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A STORY OF TWO DECADES OF CHANGE IN NEW ZEALAND

ANDY FYERS

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1997: When Petra Bagust hosted a TV show called 'Ansett New Zealand Time of Your Life'.

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1997: When Petra Bagust hosted a TV show called 'Ansett New Zealand Time of Your Life'. Stuff's One in Five Million project tells us a lot about ourselves in 2017. So how does that compare with 20 years ago? Data journalist Andy Fyers reports.

One in Five Million gives Kiwis a glimpse into their place in New Zealand on a wide range of measures, from where you live to whether you believe in God.

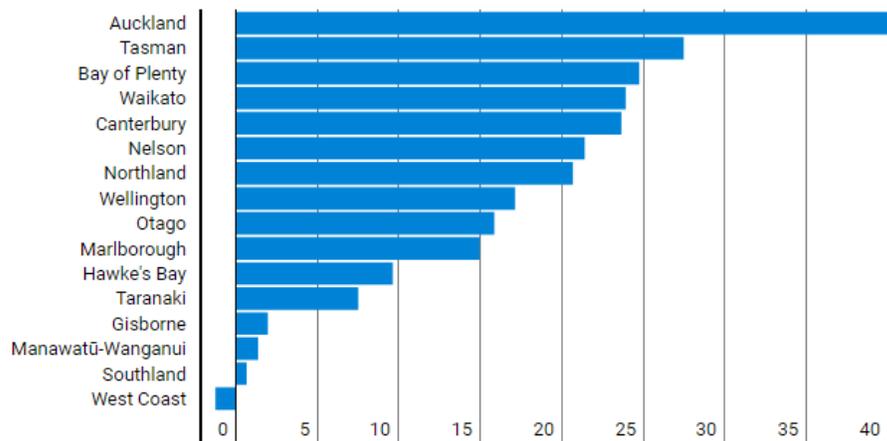
It got us thinking about how we've changed as a nation and what that might tell us about where we are going.

OLDER, MORE URBAN AND MORE DIVERSE

There are almost a million more of us living here than in 1997 - 4.8 million according to Stats NZ's rolling estimate, soon to be 5 million.

More than half of that population growth has occurred in the Auckland region, which now has 1.6 million residents versus 1.15 million in 1997.

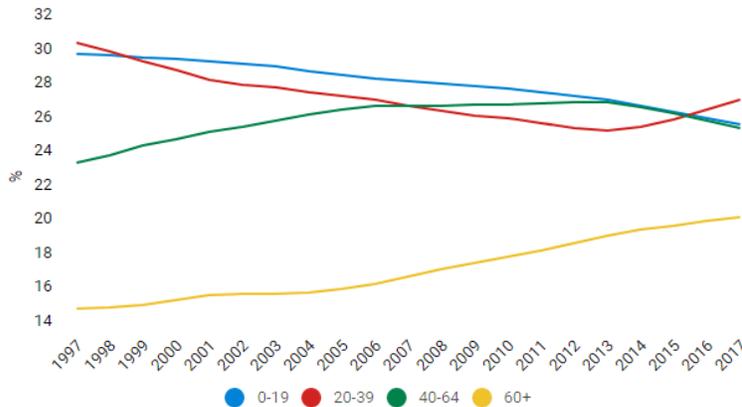
Change in population, 1997-2016 (%)



Source: Stats NZ

In 1997, the median age of a New Zealander was a sprightly 33. In just 20 years, that's increased to 37. Mostly because 21 per cent of the population is now 60 or older, compared with 15 per cent in 1997. Under-20s now make up 26 per cent of the population compared with 30 per cent in 1997.

Share of population by age group (%)



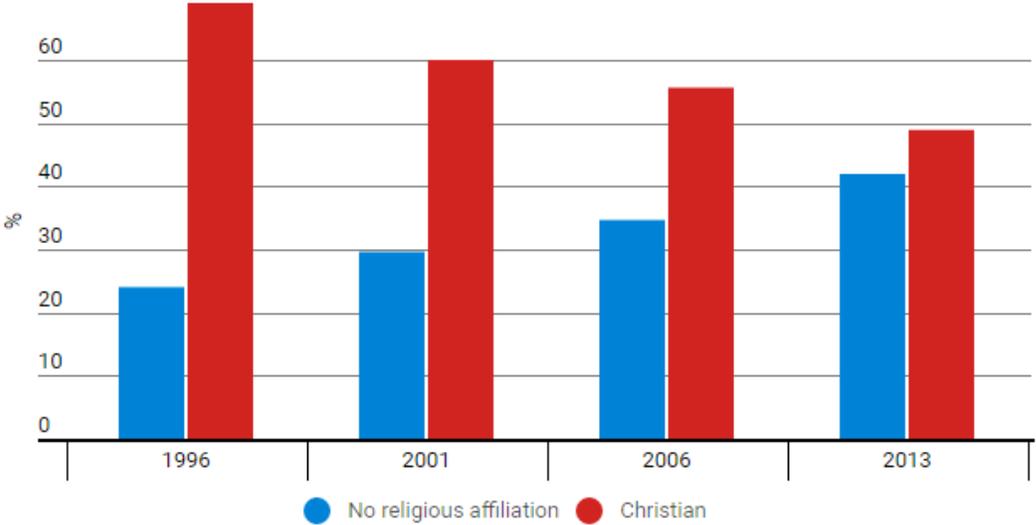
Source: Stats NZ

Since 2001, the proportion identifying as European has fallen from 80 to 74 per cent, Māori is unchanged at 15 per cent, while the proportion of the population in the broad Asian ethnic grouping almost doubled to 12 per cent. People can belong to more than one ethnicity.

LESS RELIGIOUS

According to a 2013 survey, 61 per cent of Kiwis believe there is a God. And while similar surveys seem to be too few and far between for meaningful comparison, it's interesting to look at the growth in the proportion of Kiwis who claim no religious affiliation in the census.

Kiwis increasingly have no religious affiliation



Source: Stats NZ

In 1996, about 24 per cent of Kiwis had no religion, by 2013 it was close to 40 per cent. And the proportion of the population that is Christian has declined from 70 per cent to about 43 per cent in less than two decades.

And while not having a religious affiliation is not the same as not believing in a God, it's a good proxy for how attitudes have changed.

The One in Five Million project from Stuff is your chance to figure out where you fit in New Zealand.

PRICIER HOUSES AND LESS HOME-OWNERS

This one probably won't come as a surprise to anyone who has taken even a passing interest in property over the past couple of years, but it's worth comparing the situation today to 20 years to get an idea of how bad things have become.

The average house price in 1997 was \$181,000. It's now three and half times that, at \$640,000. The proportion of Kiwi households that own the home they live in fell from 75 per cent in 1996 to 63 per cent in 2013. It's likely to have fallen further since then, given the drastic rise in the property market since 2013, but we won't know for sure until the 2018 census.

But the stuff inside our home was a lot less technologically-advanced than it is now. In 1996, Telecom started offering internet services and claimed 40,000 users within months. In 2016, there were an estimated four million internet users in New Zealand, many of whom are now streaming television via the web.

MORE EDUCATED

The New Zealand population is now much more educated overall than it was two decades ago.

Again, figures from the 1996 and 2013 censuses reveal the trend.

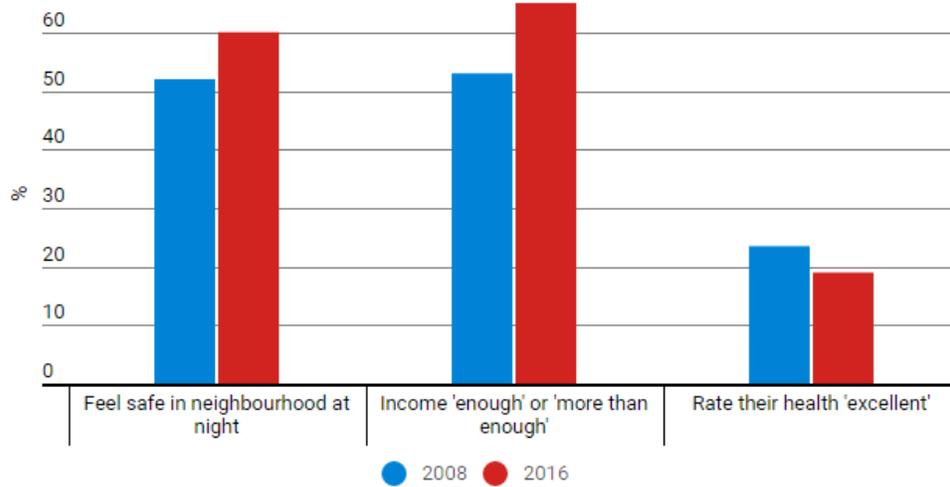
In 1996, just 62 per of New Zealanders aged 15 or older had a formal qualification (a Level 1 certificate or higher). By 2013, 79 per cent did.

The number of people with at least a bachelor's degree increased from 14 to 20 per cent.

SAFE AND WEALTHY BUT NOT AS HEALTHY

The recently released 2016 General Social Survey provides a fascinating insight to the lives of Kiwis, especially when compared with the 2008 survey.

NZ General Social Survey, 2008 vs 2016



Source: Stats NZ

About 60 per cent reported they feel safe or very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood at night in 2016, compared to 52 per cent in 2008.

And we definitely feel more financially secure. In 2008, 53 per cent of Kiwis said their income was enough or more than enough to meet their needs - last year, 65 per cent of Kiwis felt that. The global financial crisis of 2008 may, of course, have been a factor in those results.

But we don't feel as healthy, with 19 per cent rating their health as excellent in 2016, compared to 23.5 per cent in 2008. This might have something to do with the aging of the population.