

International Social Survey Programme

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) involves leading academic institutions in 40 countries in an annual survey of economic and social policy issues. New Zealand is represented in the ISSP by Massey University. Each year the ISSP member countries carry out a 30-minute survey using the same questionnaire. The data from these surveys are deposited in central archives in Cologne and Madrid where they are freely available to all members. This collection of data enables researchers to examine similarities and differences between countries, and to monitor changes over time.

The ISSP addresses a different topic each year in a roughly seven-year cycle. Previous topics have included the roles of men and women in society, social networks, social equality, work orientation, the role of government, the environment, national identity and religion. In 2004, the thirteenth year New Zealand has been involved in the ISSP, the topic was citizenship.

Survey Details

Between September and November 2004, a nationwide mail survey was conducted of 2500 people aged 18 and over, randomly selected from the New Zealand Electoral Roll. The survey produced 1065 valid responses, an effective response rate of 62%. A sample of this size has a maximum error margin at the 95% confidence level of approximately plus or minus 3%.

Though the achieved sample was representative of a wide spectrum of New Zealand society, young people were under-represented and women were over-represented. To correct these biases the sample was weighted so that its age-sex distribution matched that of the New Zealand population over 18.

What is Citizenship?

Most New Zealanders believe that to be good citizens it is important to always obey laws and regulations (92%), to always vote in elections

(84%), and to try to understand the reasoning of people with other opinions (83%). Other characteristics of a good citizen are keeping a watch on the actions of government (considered important by 75% of respondents), trying to help people in New Zealand who are worse off than yourself (70%), and never trying to evade taxes (67%).

About half of those surveyed consider that choosing products for political, ethical or environmental reasons, even if they cost a bit more, is important for being a good citizen, and around 40% believe good citizenship involves helping people in the rest of the world who are worse off than yourself, and being willing to serve in the military at a time of need. However, relatively few respondents consider being active in social or political associations as an important part of citizenship (see Figure 1).

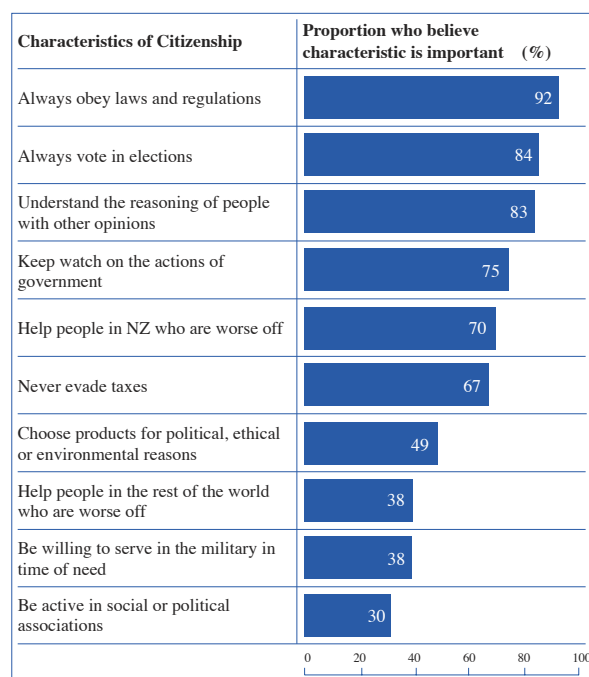


Figure 1 What Makes a Good Citizen?

This latter view is reflected in relatively low levels of direct political participation among New Zealanders. Only 10% of those surveyed belonged to a political party (and only one-fifth of these said they actively participated in a political party); only 30% had attended a political meeting or rally, or

had contacted a politician to express their views; only 25% had taken part in a demonstration; and even fewer (15%) had ever contacted or appeared in the media to express their views (see Figure 2).

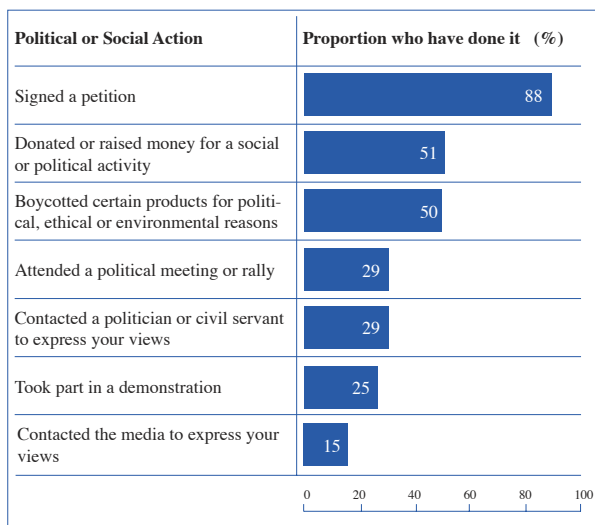


Figure 2 Political or Social Actions Undertaken

By contrast, most New Zealanders (88%) have signed a petition, and half have donated money or raised funds for a social or political activity, or boycotted, or deliberately bought, certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons. Furthermore, 60% of those surveyed said they were fairly interested in politics and 65% felt they had a pretty good understanding of the political issues facing New Zealand. The implication is that New Zealanders are concerned about social and political issues, but are relatively uninterested in organised party politics.

Democratic Rights

Most New Zealanders (65%) believe that under no circumstances should democratic rights be restricted by government; 15% believe that when the government thinks it is necessary, it should restrict democratic rights (and 20% are not sure).

Most New Zealanders (70%) also believe it is very important that politicians take into account the views of citizens before making decisions, and that Government authorities treat everybody equally regardless of their position in society (see Figure 3). An adequate standard of living for all citizens is considered a very important democratic right by 65% of our respondents, and around 45% feel

the same about giving people more opportunities to participate in public decision making, and about Government authorities respecting and protecting the rights of minorities. Only a small proportion of those surveyed (13%) consider it very important for democracy that citizens may engage in acts of civil disobedience when they oppose government actions.

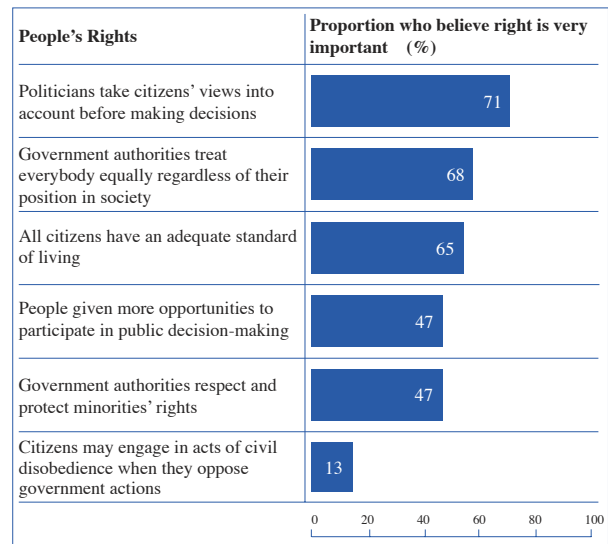


Figure 3 Democratic Rights

The strength of a democracy is often judged by the degree to which people are willing to tolerate unpopular views. Just over half of respondents (55%) believe religious extremists should probably or definitely be allowed to hold public meetings. However, 70% consider that people who want to overthrow the government by force should probably or definitely **not** be allowed to hold public meetings (though 20% think they should), and 65% think the same should apply to people prejudiced against any racial or ethnic group (though 30% believe they should).

Democracy in New Zealand

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents working very poorly and 10 working very well, 23% of New Zealanders rate democracy in New Zealand today at 9 or 10; 62% rate it at 7 out of 10 or better, and 87% at least 5 out of 10 (see Figure 4). In other words, most of those surveyed gave democracy in New Zealand today a pass mark, but far fewer believe it is working very well. Furthermore, democracy in New Zealand today is considered to be working about the same as it was ten years

ago, despite the changes that have occurred in our political system in the last decade.

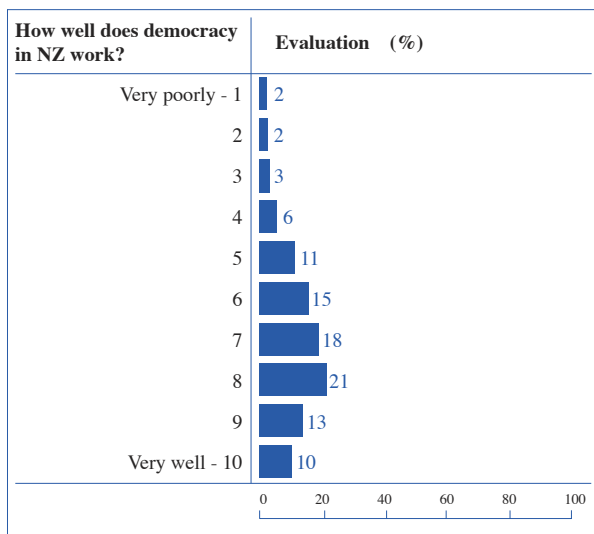


Figure 4 Democracy in New Zealand

However, only 40% of those surveyed believe we can trust people in government to do what is right most of the time; 30% disagree and the rest are undecided (see Figure 5). And 40% of respondents believe most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally (30% disagree and 30% are undecided).

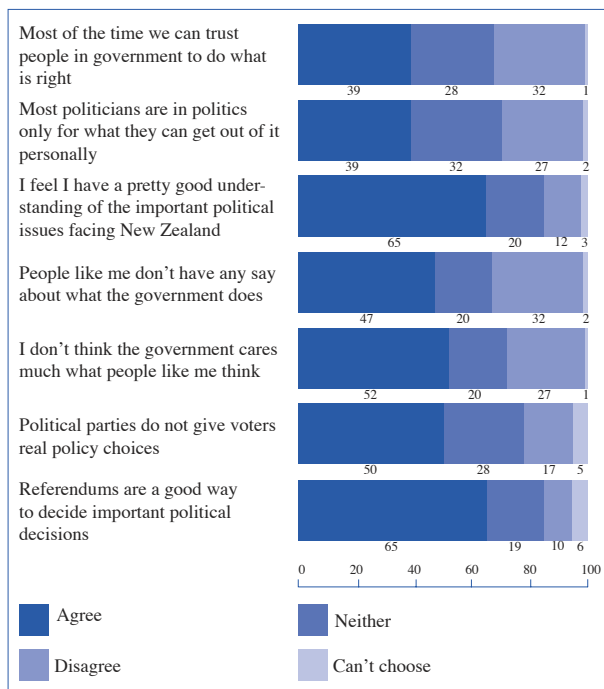


Figure 5 Politics and Government

This cynicism about politicians and the government is reflected in the fact that 70% of respondents believe it unlikely that Parliament would give serious attention to their demands if they tried to do something about a law they regarded as unjust or harmful. Similarly, about 50% of respondents agree that the government doesn't care what people like them think and that people like them don't have any say about what the government does.

There are no differences in this sense of disenfranchisement between men and women or between Maori and non-Maori, and the same applies for most age groups except for the elderly. Men and women over 65 years feel they have much less influence on the government than other people.

As far as the last election in New Zealand is concerned, most New Zealanders (60%) believe the counting and reporting of votes was honest and that the opportunities for the candidates and parties to campaign was fair, though around 50% of those surveyed consider that political parties in New Zealand do not give voters real policy choices. Sixty five percent of respondents agreed that referendums are a good way to decide important political questions.

When New Zealanders get together with their friends, relatives or fellow workers, 60% discuss politics sometimes or often, but for the remaining 40%, this happens rarely or never. However, most New Zealanders (60%), even when they hold strong opinions about politics, rarely or never try to persuade their friends, relatives or fellow workers to share their views. This is consistent with the notion that New Zealanders are interested in politics but not so interested in the political process.

Most New Zealanders get their political news from television; 75% watch political news on television at least once a week. Newspapers are the next most popular source of political news (their political content is read by 50% at least once a week), followed by radio (44% listen to political news on the radio at least once a week). Very few New Zealanders (10%) regularly use the Internet to obtain political news or information.

Should New Zealand Become a Republic?

On the issue of republicanism, 50% of respondents agreed that New Zealand should **not** become a republic and should continue to have the Queen of England as its head of state; 35% believe New Zealand should become a republic and have a New Zealander as its head of state, and 15% are undecided. Men are more in favour than women of New Zealand becoming a republic, and those aged between 35 and 64 are stronger supporters of this change than either those under 35 or over 65. However, only among males aged 50 to 64 is there a majority in favour of New Zealand becoming a republic.

The Public Service in New Zealand

Most New Zealanders (65%) believe the public service is committed to serving the people of New Zealand. However, only 10% of our sample consider the Public Service is very committed to this task, the other 55% believe public servants are somewhat committed. Sixty percent of those surveyed believe it is likely that when the public service makes serious mistakes they will be corrected. However, 35% do not think this is likely. Corruption in the New Zealand public service is not seen as being widespread; 60% of respondents believe only a small number of people are involved, and only 10% believe a lot of people are involved.

The United Nations

Most New Zealanders (85%) believe the United Nations should intervene if a country seriously violates human rights; only 5% believe that, even if human rights are seriously violated, the country's sovereignty must be respected, and the UN should not intervene (10% either don't know what the United Nations is or have no opinion). Forty percent of respondents think the United Nations has about the right amount of power, but the same proportion considers the UN has too little power (only 5% believe it has too much power).

Summary

Being a good citizen involves being concerned about social and political issues and taking an active part in the democratic process. Most New Zealanders are interested in politics and have taken part in various forms of social action for causes

they identify with. However, relatively few New Zealanders are directly involved with political parties. Generally, New Zealanders are interested in politics but not in political parties.

Most New Zealanders believe democracy is working reasonably well in New Zealand, but the level of trust in the Parliamentary process is not high, and many New Zealanders believe they have little influence over what the government does. Nevertheless, our electoral system is generally seen as fair and honest, and our public service relatively free from corruption and committed to serving the people of New Zealand.

Overall, despite some criticisms, most New Zealanders have faith in our democracy and political system. There is widespread support for the use of referendums to decide important decision, but those who believe New Zealand should become a republic are still in a minority.

About the Authors

Members of the Massey University Department of Marketing involved in this survey were: Professor Philip Gendall (Professor of Marketing) and Tanya Banks (Research Assistant).

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Access to data from previous ISSP surveys conducted in New Zealand: Religion, 1991 and 1998; Social Inequality, 1992 and 1999; The Environment, 1993 and 2000; The Roles of Men and Women in Society, 1994 and 2002; National Identity, 1996 and 2003; The Role of Government and Work Orientation, 1997; Social Networks, 2001; is available through the Department of Marketing, Massey University.