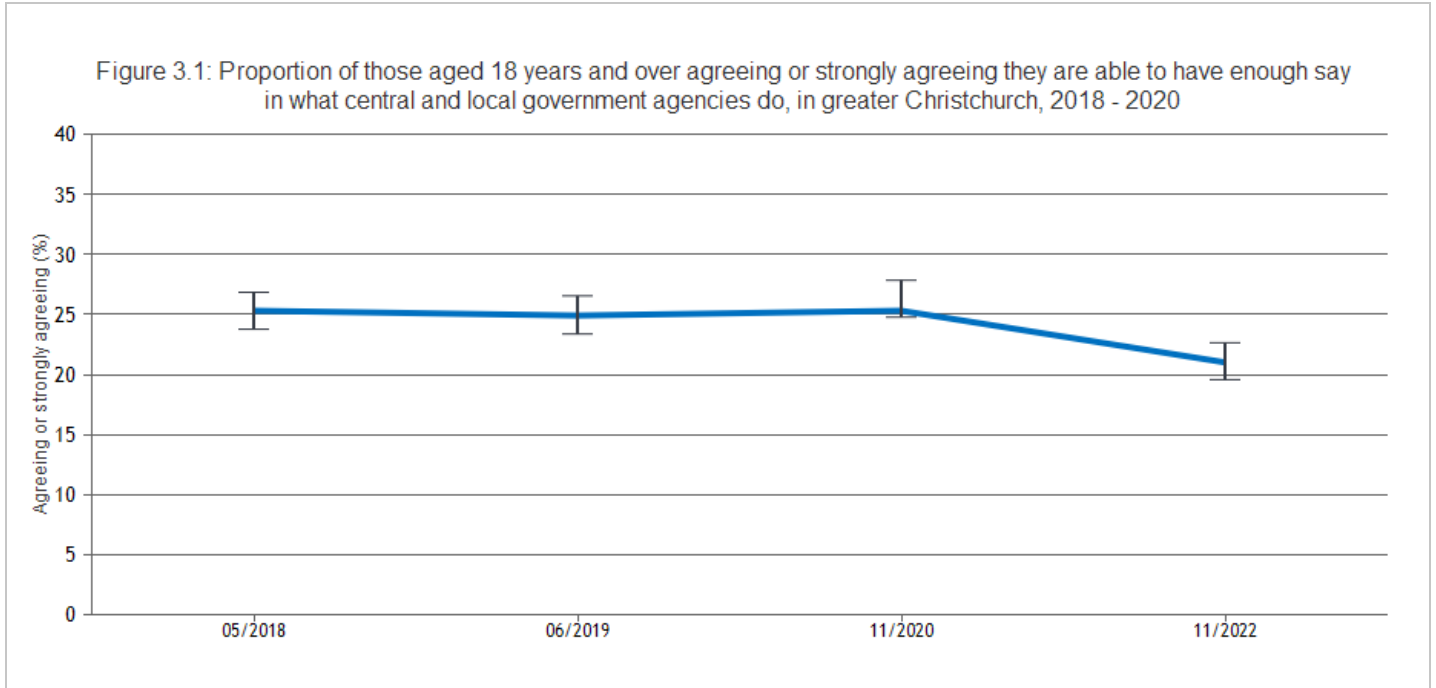
**Source data frequency:** Three yearly.

Metadata for this indicator is available at <https://www.canterburywellbeing.org.nz/index-data>

## INFLUENCING CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

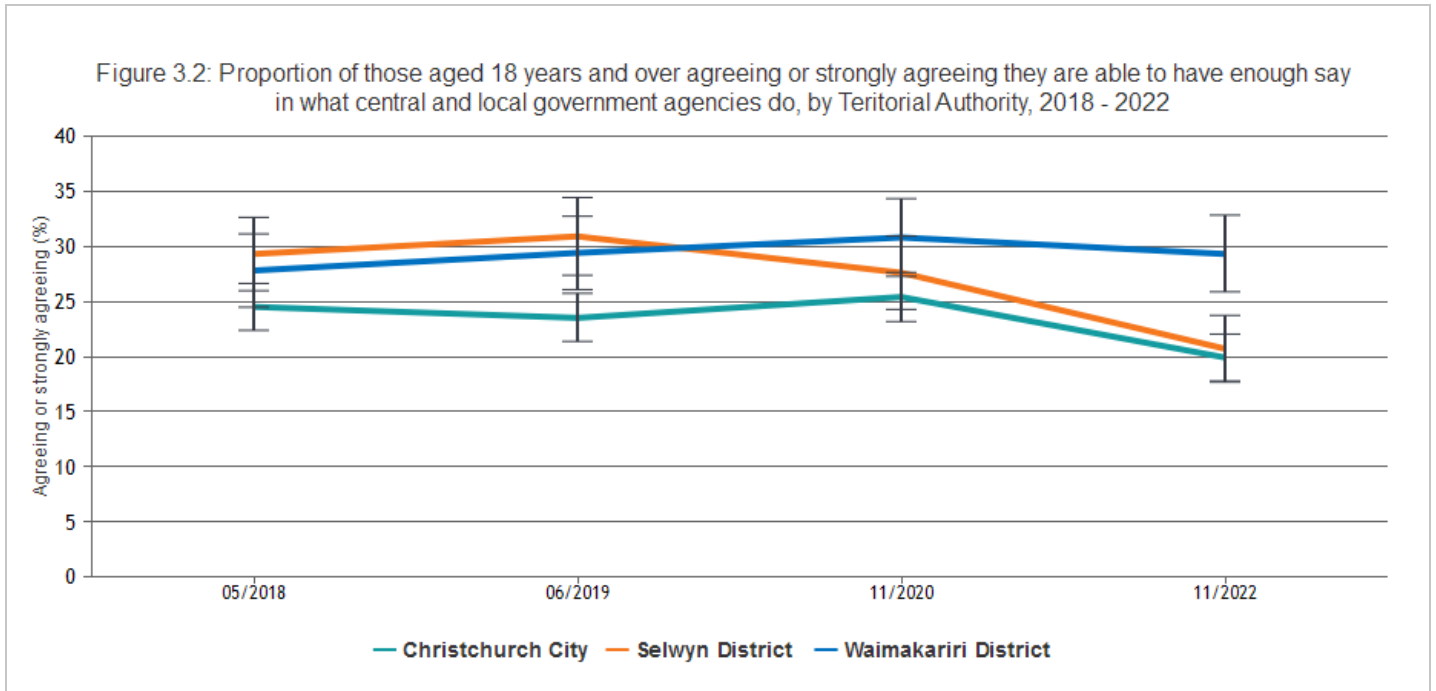
Central and local government agencies have a major role in enhancing the social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects of wellbeing within communities. Civic engagement is associated with citizens' confidence in their ability to influence local and national decision making, including their trust in the political process [3].

This indicator presents the proportion of those 18 years and over agreeing or strongly agreeing they are able to have enough say in what central and local government agencies do, as reported in the 2018, 2019, and 2020 Canterbury Wellbeing Surveys.



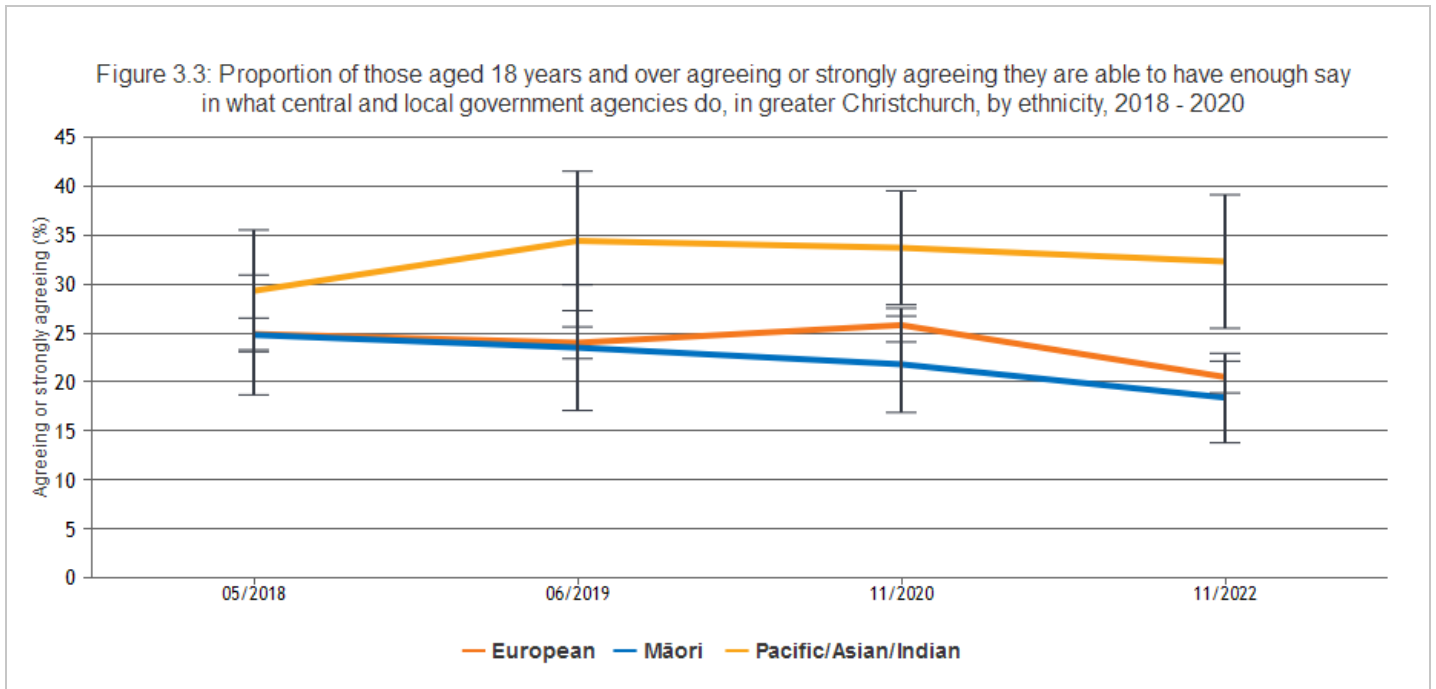
The figure shows that about one quarter of greater Christchurch respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies from 2018 to 2020. However, this proportion has decreased statistically significantly in 2022 (26.3% in 2020 and 21.1% in 2022).

## Breakdown by Territorial Authority



The figure shows that one quarter of Christchurch City respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies, 2018 to 2020. The proportion of respondents in the Selwyn and Waimakariri districts who agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies tends to be higher than among Christchurch City respondents, for 2018-2020. However, the proportions agreeing or strongly agreeing in Christchurch City and Selwyn District have decreased statistically significantly in 2022 and are significantly lower than for Waimakariri District (approximately 20%, Christchurch City and Selwyn District; 29% Waimakariri District).

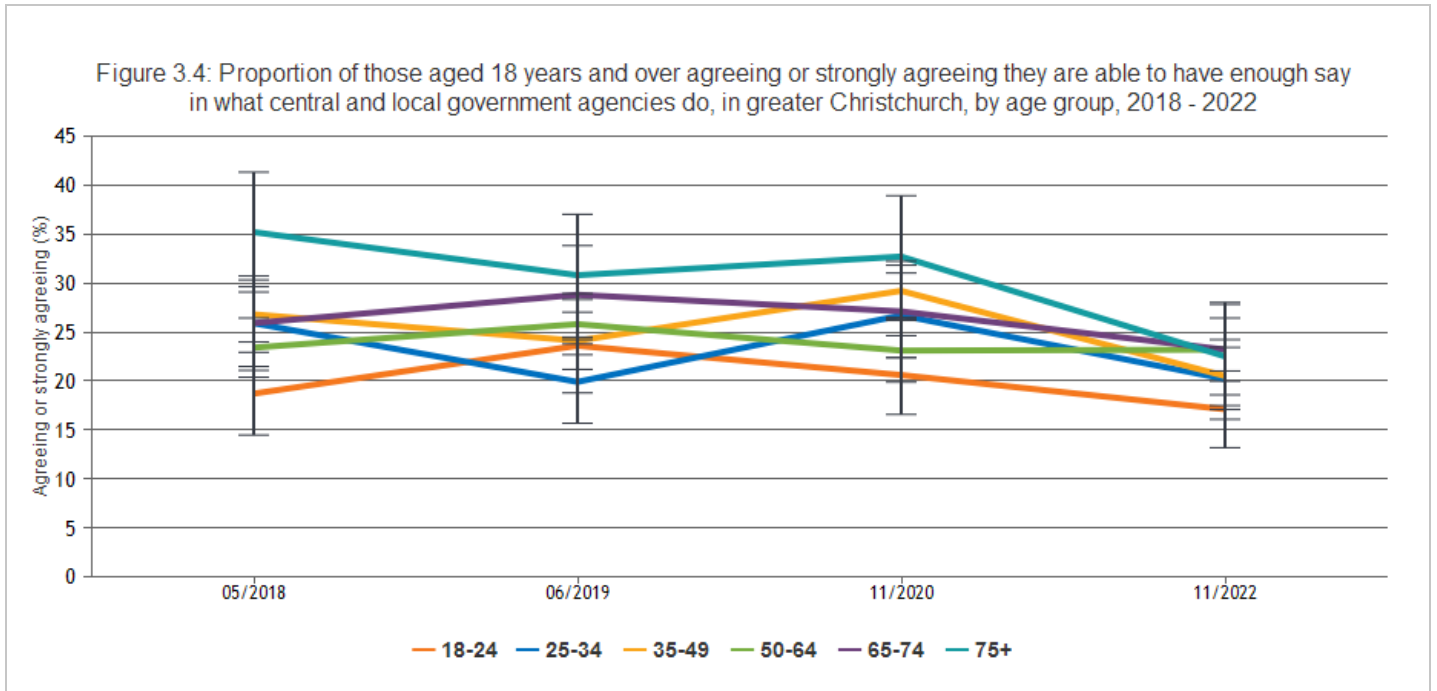
## Breakdown by ethnicity



The figure shows that in 2022, 32.3 percent of Pacific/Indian/Asian respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to have enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies. The proportion for European (20.5%) and Māori (18.4%) respondents is statistically significantly lower than that for Pacific/Asian/Indian respondents in 2022.

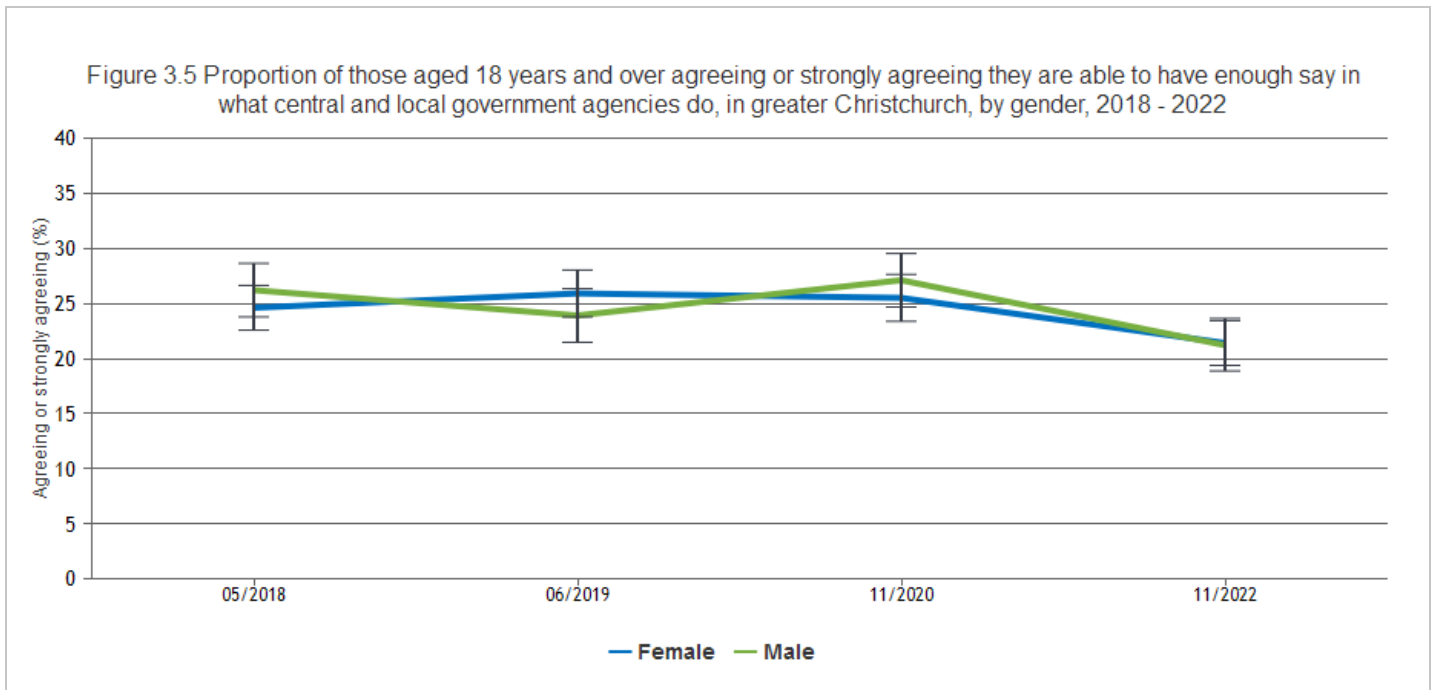


## Breakdown by age



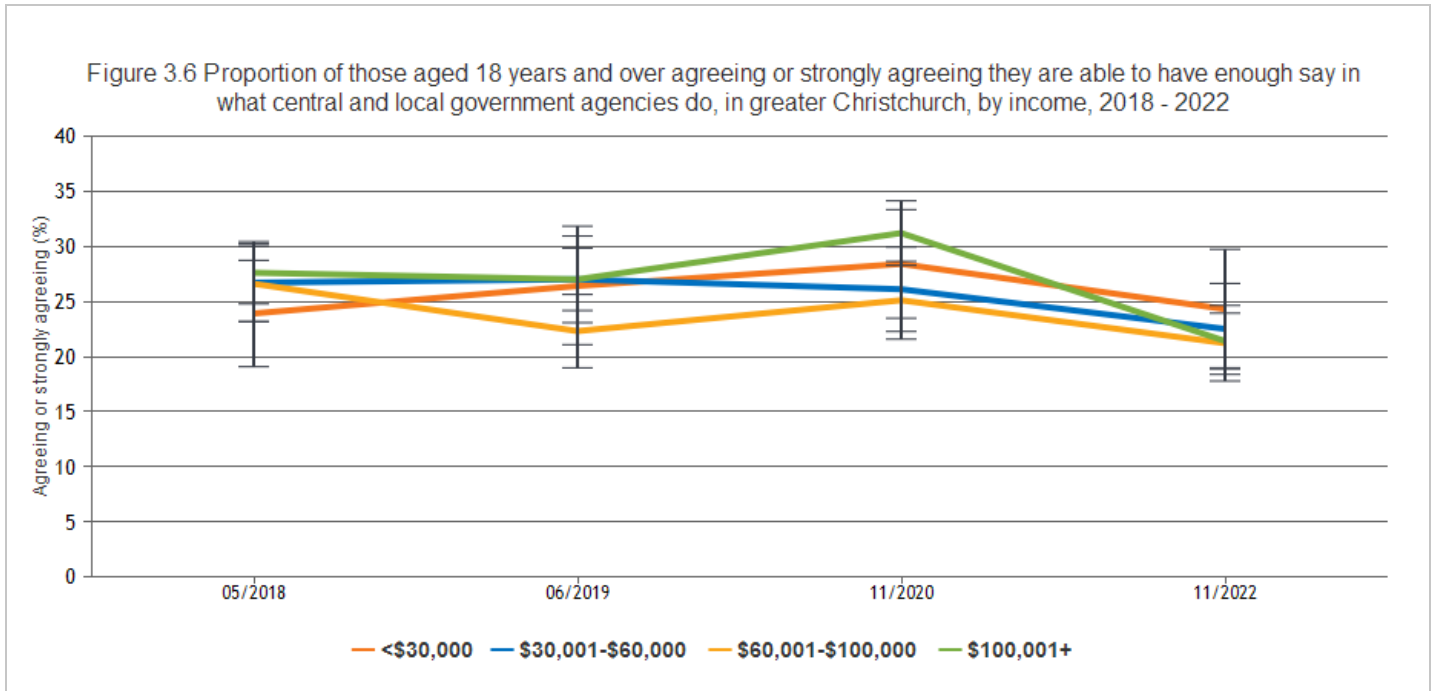
The figure shows an overall picture of increasing satisfaction with influence on central and local government agencies with increasing age. In 2020, the difference between those aged 18 to 24 years and those aged 75+ years (20.6% and 32.7%, respectively) was statistically significant but not in 2022, when the difference was much smaller (17.1% and 22.5%, respectively).

## Breakdown by gender



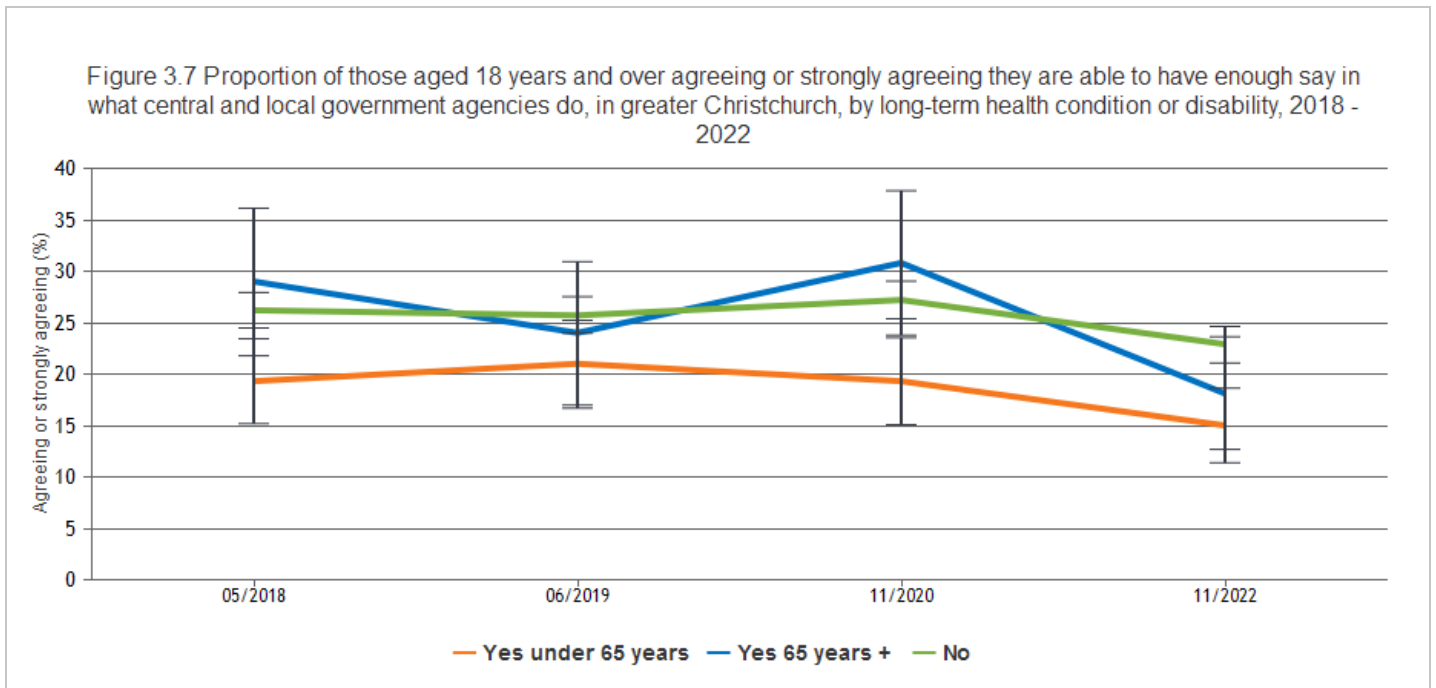
The figure shows that a similar proportion of female and male respondents agreed or strongly agreed they can have enough say in what central and local government agencies do (in 2022, females 21.4%; males 21.2%).

## Breakdown by income



There are no statistically significant differences at any timepoint in the proportion of respondents in each income group who agreed or strongly agreed they are able to have enough say in what central and local government agencies do.

## Breakdown by disability



The figure shows that a statistically significantly lower proportion of younger respondents (aged under 65 years) with a long-term health condition or disability agreed or strongly agreed they are able to have enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies in 2022 compared to those without a long-term health condition or disability (15% and 23% respectively). The proportion of older respondents (65 years and above) with a long-term health condition or disability agreeing or strongly agreeing (18%) was not significantly different from those without a health condition or disability.

## Data Sources

**Source:** Te Whatu Ora Waitaha Canterbury.

**Survey/data set:** Canterbury Wellbeing Survey to 2022. Access publicly available data from Te Mana Ora | Community and Public Health website [www.cph.co.nz/your-health/wellbeing-survey/](http://www.cph.co.nz/your-health/wellbeing-survey/)

**Source data frequency:** Annually.

Metadata for this indicator is available at <https://www.canterburywellbeing.org.nz/index-data>

## REFERENCES

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- 9 OECD (2019) Voting, in *Society at a Glance 2019: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.
- 10 Electoral Commission (2021) *Report of the Electoral Commission on the 2020 General Election and referendums: Provided in accordance with section 8(1) of the Electoral Act 1993*. Wellington: Ministry of Justice.
- 11 NZ Electorate Boundary Review (2020) Report of the Representation Commission 2020. Wellington.

## FIND OUT MORE

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> **Electoral Commission**

This website provides information about general elections, including research and statistics about enrolment and voting patterns across the country.

> **Local Government New Zealand**

This website provides information about local authorities, including results from the most recent local elections.