

News release

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Most younger voters undecided about party vote

Three quarters of New Zealanders aged 18 to 25 intend to vote in the September general election but nearly 60% are presently undecided as to which party they will vote for according to a Research Association New Zealand (RANZ) survey.

RANZ chief executive Robert Bree said the respondents were 669 young Kiwis drawn from the SSI national panel and were representative of the population based on gender, ethnicity and location – Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, North Island regional and South Island regional. The survey was conducted from 10-13 April 2017.

At the 2014 general election, 37% of enrolled 18-25 year olds did not vote according to the Electoral Commission. “With fewer than five months till the election, it is important younger voters are encouraged to exercise their right to vote,” said Mr Bree. “The media and political parties need to do their best to engage younger voters in the political debate. We conducted this poll with SSI, one of our members, to better understand what younger voters are thinking in the build-up to the election in this post-Trump, post-Brexit era.”

Intention to vote

Mr Bree said 75% of 18 to 25-year-olds intend to vote with 78% of females and 72% of males intending to vote. Overall 16% of panellists were not sure if they would vote and 9% were not intending to vote. “We know from past elections that voter participation may be as low as 60% in some demographics,” he said.

There were reasonable differences in intention to vote by location with the highest ratio of intending voters coming from Wellington at 82% and the lowest from Auckland at 72%. Interestingly, 17% of South Island young voters outside of Christchurch had already decided not to vote. There were not significant differences in the answers given by New Zealand Europeans and non-Europeans.

Decision on which party

Of those who intend to vote, only 41% already knew which party they would give their party vote to. There were not significant differences between the genders but Aucklanders were the most decided on who they would give their party vote to at 46% and Christchurch residents the least at 27%. Ethnically there were big differences with 46% of non-European New Zealanders saying they knew which party they will give their party vote to, compared with 36% of European New Zealanders. Correspondingly, 38% of European New Zealanders did not know who they would give their party vote to, compared with 24% of non-European New Zealanders.

To the question: 'Do you feel that at least one political party largely represents your interests, values or beliefs?' only 46% answered yes, 14% no and 39% were not sure.

Males were more satisfied at 48% that at least one political party largely represented their interests while only 44% of females answered yes to this question. Wellington residents at 53% and Aucklanders at 51% were the most satisfied with the current political party offering while those living in South Island outside of Christchurch were the least satisfied at 31%.

A sizeable 44% of non-European New Zealander young voters answered 'not sure' to this question compared with 36% of European New Zealanders.

Right to vote, election process and improvements

The vast majority of panellists, 94%, said the right to vote was an important element of New Zealand's democracy, and there were no significant differences by gender or location.

Most respondents, 61%, said the election process in New Zealand is well conducted, with males at 65% more satisfied than females at 57%. Wellington residents at 72% were the most satisfied with the election process and South Island residents outside of Christchurch at 50% the least. European New Zealanders at 63% were slightly more satisfied than non-European New Zealanders at 58%.

Suggested improvements to the election process included improving the quality of information leading up to an election, on-line voting, compulsory voting, civics education in schools and the opportunity to register a vote of no confidence.

Mr Bree said the Research Association's young voter snapshot research showed that overall most young Kiwis intend to take up their right to vote and there is plenty of opportunity for political parties to woo undecided young voters. "What is concerning for all parties is the 25% of young voters who intend not to vote or don't know whether they will vote.

"In the build-up to the election, the focus tends to go onto polling. There are some salient reminders in this survey that most younger voters are still undecided and it is important that the political parties and the media do their best to provide quality information to voters so they can make informed decisions about our nation's future."

This poll was conducted by Research Association New Zealand with sample sourced from the SSI online panel. It is a random sample survey of 669 New Zealanders aged 18 and 25 years, adjusted to be representative of the gender and ethnicity and location of 18-25 year olds in New Zealand. Fieldwork dates were 10-13 April. The poll has a maximum margin of error of +/- 3.8%. The full results are available by contacting ceo@researchassociation.org.nz

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