Local government and youth voter turnout: Obstacles and solutions for Aotearoa New Zealand

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)

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“The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It’s the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democratic society and we’ve got to use it.”

US Congressman John Lewis, 24 August 2013
Abstract

Local government youth voter turnout in New Zealand is very low. Although it is not too dissimilar to other western democracies where voting is not compulsory, the low rates are ineffective in terms of a healthy democracy. Low voter turnout amongst 18- to 24-year-olds can undermine the political process. Research has shown that youth are not turning out to vote in local government elections, mainly due to a lack of available information, a feeling that local government is a second-order election, and because they feel they have no influence in the political process. This thesis asks “Do young people (18-24 years think that eVoting, compulsory voting, and a reduction in the voting age would encourage them to vote in New Zealand local government elections?”

This research explores the causes of low youth voter turnout for 18- to 24-year-olds in local government elections in Dunedin and Palmerston North, New Zealand, as described by young voters themselves. The research explores, through a survey and focus groups, the motivations of young people who did turn out to vote. The focus here is on young voters in two specific cases—Dunedin and Palmerston North—both with high percentages of potential youth voters at tertiary institutions. The thesis proposes and considers the effectiveness (in theory and practice) of three solutions to boost youth turnout: 1) introducing eVoting; 2) lowering the voting age to 16 years; and 3) moving to compulsory voting. Insights into youth not feeling that they had sufficient information to make informed decisions when voting were unearthed and explored.

The research draws the following conclusions: 1) eVoting appeals to young voters and could potentially increase youth voter turnout; 2) young people are divided about introducing compulsory voting, particularly at local government level; 3) youth are opposed to reducing the voting age to 16 because they feel that it is too young. Whilst not initially set as a focus of the current research, civics education was raised by so many participants in both the surveys and the focus groups, that it needs to be addressed. The current research limitations, including the need to explore the generalisability of the results across New Zealand and ideas for future research directions, are also covered.
Acknowledgements

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To my Hickman, whose stories and antics always made me laugh when I needed it – my sista frm antha mutha.

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Kyle Whitfield – October 2020
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Introduction

My first political memory was being around the age of five and watching an interview on television with my father. The interview was with Helen Clark, the then Minister of Health. The interview was conducted at her home, and I was asking my father about who she was, why they were interviewing her, what was the ‘Minister of Health,’ and why did she seem so important? My father is not a political man, but I do remember that I was obviously happy with the answers he gave to my questions. This was my first foray into being fascinated by politics and how New Zealand is run. By the time I was seven, I had had my first of many tours around Parliament and the Beehive and was interested in how this beautiful complex functioned. Moving on a ‘few’ years, I have since worked in both central and local government, and have turned my attention to democracy, and what it means to people.

What motivates people to participate in the various political processes? What happens if only a small percentage of the population votes? How can politicians be said to represent us if lots of people did not vote for them? So here you find me, writing a doctoral thesis on youth voter turnout in New Zealand.

Although I am interested in all aspects of democracy and political processes within New Zealand, I have a particular passion for local government. This was not always the case; when I was completing my undergraduate degree, the last place I wanted to be employed in was local government. My thoughts at the time would have been: “All they do is clear the rubbish, make sure the toilet flushes and plant wee gardens at give way signs!” How wrong I was. Local government is much more than this, as I will expand on further in this chapter. Having now worked at two local councils, I understand that from the moment we wake up and make our morning coffee, till the time we brush our teeth at night, local government has been with us every step in our day, despite not having the public profile of central government.

This introduction outlines the reasons why I am researching youth voter turnout in New Zealand local government elections. I detail how I arrived at my research question and outline how I am going to gather and analyse my data. I then go on to discuss the structure
and functions of local government in New Zealand before concluding this introduction with an overview of how the thesis is structured.

Youth participation in local politics

New Zealand has a poor turnout generally for local government elections (Asquith & Molineaux, 2018; Cheyne & Comrie, 2005; Hercus, 2012). This is not too dissimilar to other western democracies where voting is not compulsory. New Zealand’s turnout rates are especially low amongst 18- to 24-year-olds. There has been a long term decline in youth turnout in elections has declined both in New Zealand and around the world (Hercus, 2012). Whilst there have been attempts by both government and non-government bodies to explain and try to reverse this trend, these have had little effect. There are numerous theories about why youth are not participating in elections, although those theories tend to focus on central government elections rather than local government elections.

The one guiding question when developing this research was: “Do young people (18-24 years think that eVoting, compulsory voting, and a reduction in the voting age would encourage them to vote in New Zealand local government elections?”

This thesis provides an in-depth look at what does or does not motivate youth voters, and explores alternatives aimed at reversing this trend. It also reveals what young people think about these potential solutions, and includes recommendations on each of the proposals. These are the opinions of youth themselves, and we cannot be certain there will be any change in the actual voting behaviour of 18- to 24-year-olds. But the attitudes expressed in the survey and focus groups, can be reasonably assumed to be indicators of ‘probable’ or ‘likely’ behaviour.

For this research I use the terms ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ interchangeably, and for this, I define youth as those aged between 18- to 24-years. The concept of youth as a social category is often “used and abused”, and can at times be something that researchers looks upon with less rigor as youth can be seen as ‘dope’ and not really a ‘person’ (Threadgold, 2019). Wyn & Woodman (2006) discuss youth as being a ‘transition’ and explore how researchers could conceptualise youth more, and how youth have evolved from the generations before them (Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Kelly (2010) agrees with Wyn &
Woodman and introduces the idea that society needs to rethink or reassess the modes of representing youth and that youth are ‘knowledgeable in all of their diversity’ (Kelly, 2010). This is why I believe that this research is important, important to hear what youth themselves have to say.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to:

1. Ask young people themselves why they do or do not engage in voting;
2. Explore the anticipated willingness and motivation to participate in the 2019 local government elections; and
3. Examine avenues for increasing voter turnout, namely eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age.

The three proposals (eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age) the three changes to our existing Electoral law which directly impacts who can vote, and how they can vote, and which have implications for local government elections. Civics education is not a change to constitutional/electoral law. It is a policy change to education which local government would have no responsibility for or ability to administer. Supply side factors are attempts made by parties, institutions and public sector bodies to ‘pull in voters’ (Convey & Harvey, 2015). What is on offer (supply) to attract voters, for example: attractive policies that differ between parties; multiple options (multiparty systems); electoral systems where votes are not wasted (PR v FPTP); electoral laws that make voting easy or compulsory (Blais & Rubenson, 2012). For this research I am focusing on the supply side, the ‘rules’ of the game that formal authorities can (re-)structure (‘supply’) in order to facilitate citizen engagement in the political system. The demand side relates to the ‘resources’ that voters have to enable them (‘demand’) to participate. Civics education is a demand side factor that focuses on the attitudes and expectations of citizens; to encourage political participation, citizens need to want to participate, and for this they need to have the knowledge and belief that participation will be worthwhile. Civics education tries to level the playing field by providing knowledge free of charge (Powell, 2019). The thesis focuses mainly on supply side factors but I do pay some attention to civics education. The impact of providing new opportunities for youth to participate is clearly going to be moderated by how motivated young people are to make use of such opportunities. It was, also, very evident from youth
themselves, that they believe civics education to be part of any solution to address the problem of low youth turnout in elections.

**The importance of voter turnout for democracy**

Voting is a fundamental right for citizens. It is an integral part of participation in any healthy society and something that, if not nurtured to maintain or increase turnout, could have detrimental effects into the future. Voting in New Zealand is inclusive of anyone aged 18 years or over who is a New Zealand citizen or has been a New Zealand resident for over 12 months. The exceptions to this are some of those in prisons and mental health institutions. While participation in politics can take many forms, with some requiring considerable resources, time, effort, and money, voting requires the least amount of these.

There are various reasons why increasing voter turnout is important, and these will be discussed in chapter one. What is important to note at the outset is that people in general, and young people in particular, seem less interested in being involved in electing their local councillors than they do in electing their representatives to the national parliament. Voter turnout in local elections in New Zealand is half that of national elections (Hercus, 2012). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that New Zealand local government is experiencing a “male, pale, and stale” majority where the preponderance of elected members are middle-aged Pākehā men and where minority groups are significantly under-represented. There are few elected members under the age of 35 years who sit around the council table (Local Government New Zealand, 2019).

Why is there a trend of declining voter turnout in local elections in New Zealand? And what effect does this declining trend have on democracy in New Zealand? My interest in youth, and their involvement, or lack thereof, in local government elections, is because youth are the face of the future. What happens to democracy if they continue voting in low numbers? Why are young people less likely than any other age group to vote in local government elections? What happens if young people continue not to vote throughout their lifetime and what does this mean for the role of local government and its elected representatives?
This research, therefore, asks why young people are not voting in local government elections and considers the viability of three solutions that have been proposed to address this issue. The answer to this question can have implications for the way that local elections operate in the future. Knowledge gained from the research will hopefully enable policies and processes to be put in place that could increase voter turnout (and not just for youth) and ensure that those in the relevant age groups become engaged in what is happening around them within the political spectrum. This will help strengthen democracy now and into the future.

Structure of local government

Throughout the thesis I will be using the term ‘local government’ to refer to city, district, and regional councils. The term will not apply to district health boards, community boards, or licensing trusts. Local government is crucial in the everyday lives of New Zealanders and yet, for the most part, people are not aware of the reach of the long tentacles that councils have into our lives. Local government is a major sector of the New Zealand economy. In 2018, the combined annual operating income of councils was $9.4 billion, with operating expenses of $9.8 billion. They have a combined asset worth of $138 billion, and liabilities of $19 billion. They employ around 30,000 full-time equivalent staff and represent around 11% of all public expenditure (Local Government New Zealand, 2019).

Local government in New Zealand is currently facing many challenges, not least from the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, and reduced council-related income from services like parking. The large majority of income for councils comes in the form of rates, so businesses, householders, and landowners, pay various charges on their land and buildings that contribute to paying for services and reducing council debt. Minimal funding is received from central government, so councils need to be self-sufficient. Most councils borrow through ‘intergenerational’ debt. This means that the debt is spread across generations of ratepayers for infrastructure and capital projects that have benefits both now and into the future. As listed above, councils have a combined asset portfolio of over $138 billion, but
they are not assets that can easily be sold as investments. Not many people want to buy a road, or a wastewater processing station.

Local government is a creature of Parliament and receives its powers and duties through legislation (Local Government New Zealand, 2019). Local government’s general powers allow them to act in response to the wishes of their communities, as set out in the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA). Section 10 of the LGA states that:

1. The purpose of local government is:
   a. To enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of communities; and
   b. To promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future.

Local government is one of the two levels of government in New Zealand, with central government being the other. Local government is referred to as ‘second order’ or subsidiary, and central government is referred to as ‘first order’ – the implications of this for voting are discussed in chapter two. According to the LGA, councils have the authority to make decisions that set the direction of their communities. The LGA requires councils to be autonomous and accountable to the communities that elected them (Local Government New Zealand, 2019). Because local government is a creature of statute, it means it has no real autonomy.

There are three types of local government: city, district, and regional councils. City and district councils are called territorial authorities. There are 67 territorial authorities in New Zealand and 11 regional councils. Territorial authorities consist of 13 city councils and 54 district councils. The main functions of a territorial authority include:

1. Roading. Any roads that you drive on that are not state highways are provided and maintained by the city or district council – that is a lot of roading!
2. The three waters – water, wastewater, and stormwater. These are a large expense as councils are responsible for ensuring that these waters are treated to a very high standard;

3. Emergency management. This entails the responsibilities of ensuring adequate civil defence during times of flooding and other emergency situations;

4. Providing community facilities and services, such as swimming pools, sports grounds, and skateboard parks. They also may provide library facilities, museums, and art galleries for when we feel like a cultural experience; and

5. Providing economic development to businesses within their area, and promoting their areas for tourism or business, and to prospective new residents.

Regional councils are responsible for environmental resource management, flood control, air and water quality, pest control, and public transport. These functions are becoming increasingly important when we consider climate change, and other environmental factors that can have an impact on our everyday lives. As will be seen in this research, some youth are single-issue voters, such as for environmental causes, so it is important that it is known that much of this environmental work is carried out by regional councils. For instance, it was a council initiative to stop the use of single-use plastic bags, and to carry out riparian planting. These occurred in partnership with individuals and groups lobbying with councils.

There are six territorial authorities which have the responsibility of both territorial and regional councils. They are: Auckland Council, Nelson City Council, Tasman District Council, Marlborough District Council, Gisborne District Council and Chatham Islands Council. The map below shows the boundaries of the city and district councils. The coloured areas show the regional council areas.
Decisions are made at all levels of local government by elected members. The number of councillors elected to each local government varies significantly across the country. Councils around New Zealand have between six and 30 elected members, with the average number being 11. Auckland Council has the highest number of elected members, with 20 for a population of 1,643,000 residents, and the Chatham Islands has the smallest number of elected members, with 10 and a population of 600.

Local government elections are conducted under the Local Electoral Act 2001 (LEA). The purpose of this act is to allow for diversity through local decision making. Local government elections are held every three years, on the second Saturday in October, and are conducted by postal voting (Local Government New Zealand, 2019). (This research engaged with the
election held on Saturday, 12 October 2019.) Voting documents are sent to eligible voters three weeks before the election date. Those documents include a booklet called the ‘Candidate Information Booklet,’ where candidates have provided up to 150 words about themselves, why they should be elected, and maybe in some cases policy initiatives. Candidates have almost complete discretion in what they write within the 150-word limit. Some examples are provided in appendix one. Preliminary results are announced by the electoral officer as soon as possible once voting has closed. Official results are then released a few days later. Successful candidates take office the day after the official declaration is publicly notified, generally five days after the release of the provisional votes. Elected members cannot act until they are sworn in at the first council meeting after the election (Local Government New Zealand, 2019).

Through the LEA, councils have considerable discretion over many aspects of their electoral arrangements. First, councils have a choice every six years between two voting systems, First Past the Post (FPP) or Single Transferable Vote (STV). FPP is a plurality voting system whereby voters select their candidates, and whoever receives the most votes wins. FPP can be used in single and multi-member elections. STV, on the other hand, is a proportional voting system whereby voters cast a single vote by ranking candidates in their order of preference. Most council elections are conducted using FPP; for the 2019 local government elections, only 11 councils used STV. The LEA also requires councils to conduct a representation review every six years. This review allows for the council to reassess the number of elected councillors, to decide whether elections will be held using wards or at-large, and to decide whether or not to establish Māori wards.

Thesis outline

This thesis has six chapters. Chapter one, Voter turnout and a lack of information, provides an analysis of the literature on voter turnout from both international and New Zealand viewpoints. I first discuss voter turnout, and then provide international data relating to local government voter turnout, and then look specifically at youth voter turnout. I then highlight local government voter turnout in a New Zealand context, with a final section which discusses youth voter turnout in New Zealand. Chapter two, Voting theories, provides the
theoretical framework for this thesis. I discuss several of the key theories that seek to explain voting turnout, namely, rational choice theory, socio-economic theory, socialisation theory, mobilisation theory, and post-materialism. The suggested reforms are viewed through each theoretical approach to determine whether they are likely to be effective. In chapter three, Reform, I introduce the three reforms that arguably could improve low voter turnout: eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age to 16 years. I explain how these reforms work and discuss some examples of where these have been used elsewhere in the world. The fourth chapter, Methodology, outlines and defends my mixed-method research approach in relation to my use of focus groups and survey data. I also outline aspects of both my quantitative and qualitative methods of collecting data, and how the data were processed. This chapter also outlines the University of Otago ethics process I followed when conducting my research. The fifth chapter, Young people and their views on voting, looks at both survey and focus groups data split into different themes, which was undertaken when I undertook the analysis. I discuss the disconnect between youth and voter participation, concerns regarding the lack of information available to voters, the concept of civics education in schools and, lastly, eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age. The sixth chapter, Discussion, brings together the theory and data analysis on the proposed reforms and looks at how and why the reforms may be effective in addressing low youth turnout. In the seventh and final chapter, Conclusion, I offer my final thoughts on youth and local government.
Chapter One: Declining voter turnout

Political participation is an essential part of any democratic system. Political participation can be defined as activities that individuals undertake that affect politics (van Deth, 2016), and it is an expression of an individual’s interests, preferences, and needs (Anderson, Loewen, & McGregor, 2018). Nagel suggests that political participation refers to “actions through which ordinary members of a political system influence or attempt to influence outcomes” (1987, p. 1). These activities include attending rallies, demonstrating, signing petitions, boycotting, contacting elected officials, and blogging, to name just a few (Anderson et al., 2018). Voting is also a form of political participation. Through turning out to vote, individuals can decide on who will hold political office and undertake decision making on their behalf (Saward, 2003). Verba and Nie state that “where few take part in decisions there is little democracy, the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is” (1972, p. 1). Large-scale political participation within a democracy is essential, and perhaps even decisive for assessing the quality of democracy. However, while we recognise all forms of political participation, voting provides political legitimacy and stability (Ellis, 2006; Wattenberg, 2000).

1.1 Why declining turnout is of concern

The literature identifies five reasons why low voter turnout should be of concern. First, voting is a requirement for democratic representation. By participating in voting, individuals can express their opinions, and when voter turnout is low, certain groups of the population may not have their views heard (Wattenberg, 2002). Min states that “Declining turnout rates have been labelled a threat to democracy, since low turnout may diminish the representativeness of a democratic policy” (2004, p. 95). Furthermore, low voter turnout can also lead directly to misrepresentation and could lead to voting results being biased or skewed (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Second, high voter turnout helps to legitimise the results of a newly elected government (Wattenberg, 2000). The higher the level of participation in voting, the greater the power the government can legitimately exercise (Sheerin, 2007). Third, high voter turnout can act as a safeguard against political extremism and helps to bring about democratic stability as those elected have more of a mandate to
govern (Patterson, 2003). Fourth, as Ellis (2006) suggests, since healthy democracies need active citizens, the simple act of voting may be seen as a vehicle to build wider citizenship and strengthen community values. In this way voting may encourage volunteering and other forms of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). Fifth, given that election results can often be won or lost by very close margins, the effect of a few individual voters can be significant. It could be argued that Al Gore’s 2000 US presidential campaign failed to mobilise the necessary voters in Florida, which ultimately led (in some respects) to his defeat in the state, and the subsequent defeat by George W. Bush for the Presidency (Wattenberg, 2000). Mobilising voters is hugely important.

The next section of this chapter looks at the evidence of the overall trend of declining turnout both overseas and in New Zealand, in national and local elections, and particularly among youth. This is followed by a discussion of why information is a major factor accounting for the decline in voter turnout. The final section looks at explanations of low youth turnout and declining turnout in New Zealand.

Evidence of declining turnout overseas

(a) Turnout in national elections
Voter turnout is in the most part in decline right around the world, and in most levels of government. Voter turnout has attracted a large amount of attention in the academic world, particularly since the 1990s (Gray & Caul, 2000) when authorities in several western democracies expressed concern about the decline in voter turnout (Franklin, M., 2004). Despite the growth in the worldwide voter population, and the number of countries which now hold democratic elections, the worldwide average voter turnout has decreased significantly (see graph 1 below).
(b) Turnout in local elections

It has been documented by Gendzwill and Steyvers (2019) that the issues around low turnout in local government elections are down to “to the lack of knowledge on local elections; their institutional variation and voting behaviour is fragmented and incomprehensive” (para 1). An individual’s perception of how important an election (and consequently a vote in that election) is depends on the individual’s capacity to vote. Reif and Schmitt argue that national elections are known as ‘first-order elections’ as they are more dominant and critical to the operation of the country, and local government elections (which include the likes of regional, state, or European Parliament) are perceived as ‘second-order elections’ and as less influential (Reif & Schmitt, 1997). So the underlying assumption made by Reif and Schmitt is that voters have less ‘skin in the game’, then second-order elections are perceived to be unimportant and uninteresting, which results in lower voter turnout (Reif & Schmitt, 1997). In the United Kingdom, for example, voter turnout in local government elections decreased from 2014 (35.5%) to 2018 (34.6%). The next chapter discusses this in more detail.
Declining youth turnout

While the trend of voter turnout has been declining overall, it is more apparent among those aged between 18 and 24 years (Catt, 2005; Franklin, M., 2004; Hercus, 2012; Kitschelt, 2005). International literature indicates that the younger the voter, the lower the likelihood that they will vote (Hercus, 2012). Youth voter turnout also tends to be much lower in local government elections than in general elections around the world (Hercus, 2012). Youth political disengagement continues to be seen as a major issue for many democracies (Kitanova, 2020).

Ballington’s (2002) study on behalf of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), found that voter turnout for people aged 18 to 29 years had steadily declined in general elections over the past 50 years in 15 Western European democracies. Kirby and Kawashima-Ginsberg (2009) found that voter turnout of 18- to 25-year-olds is on average 20% lower than that of over-25-year-olds in their study with the US Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). In the 2010 US Presidential Elections, only 24% of those aged 18 to 25 years voted (McGrath, 2011). In Canada, similar trends have shown that around 40% of those aged 18 to 25 years voted in their federal election (Barnes, 2010). In the United Kingdom, research indicated that youth voter turnout for the general election had increased from 37% in 2005 to 44% in 2010. However, this remains approximately 20% lower than the figure for those aged above 25 years (IPSOS, 2010; Stutz & Atkin, 2011).

Voter turnout in New Zealand

(a) Turnout in national elections

New Zealanders are losing the habit of voting (Catt & Northcote, 2006). Declining voter turnout is a concern in New Zealand, as it is in most other western democracies. The declining turnout will almost certainly have a long-term impact on New Zealand’s democracy (Catt & Northcote, 2006). Voting in New Zealand is not compulsory; however, enrolment is. When individuals turn 17, they can provisionally enrol to vote and then on their 18th birthday they are automatically switched over to the official roll. Under the Electoral Act 1993 it is an offence to intentionally choose not to enrol, with a fine of
between $100 and $200. The latest available information around whether police had enforced this shows that no fines have been imposed in the last nine years (Williams, 2017).

Table 1: Voter Enrolment as at 18 May 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Est Eligible Population</th>
<th>Total Enrolled</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>% Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 - 24</td>
<td>464,620</td>
<td>292,236</td>
<td>172,384</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 29</td>
<td>355,340</td>
<td>265,184</td>
<td>90,156</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 34</td>
<td>316,040</td>
<td>268,849</td>
<td>47,191</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 39</td>
<td>288,850</td>
<td>272,760</td>
<td>16,090</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 44</td>
<td>285,390</td>
<td>269,854</td>
<td>15,536</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 49</td>
<td>320,620</td>
<td>305,520</td>
<td>15,100</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 54</td>
<td>310,560</td>
<td>300,512</td>
<td>10,048</td>
<td>96.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 - 59</td>
<td>310,890</td>
<td>306,843</td>
<td>4,047</td>
<td>98.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 64</td>
<td>270,180</td>
<td>267,987</td>
<td>2,193</td>
<td>99.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 - 69</td>
<td>236,050</td>
<td>233,016</td>
<td>3,034</td>
<td>98.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>508,500</td>
<td>509,216</td>
<td>-716</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,667,040</td>
<td>3,291,977</td>
<td>375,063</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced from Electoral Commission (2019)

Table 1 demonstrates that in New Zealand enrolment statistics increase with each age bracket, and which shows that those in the lower age range are much less likely to be enrolled than the older population.

Unlike the currently low enrolment figures shown in table 1, historically, general elections in New Zealand have an enviable record when it comes to voter turnout (Sheerin, 2007). In the past, New Zealand enjoyed considerably high voter turnout rates, of over 90% until 1984, with the exception of the 1978 election. However, a downward trend began in 1987 and continued to the first MMP election in 1996 when voter turnout increased, mostly due to the novelty of voting under a new electoral system. The slight rally was short lived and record lows were recorded in both the 2011 and 2014 elections. There were significant
increases in turnout at the 2017 and 2020 general elections but the turnout in 2020 was still over 10 percentage points lower than in 1984.

**Table 2: General Election percentage of turnout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage turnout</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced from Electoral Commission (2020)

When reviewing turnout rates for New Zealand, there are three main over-represented non-voter groups: Māori, Pasifika, and youth. In 2017, 30.8% of young enrolled people did not vote in the general election. The theory of political engagement and voter turnout are major discussion points in academia in New Zealand. Increasing voter turnout in these groups has become a strategic goal for the New Zealand Electoral Commission. For Māori and Pasifika, at the 2017 general election, only 61.8% of Māori youth voted compared to 71.4% of non-Māori (Electoral Commission, 2017). The Electoral Commission has commissioned work to try and address non-voting among Māori and Pasifika.

(b) **Turnout in local elections in New Zealand**

Local government turnout in New Zealand has seen a decline of around 13 percentage points between 1989 and 2016 (Local Government New Zealand, 2016).

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1 There does not appear to be any specific data on Pasifika youth non-voter statistics.
Graph 2: General and Local Government Turnout in New Zealand

![Turnout Graph](image)

Sourced from Local Government New Zealand (2016)

Graph 2 illustrates total voter turnout in both general and local government elections. This shows that voter turnout in local government is substantially lower than in general elections, a phenomenon evident in most democracies.

(c) Youth voter turnout in New Zealand

New Zealand is similar to other western countries in having low youth voter turnout. Data from the 1996 New Zealand General Election showed that those aged between 18 and 24 years were twice as likely not to vote as the rest of the population (Vowles, Banducci, & Karp, 2006). This trend has continued into the 21st century. Curtin (2010) points out that in 2005 it was estimated that around 60% of 18- to 24-year-olds had voted, compared to approximately 77% of those over the age of 24 years.

Table 3: General Election age range turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Did not vote</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Non-voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-59</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows that 6.5% more of those aged between 18 and 24 years voted in the 2017 General Election than had in 2014. This could be in some part attributed to “Jacindamania”, where youth voters were encouraged by the 37-year-old Jacinda Ardern becoming Labour Party leader six weeks out from the 2017 General Election (Ainge-Roy, 2017). This might be because young people may have been encouraged to register and vote after Ardern became leader because of her age, and that young people could better relate to her.

As regards youth participation in New Zealand local elections, as expected, this is lower than youth participation in national elections. At the 2016 local elections, the turnout amongst 18-24 year olds was just under 40% — a massive 30 percentage points lower than for the same age group participating in the national election a year later.

1.2 The value of political information

What can explain this worldwide trend of decreasing turnout in national and local elections? One explanation is the lack of political information available to voters. It is a common theme within academic literature that the more political information a voter has, the more likely they are to be politically engaged (Larcinese, 2007; Palfrey & Poole, 1987). We can assume that adequate political information is fundamental to providing voters with the correct knowledge and skills, which may subsequently influence voter turnout. Knowledge of relevant political information is vital for individuals to enhance their capacity to make informed decisions about who to vote for (Delli Carpini, 2000). As Cheyne and Comrie (2005) state, adequate political information is a minimum requirement for voters to feel empowered enough to vote. An absence of political information or knowledge of candidates could lead to voter ignorance, resulting in whether or not individuals vote (Hercus, 2012). This is because voters may not have voted in the same way as they would have had they been better informed (Bartels, 1996). In some cases, individuals may vote against their political ideology or interest because they are unsure of what candidates actually stand for, or where to find suitable information (Bartels, 1996).
Palfrey and Poole (1987), reporting on the 1980 US Presidential Election, noted that there was a positive relationship between the amount of political information available to voters and voter turnout. Wattenberg, McAllister, and Salvanto (2000) conducted a study using aggregate data from the 1980s and 1990s National Survey Data and found that voters often do not complete certain parts of a voting paper “not because they lack in education or are members of minority groups, but rather because they do not have enough information to cast a vote” (Wattenberg et al., 2000, p. 234). Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) found that “around 90% of voters in the 1988 Presidential Elections who classed themselves as ‘informed voters’, actually participated and voted; while only 20% of those who classed themselves as ‘not well informed’ subsequently voted” (p. 224). However, they noted in the 1992 election 72% classed themselves as ‘informed’, while only 16% of those who classed themselves as ‘not well informed’ actually voted.

It is well established in the academic literature that when there is an absence of political information this can be directly linked to a decrease in voter turnout (Hercus, 2012). Harris, Parackal, Rudd, and Williams (2006) suggest that less-informed voters are less likely to vote as they feel that their vote is pointless, and therefore abstain from voting altogether. Lassen (2005) explains that there may well be benefits to this phenomenon:

It can be optimal for uninformed independent voters to abstain from voting even though they may prefer one alternative to the other. The reason is that by abstaining, they effectively defer the choice to the informed voters who, by definition, vote for the correct policy (p. 105).

Larcinese (2007) reviewed survey data from the 1997 British General Election Study to explore the possibility of a relationship between an individual’s political knowledge and whether or not they chose to vote. He concluded that “political knowledge has a sizeable and statistically significant impact on the British citizens’ likelihood of voting” (p. 389).

Political information (or lack of it) can play a significant part in encouraging voter turnout in local government elections, much like in general elections (Hercus, 2012). Lassen (2005)
investigated the role of political knowledge in terms of its effects on voter turnout in Copenhagen’s municipal elections in 2000 and reported that those who felt they had been ‘informed’ were 20% more likely to vote (Lassen, 2005). Thus the reason for low voter turnout for local government elections seems to be consistent with that identified for general elections — a lack of information.

Lack of community integration
An additional reason for low turnout in local elections may be the lack of community integration. The level of community integration a person has can have a positive or negative effect on voter turnout, both in the general as well as the youth population (Wood, 2017; Hercus, 2012). High community integration is the concept that suggests that increasing your social ties within a community can increase your likelihood that you will participate in an election – particularly for local government elections. McLeod, Scheufele and Moy (1999) state that community integration is essential for any increase in political participation when it comes to a local level and that “a lack of social networks and ties to the community makes participation undesirable and difficult” (p. 316). Also, in the United Kingdom, Curtice (2005) states that “One of the reasons for the low turnout was the failure of parties to mobilise voters to vote. Voters were not motivated at all” (p. 778).

1.3 Explaining low youth voter turnout

Lack of information
As discussed above, the amount of information available to voters impacts on voter turnout, both in the general and youth population. Research has shown that there is no difference between general or local government elections when it comes to the role of political information for youth. Wells and Dudash (2007) from their research on political information in the 2004 US Presidential Election stated that:

Young citizens are motivated by a healthy dose of political information – such as exposure to a presidential debate – which seems to increase their desire to seek out additional knowledge. Additionally, the results of this study also suggest that increased learning may also increase young citizens’ political participation (p. 1288).
Other research suggests that university students have no impediment to accessing political information. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) found that “being part of a college [tertiary education institution] provides relatively free access to information about politics. Through living groups, extracurricular activities, and classes, students are less socially isolated that nonstudents” (p. 57). Notwithstanding this, academic literature shows that youth still feel they do not have enough political knowledge or know-how to turn out to vote. The reasons for this are unclear. There is some suggestion that youth who attend tertiary education outside of their home location could feel more isolated when it comes to relevant political information (Franklin, M., 2004). Niemi and Hanmer (2006) further showed that the more isolated youth are, the less likely they are to participate in voting, and that this is more likely now than it has been in the past. Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007) conducted focus groups with university students in the United States between 1996 and 2000 and found that a dominant reason for students not to participate in voting was a perceived lack of political information on candidates running for election and local issues (Kaid et al., 2007). Delli Carpini’s study on youth civic engagement also found that young adults routinely lack basic political information, ranging from general knowledge to institutional knowledge, which prevents them from becoming politically engaged (Delli Carpini, 2000). Thus, the resounding message is that youth tend to have lower levels of political information than the general population, which consequently means that they feel less included to vote and participate in both general and local government elections (Ellis, 2006). Whilst these declining trends are not new, they are becoming more troubling in developed countries where the proportion of youth compared to the overall population is increasing, which means that voter turnout has a noticeable impact on the response rate, and this demographic group has the potential to become a significant threat to democracy (Ellis, 2006).

Lack of community integration

Youth are seen as a section of the population which has low community integration. Youth are likely to have less social connectedness because people gain more experience as they become older and have gain more of a stake in their community and country (Ellis, 2006). Hooghe (2004) suggests that the transient lifestyle of the younger generation and lack of access to the labour market may also be implicated, saying:
Young people are not yet integrated into the labour market, they do not yet have children of their own, and probably they do not own their own family house. All of this implies that they are less likely to be members of trade unions, parents’ committees or neighbourhood watch associations. Furthermore, because of continued education, this young phase tends to become extended in Western societies (p. 336).

Niemi and Hanmer (2006) reiterate Hooghe’s analysis of youth voter behaviour in their research into university student voting turnout, and found that those who lived in proximity to their home town were more likely to vote. Niemi and Hanmer (2006) also note:

Proximity to home made a difference in whether a student voted. Eighty-five percent of those living within 30 minutes of their home claimed to have voted, compared to 78% of those who were one-half to two hours away, and 75% of those who were more than two hours away (p. 14).

It needs to be pointed out that community integration and community involvement are two different terms, especially when it comes to youth. Being involved in their community does not necessarily mean that youth are politically engaged (Dudash & Harris, 2011). In the US, a survey was conducted of university undergraduate students which showed that over 60% of them were involved in community services; however, only 16% belonged to a political or issue-based group (Dudash & Harris, 2011).

Lack of internal efficacy

Along with a lack of political engagement, youth have also been defined as having what is termed as ‘low internal efficacy’ whereby they place less emphasis on political engagement because they believe that they will not see efficient results (Russell, Fieldhouse, & Al, 2002; Saha, Print, & Edward, 2005; Sheerin, 2007). The low youth voter turnout around the world is regularly attributed to the inadequate political socialisation of individuals (Cook, 1985; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2007). Teixeria (1992) conducted a study which explored the influence of systematic and attitudinal factors on youth voter turnout in the United States between
1960 and 1988. He reported a decline in social and political connectedness, and in his opinion it best describes the decline in voter turnout (Teixeira, 1992). Lyons and Alexander (2000) also reviewed political socialisation data between 1952 and 1996 and concluded that a decrease in voter turnout during this period might have been the result of the decline in political socialisation. The decline in turnout cannot, therefore, be attributed to a life cycle effect as the decline is evident over time and across most age groups (with the exception of the oldest age group). Rather, what is happening is a cohort effect and, as such, requires proactive intervention to try and address.

Research has also shown a strong relationship between the political interest and voter turnout of parents and the voting turnout of their children (Hercus, 2012). In the lead-up to the 2008 US Presidential Election, Gross (2007) researched the influence of parents when it comes to youth political engagement. He found that among those who had parents who were very interested, 84% would themselves vote in the presidential election. They also found that of children whose parents classed themselves as ‘somewhat interested’ in politics, 80% expected that they would vote, with only 2.4% stating that they would not (Gross, 2007). Additionally, voters may mimic the behaviour of those around them when they feel that they do not hold the necessary information to vote. These shortcuts can come from political parties, family, friends, or work colleagues (Berent, Krosnick, & Lupia, 2016). However, an essential finding was that when parents were ‘politically disinterested,’ their children were also less interested, with around 64% saying that they would vote in the presidential election, and 8% stating that they would not vote at all (Gross, 2007). Gross concludes that “youth with politically interested parents have a 20% greater chance of going to the polls in the upcoming election than those with politically disinterested parents” (p. 8).

Previously, the 2002 National Youth Survey conducted in the United States included questions on the voting habits of the participants’ parents; this was to see if there was any relationship between the participation of parents and participation of their children (Jones, 2007). Jones’ (2007) findings are in accordance with Gross’, and she concludes:
Among young people whose parents took them to vote, 69.1% consider voting very or somewhat important. Among young people whose parents did not take them to vote, only 39% viewed voting as very or somewhat important (p. 7).

Education level, marital status, and age of entering parenthood have all been found to be factors affecting youth voting tendencies. A 2005 study by Sandell and Plutzer found that having divorced parents can reduce youth turnout rates by around 10%. Parents’ higher educational levels can also correspond to a positive trend when it comes to their children’s voter turnout (Verba, Schlozman, & Burns, 2005). Research conducted by Pacheco (2008) found that those who are parents earlier in their lives are also less likely to turnout to vote. Education of the youth voter as well as their parents has been found to be another important factor when reviewing youth-based voter turnout. However, this can vary between countries (Ellis, 2006). Those who have a higher level of education are more likely to turn out to vote in both general and local elections. As Ellis (2006) points out:

There is growing evidence that younger age groups are losing or never gaining the habit of voting and are carrying their lack of interest through into later life. Young people are also the least politically knowledgeable, and those who are already politically involved are, for the most part, the same people who vote (p. 15).

He went on to emphasise that a voter’s first elections establish a pattern:

The first three elections for which a voter is qualified are of defining importance, and that if voting does not become a routine event early in a person’s life, the potential for that individual to participate consistently may be lost (p. 16).

It is also well documented that the level of an individual’s education (Leighley, 2010), their race (Schlozman, Burns, Verba, & Donahue, 1995), gender (Schlozman et al., 1995), possibly even someone’s genetics (Bond, Settle, Fariss, Jones, & Fowler, 2017). Fourth, along with the intrinsic characteristics stated above, a study from the United Kingdom Institute for Conflict Research in 2006 showed that despite some youth being cynical about politics, politicians, and institutions, in general they are not necessarily apathetic about political
issues (Institute for Conflict Research, 2006). The research focused on the voting participation of youth in Northern Ireland and found that while they were not overly interested in local body politics, they did feel that politicians were not interested in listening to their opinions. Youth were found, however, to take an interest in issues which were likely to directly affect their lives (Institute for Conflict Research, 2006). A similar trend was identified by Harris, Wyn, and Younes (2010) in a study involving 970 Australian youth.

Political socialisation describes the process whereby individuals acquire their political identities, values and behaviours, usually during childhood and adolescent years, which normally remain with them throughout their lives (Neudorf & Smets, 2017). Political socialisation gained academic attention in the 1950s. Hyman (1959) defined political socialisation as an individual’s “learning of social patterns corresponding to this societal position as mediated through various agencies of society” (Hyman, 1959, p 25). Political socialisation is an important aspect of a young person developing their political attitudes and values. Political socialisation can also lead to some youth being inactive when it comes to voting (Henn & Weinstein, 2006). Henn & Weinstein undertook a nationwide survey of over 700 young people and found, generally, that while they are supportive of new electoral methods [like eVoting] they are unlikely to be persuaded to turnout to vote because they felt that the political process still marginalised young people (Henn & Weinstein, 2006, p 517). What is interesting to note from their research is that youth are actually interested in politics, with 56% of their respondents saying that they are interested in politics. They also go on to say that “young people are particularly interested in political issues” (Henn & Weinstein, 2006, p 524). This is also discussed by Sloam (2007), who states that “young people remain interested in politics (broadly defined) and are active in alternative modes of political participation. The problem is not, therefore, political apathy, but alienation from the political system (Sloam, 2017, p 548). As noted above, civics education is one way to try to address the political alienation of young people and this may be a necessary prerequisite for youth in order for them to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by eVoting.
1.4 Studies of voter turnout in New Zealand local elections

In New Zealand, information about voting and how to vote is provided by the Electoral Commission for general elections, and local councils for local government elections. Information about candidates and political parties for central elections are more widely spread on social media, television, and other media sources than it is for local government elections. Due to their nature, general elections have much more visibility than local government elections. Lack of available information could also be a contributory factor, in that New Zealand education has minimal levels of civics education. As stated in the Ministry of Education civics education guide (2020), “There is considerable variability in the extent to which learning experiences at school promote active citizenship and support students to develop a robust understanding of political institutions, process, and systems” (p. 6). This could also have a bearing on voter turnout and individuals lacking knowledge.

If we look into local government turnout more closely, the 2016 Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) report found that those most likely to vote were New Zealand Europeans, older, male, couples, and those who had been living at the same address for more than 10 years.

Research conducted by Crothers (2016), as shown in table 4, looked for motivations to vote, focussing on Auckland. He found similar motivations to those revealed by the LGNZ surveys.

Table 4: Auckland voter motivations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Respondents who said it applies to them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting is a democratic duty</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a say</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I could not complain if I had not voted</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I care about a specific local issue</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because I like/dislike a particular candidate  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Respondents who said it applies to them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t have enough information</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacked interest</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were too busy or had other commitments</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced from Local Government New Zealand (2016)

Research undertaken by LGNZ (2016), which is set out in table 4, identified why people did not vote in the 2016 local government election. They found the three most significant reasons for not voting were that voters did not have enough information, lacked interest, or were too busy.

Complementing the information contained in table 5, LGNZ conducted a study in 2002 where they determined that the leading cause of individuals not voting in local government elections was a perceived lack of information (Local Government New Zealand, 2002). Please see appendix one for examples of the limited information which candidates are able to provide in the candidate information booklet. Sitting alongside the LGNZ data is a survey conducted by the Eight Cities Quality of Life Survey 2002, which asked those who did not participate in the 2001 local government election their reasons for not doing so. The most frequently cited reason (32%) for not voting was due to a lack of information on the candidates (Cavana, McMillen, & Palmer, 2004). LGNZ conducted a similar survey two years later which found nearly identical results to the Eight Cities ‘Quality of Life’ survey (Cavana et al., 2004). In LGNZ’s 2016 survey, they found that this lack of information and candidate knowledge increased between 2004 and 2016. Put another way, the voter’s level of information and candidate knowledge decreased in this time period; this is shown in graph 3 below.
As mentioned above, registered voters in New Zealand local government elections are sent their voting papers and information booklet via the post. This booklet, which is known as the ‘candidate information booklet’, has limited information about candidates. Candidates can write no more than 150 words about themselves, their views, policies, positions, and why individuals should vote for them. See appendix one for examples of what candidates can say. Cavana et al. (2004) measured the perceived effectiveness of the candidate information booklet for the 2005 local government election. They reported that 96% of those who undertook the survey stated that they had received their voting papers, and 71% of these said that “they had read or looked at the booklet about candidates” (Cavana et al., 2004). Only 37% stated that they “strongly agreed” that the candidate information booklet was a “useful guide to help them on who to vote for”, with an additional 42% who “agreed” that the candidate information booklet was helpful (Cavana et al., 2004). This left only 11% who “disagreed”, and 4% that “strongly disagreed” that the candidate information booklet was helpful (Cavana et al., 2004, p.15). What this research indicated was that those who consume the relevant political information are more likely to vote in local government elections than those who do not (Cavana et al., 2004).
In the aforementioned 2002 LGNZ study, non-voters were asked “could you please tell me why you didn’t vote?” Fourteen percent responded that they had a lack of interest in the election or that they could not be bothered (Local Government New Zealand, 2002, p. 8). This aligns with the findings of Cavana et al.’s (2004) that 18% of respondents in their study indicated that they were “not interested / didn’t vote / couldn’t be bothered” when asked why they did not vote in the 2004 local government election (Cavana et al., 2004, p.10). In their 2002 report, LGNZ found that those who resided for a short period in one location were less likely to turn out to vote than those who lived in an area for a more substantial amount of time (Local Government New Zealand, 2002). In their research, LGNZ established the relationship between the amount of time someone has lived in a particular area and their likelihood of participating in the local elections (Local Government New Zealand, 2002). This is shown in table 6, which shows that if you have lived in the same residence for over 10 years, then the likelihood of your turning out to vote is 68%, compared to those who have lived in same location for less than three years (37%), and three to 10 years (48%).

Table 6: Likely participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of residency</th>
<th>Percentage of voter turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than three years</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to 10 years</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced from Local Government New Zealand (2002)

LGNZ conducted a post-election survey which shows that the top three reasons why people choose to vote in local government elections are:

1. Values, such as a sense of democratic duty;
2. Personal or community concerns, such as a desire to remove an unpopular politician or improve a local area; and
3. Instrumental factors, such as practical difficulties like the absence of post boxes or lack of candidate information.

(Local Government New Zealand, 2016).
It may be the case that those who are avid consumers of political information are those who are more likely to vote in the first place. People who are more inclined to vote go looking for information to help them make their decisions. Nevertheless, it is also the case, that if there is more political information available, people are more likely to be inadvertently exposed to such information, increasing their likelihood of voting.

Beyond the information provided above, there is a paucity of data concerning youth turnout in both general and local government elections in New Zealand (Dudash & Harris, 2011; Hercus, 2012; Sheerin, 2007; Zvulun, 2009). A telephone survey conducted by LGNZ of 2,509 people across five cities, asking about the 2001 local government elections, found 61% of participants had voted in the election. However, only 34% of those aged between 18 and 24 years indicated that they voted (Local Government New Zealand, 2002). This showed that the older you are, the more likely you were to vote in local government elections (Local Government New Zealand, 2002). These statistics reinforce the earlier point, that youth turnout is a critical area for further investigation. However, interest in the area from a research perspective has been sparse. One academic study into youth participation or voter turnout in New Zealand by Hercus, 2012 showed similar trends to research conducted by LGNZ and Crothers. A significant theme which emerged from Hercus’ study was the lack of information and knowledge of the election (be it general or local). Youth reported that “the ease of obtaining information was a facilitating factor for them voting in national elections” (Hercus, 2012, p. 59). However, Hercus pointed out that many of these “uninformed” participants still voted in the general election. While many of the participants in this research stated that they voted in the general election without knowing all of the facts, this did not translate to local government elections. Again, a major theme from these young participants was they did not vote due to a “lack of information”, and the task of finding out information was too burdensome for most of them. Other participants who did not vote ignored any information given to them about the local government election and indicated that they saw it as boring and not relevant, and that any information provided to them lacked quality (Hercus, 2012).

Hercus (2012) also examined whether the type of electoral system being used had an effect on youth voting. Participants stated that it was “easy” to vote in the general election, they
could easily understand how to vote, and that the ‘Orange Man’\(^2\) told them what they needed to do (Hercus, 2012). However, some of the same participants stated that they found voting in the local government elections to be more difficult, with some not understanding the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system (Hercus, 2012). This was not the case for all participants, with a number stating that voting “[is] way more effective in local body elections, since it’s not going to be wasted”, and another participant stating “to be honest I was kinda excited by STV, it’s a small community, and out of that community only a small percentage would even vote, you think your vote counts more” (Hercus, 2012, p. 72).

Hercus (2012) also discusses the transient nature of youth having a specific effect on their voting habits and being a significant contributing factor as to why youth can be seen as uninterested in local government elections. They simply do not see the benefits of voting for candidates when they are likely to be moving on in the short term, and consider the impact that their vote may have on those who remain in the area. Those youth who are more transient, or who have recently arrived in a new location, can also be at a disadvantage when it comes to local government elections, as voting papers are sent out via the postal system and addresses need to be updated. Youth are often considered a very transient part of the population (Nielsen, 2003). Hercus (2012) states:

The transient nature of the participants appeared to play an important role in their decision not to vote in the local election (both in Dunedin or their home town). Many of the participants felt that since they intended to leave Dunedin once they graduated from their studies, the outcome of the local election would not affect them. Therefore, they felt no desire to vote (p. 72).

Participants in the Hercus (2012) study stated that “I’m only going to be here another year after this, so the changes that happen to Dunedin won’t really affect me very much” and “local elections could be really important and relevant ... a lot of us are just kinda here temporally [sic] while we’re studying, so we don’t see that long-term effect” (p. 88). Several participants stated that they were influenced by socialising agents, mainly their parents,

\(^2\) The ‘Orange Man’ is a cartoon-type figure developed by the New Zealand Electoral Commission for helping to explain what’s happening with an election throughout the electoral cycle.
when it came to voting in general elections (Woods, 2013; Gross, 2007; Hercus, 2012). The role of political information and socialising agents has been found to play an integral role in increasing voter participation and turnout, as it helps to establish positive habit formation in children and youth and provides them with vital information on the importance of participating in the political system (Hercus, 2012). Within the focus groups, some revealed that parental influence could have either an ‘active’ or ‘passive’ influence (Hercus, 2012). When it came to local government elections, the influence of socialising agents appeared to have less influence, participants stating that they believed that general elections are more critical than local government elections, and they attributed less importance to them (Hercus, 2012). One participant stated “I guess I care more about whether my student loan is gonna have interest on it, than what day rubbish goes out” (Hercus, 2012, p. 87). Many of the participants felt obliged to vote in general elections because it had been drummed into them about how important it was, and they wished to “have their say” (Hercus, 2012, p. 90).

Conclusion

There is a trend of declining voter turnout in national and local elections around the world. New Zealand is no exception to these trends. One fact driving this decline is arguably a lack of information, but this is only one possible explanation. Further explanations are outlined in the next chapter.
In chapter one, I established that voter turnout is essential for any healthy democracy, that it is declining, and that youth political participation is crucial for the future. In this chapter I discuss theoretical explanations of political participation. It is important to see how these theories may help inform us on possible ways to address low voter turnout amongst youth. In this chapter I outline five main theories and consider how these theories apply to the experiences of youth voters. I discuss how rational choice theory has been one of the most influential theories in the 20th century, advocating that turnout will be higher when individuals think that their vote will make a difference. But how well does this theory relate to youth and voter turnout, and do youth actually think about the cost of voting? I then move on to discuss socio-economic theory; this states that individuals are more likely to vote if they have a higher socio-economic background. But what does this mean for youth who are just starting out in life? Following on from this, I discuss socialisation theory, which argues that an individual’s political characteristics and political world view are formed at a young age through ‘agents.’ Socialisation theory suggests an increase in a young individual’s sense of civic duty might increase the likelihood of their turning out to vote. The next theory I discuss is mobilisation theory. This looks at what effect external factors, like political parties and social networks, have on individuals and how those factors serve to mobilise the population to increase voter turnout, and whether this has any connection with youth. The last of the five theories considered is post-materialism. This theory explains that the traditional way of voting may not motivate youth to vote, but can post-materialism explain the different ways in which youth can express their political views?

It must be acknowledged that the importance of elections plays a big part in turnout. I conclude this chapter by discussing the differences between first- and second-order elections. New Zealand local government elections are very much second-order, in that voters deem these elections to be less important than central government elections. I discuss how second-order elections can explain why youth are under-represented when it comes to voting statistics in local government elections.
2.1 Theories of voter turnout

Rational choice theory

Rational choice is probably the most influential theory on voter behaviour since the 1950s. Rational choice theory was first formulated in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Downs, 1957) and had a significant influence on explanations of voter behaviour throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The theory explains voter motivation in terms of an individual’s ‘utility maximisation.’ Rational choice maintains that voting is a transaction that involves costs and benefits (James, 2020). Evans states: “Rational choice theory brings to the fore people’s intentions and motives, and it has given an additional and fruitful push to account for human agency and to apply agential explanations” (2004, p. 70). According to rational choice theory, when individuals believe that their vote will make a difference, voter turnout is higher (Heywood, 2002). Rational choice theorists believe that the level of competitiveness among political parties, electoral proportionality, multi-partyism, and the number of legislative chambers are important determinants of voter turnout (Blais, 2000; Downs, 1957; Franklin, M., 2004; Jackman & Miller, 1995; Powell, 1986). As the cost of a vote is a key idea of rational choice theory, it is common during an election period to hear slogans such as ‘make sure you vote’ and ‘every vote counts,’ but what are the chances that one single vote will change an election’s outcome? In terms of rational choice theory, if everyone believes that their single vote could change the outcome of an election, the likelihood of their voting is high (Ciccone, 2002; Lomasky & Brennan, 2000; Tucak & Sabo, 2015). But as more people vote, the likelihood of one person’s vote determining the outcome declines. Thus, as Waldon (2004) states, “when the influence of an individual voter on the election results is insignificant, the decision not to vote can be fully rational” (p. 237). The degree of competitiveness of the election may make it more rational to vote. In first-past-the-post electoral systems, many people’s votes are ‘wasted’, and so this could deter voting. Under proportional representation systems, your vote is more likely to ‘count’, and this could stimulate turnout. For example, as mentioned above, the first MMP election in New Zealand in 1996 had a high turnout. Unfortunately, this was not sustained in subsequent elections (Curtin, 2010). As regards youth voting, Bob Franklin (2004) considered that electoral competition could have a substantial effect on potential youth voters. Still, research from Canada showed that electoral competition had no significant
impact on young people’s decision to vote in their 2000 local government election (Blais, 2000). So, rational choice theory highlights the contradictory behaviour of voters when one tries to use costs and benefits to explain turnout (Blais, 2000). What personal utility is gained in terms of turning out to vote is often lower than the actual costs incurred of voting (James, 2020). In elections involving large populations, the chances of an individual vote determining the outcome of the election is minuscule (Blais, 2000). Therefore, a rational voter may ask themselves: what is gained from casting a vote that will probably not change the result? The contradiction is, of course, that people still vote in large numbers, even though they are aware that their individual choice on the voting paper is unlikely to be decisive (Mueller, 2003). This suggests people vote for reasons other than to maximise their personal utility. For example, they may vote because they consider it a citizen’s duty, or because of peer pressure.

Although rational choice theory has significant weaknesses as a general explanation of voter turnout, it can offer some insights into why youth turnout is low. As turnout is lower among young voters, does that mean that the ‘costs’ of voting are particularly high amongst that group of voters, and if so, why? Such costs might include access to information, the time it takes to enrol to vote, and the voting method itself. Rational choice theory may be used to partially explain the effects of many youth not residing in the same area for extended periods of time and their reluctance to update their voting details. Usually, tertiary students can change their place of residence every year, meaning that since their voting packs and candidate information are sent via the post, they must ensure that their addresses are up to date. Some of the participants in Hercus’s (2012) study thought that they should be able to vote in their home towns if they are only in another location for a short period of time (for example, for study), and not have to change their voting address if they move for a short period of time. Not voting for candidates in their home town made them feel disconnected (Hercus, 2012). Rational choice theory therefore goes some way to explain that young people are perhaps not being motivated enough to ensure their details are up to date because the cost of doing so in terms of time outweighs what little benefit actual voting brings. Furthermore, it is costly to obtain information about politics; at the national level, people use party labels as a shortcut to obtain such information. However, such party labels in local government elections in New Zealand are largely missing. Also, as I pointed out
earlier, information provided for local government elections is scant. Therefore, voters feel the cost of obtaining information is greater than the benefit, especially if local government does not appear to do anything important. However, why should this affect young people more than older people?

If rational choice theory is at play in youth voting behaviour, then the kinds of initiatives required to improve turnout amongst young people must identify and then minimise or remove those costs young people associate with voting. Such initiatives will be addressed in chapter three, when I discuss possible electoral reforms.

Socio-economic theory

Socio-economic theory states that socio-economic status and, in particular, differences in education, can be used to explain why individuals do or do not vote. The more educated an individual is, the more likely they will have the required skills, knowledge, and sense of civic duty to participate in voting (Goodman, 2018; Almond & Verba, 1963; Tenn, 2007). In addition to education, an individual’s income and occupation status will influence how likely they are to turn out to vote, with higher socio-economic status linked to a higher likelihood of voting (Almond & Verba, 1963). Zvulun (2009) states that “There is a correlation between the socio-economic resources available to an individual and [their] feeling of what has often been called ‘political competence’” (p. 62). Socio-economic theory explains that individuals who have significant financial assets, skills, and leisure time, have more of a sense of understanding and identify with politics and the voting system, and they are therefore more likely to vote than those who do not possess these factors to the same extent (Zvulun, 2009). Previous studies had identified formal education as a socio-economic asset that was positively associated with turnout. Yet it is now less clear that formal types of education have positive impacts on turnout as earlier studies suggested (Gidengil et al, 2019). As Gidengil et al (2019) state, “the association between education and voting is considerably reduced when parental education, parental voting are taken into account” (Gidengil et al, 2019, p 349).

It may be the case, that while education per se seems not to influence turnout, the type of education may be a critical factor. Whether civics education can impact on political participation is something that is explored later.
There are, however, criticisms of socio-economic theory. First, the assumption that education has a direct impact on income and occupation status is at odds with situations where an individual’s income and occupation are unrelated to their educational achievements (Woodly, 2005). Second, the assertion that education fosters a sense of civic duty in an individual has also been criticised (Woodly, 2005). Similarly, simply because someone is educated, it does not mean that they are civic-minded. Finally, if one does subscribe to the socio-economic explanation, then why are voting patterns in the majority of established democracies showing a downward trend in voter turnout, given that these democracies possess citizens with higher levels of formal education than ever before (Sheerin, 2007)? Gallego, 2009 states that “well-educated citizens vote more frequently in the USA, however, in many other countries, no such differences are observed” (Gallego, 2009, p 25).

Civics education and political literacy can be linked into socio-economic theory. The New Zealand Political Studies Association defines civics education as “The knowledge, skills and shared expectations of citizens who participate in, and sustain, democracies” (NZPSA, 2018, p 3). Civics education has received increased debate around the world in the past two decades (Pontes, Henn & Griffiths, 2019). Academics and politicians alike have been concerned about the apparent non-commitment of established democracies to establish well thought-out civics education programmes (including in New Zealand) (O’Toole, 2015; Henn and Oldfield, 2016). Youth of today are seen to have lower political awareness than previous youth generations (Henn & Foard, 2012). However, studies have also shown that while youth are disinterested in mainstream politics, they can be attracted to, and engage in information, or other forms of political participation (O’Toole, 2015). It is common around the world that youth are more interested in other forms of political participation (Kitanova, 2020). Kitanova found in her research that “socio-economic factors are crucial for youth political participation, context matters in shaping levels of political participation among young people” (Kitanova, 2020, p 819).
While civics education is on the demand side of the equation (see above), it does feed into the supply side, in that for young people’s ability to make use of possible changes in the supply side, for example, eVoting, they have to feel confidence to do so. Civics education could help foster such confidence and provide the political literacy necessary to shape young voters who are more likely to avail themselves to changes in electoral law relating to eVoting, compulsory vote and reducing the voting age (Henn and Oldfield, 2016).

When applying socio-economic theory to New Zealand voting patterns, it is difficult to explain the declining trend in voter turnout. Since the end of World War II, New Zealanders’ levels of education have increased substantially, as have levels of affluence, while voter turnout has reduced. For example, in 1963, approximately 5% of the population had obtained a university qualification; by 2000 this proportion had risen to about 20%. Furthermore, it is precisely in the age group where levels of education are the highest (18 to 24-year-olds) that turnout is the lowest. Therefore, socio-economic theory is not an adequate explanation of low voter turnout amongst young people in New Zealand.

Socialisation theory

Socialisation theory states that an individual’s political attitudes and behaviour are established when they are children (Neindorf & Smets, 2017; Torney-Purta, 2000). In particular, what is taught and learnt about politics and political participation at an early age is influential (Yates & Youniss, 1999). ‘Agents’ such as parents, school, friends, and church leaders, provide sources of political attitudes and behaviour that children then adopt (Greenstein, 1969; Hess & Torney, 1967). Greenstein’s research involved primary school children in the 1960s and was used to provide support for socialisation theory (Greenstein, 1969). Delli Carpini (2000) stated that:

   Early socialisation is critical to the development of one’s political worldview. Since particular age cohorts share a set of common social and political experiences, each new generation tends to develop its own ‘civic style’ or set of deep-seated attitudes and practices (p. 345).
Socialisation theory was popular during the 1960s and witnessed a revival at the end of the 20th century (Neundorf & Smets, 2017; Sapiro, 1998; Torney-Purta, 2000; Yates & Youniss, 1999). Contemporary socialisation theorists use a more interactive and complex interpretation of the theory. They demonstrate that socialisation was a more diverse process, which includes other institutions and external factors, such as media (especially social media) and peer groups (Simon & Merrill, 1998; Torney-Purta, 2000).

Parents/guardians provide a pivotal role in developing political information and interests in their children (Plutzer, 2002). This can be linked to socialisation theory, where ‘agents’ are thought to guide youth in making political decisions based on their own values. Wells and Dudash (2007) researched how youth obtained and utilised political knowledge for the 2004 US Presidential Election with particular reference to socialisation theory, and found that for youth:

The most frequently cited source of political information is their political talk with others. As such, young citizens frequently turn to their family and friends to discuss politics ... this confirms that parents, friends, school and the media all continue to be key agents of political knowledge and socialisation (p. 1286).

The concept of socialisation theory can be linked to the concept of civic duty when addressing voter turnout. Civic duty is defined as “an ethical obligation to vote in an election” (Blais, 2000, p. 93). As outlined in Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008), “citizens worry that others will think less of them if they fail to participate in elections” (p. 33). This is why socialisation may increase an individual’s sense of civic duty and chances of turning out to vote in an election. According to both the LGNZ (2002) research and Cavana et al. (2004), a duty to vote is often cited by people as the reason why they turned out to vote in an election. Socialisation theory can help explain why people vote despite the low likelihood of their vote ‘making a difference.’ In other words, people vote out of a sense of civic duty, not because they think their vote will decide the outcome of the election.

If the socialisation of an individual’s belief system, including their political beliefs, is shaped early in an individual’s life, how might that explain youth voter turnout, and, if it is true,
what are the best ways to boost youth turnout? Some youth do not see voting as a civic duty, and nor do their parents (Goodman, 2018). The most common explanation for low voter turnout by youth is expounded by Sheerin (2007): their life cycle demands require them to establish themselves individually from their parents, gain further education or employment, and establish relationships. Sheerin says this must all take place before they have the time or inclination to participate in the political sphere and, as such, are less likely to make an effort to vote as they are already facing other challenges. It could be argued that this is an ‘anti-socialisation’ theory, whereby youth want to distance themselves from their parents.

If socialisation theory is correct, then the decline in voter turnout could be turned around by giving young people access to information about politics at an early age through avenues in addition to family and friends. Civics education within schools is frequently raised in the literature as an option to boost turnout (Woods, 2013; Kaid et al., 2007). Riedel (2002) researched four Minnesota high schools’ community service programmes and found that offering civics education increased engagement by those students who had requested more civics education within schools. Complementary to this, research conducted by Simon and Merrill (1998) also concluded that civics education could increase opportunities for young people to engage with elections.

**Mobilisation theory**

Mobilisation theory is quite different from the previous theories. Other theories look at individuals and the characteristics that lead them to participate (the ‘supply side’ of voting). Mobilisation theory looks at the ‘demand’ side of voting from external bodies. It looks at how political parties, social networks, and external bodies may influence (mobilise) individuals to vote, strengthen their engagement in the political process, and increase individual involvement within the community (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Rosenstone and Hansen argue that voter turnout has declined because mobilisation agents are less engaging and are not successfully mobilising all sectors of the population, especially youth.

Mobilisation theory argues that the more effort politicians put in to encourage individuals to turn out and vote, the more likely it is that they will vote (Zvulun, 2009). However, it is not
simply a matter of encouraging individuals to turn out at election time. Mobilisation theory states that political parties, external bodies, and social networks need to go beyond ensuring that individuals cast a ballot; they also need to ensure that people join in non-electoral forms of participation. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) suggest that under mobilisation theory, political parties tend to pay more attention to groups or sections of the population who may ‘side’ with them politically, and generally do not target those who are not supporters from a political or ideological point of view.

Mobilisation theory may explain to some extent the reduction of voter turnout in New Zealand. Membership of political parties has been estimated to have declined from 22% of the population in the 1950s to around 5% in the early 2000s (Vowles, 2004). Miller (2010) states that political parties in New Zealand are now concentrating more on ‘grassroots campaigning’ as a form of mobilisation. It may be that parties make a minimal effort to mobilise youth as they believe young people are less likely to vote (Miller & Rahn, 2002). In New Zealand, political parties are largely absent from local government elections, and do not perform a mobilisation role. It may be the case that local government candidates also do not seek to mobilise youth in New Zealand. Some candidates may see that the amount of effort required is not reflected in the number of youth votes that they may receive. This creates a vicious circle, with younger people not voting as they perceive that political parties and/or candidates standing for election fail to address the concerns of their age demographic (Torney-Purta, 2000).

Hercus (2012) showed that youth viewed candidates running for the Dunedin City Council election as being of poor quality, and that the council at the time did not adequately represent them. Some participants in Hercus’s study stated that candidates largely ignored youth, made them feel unwelcome, or were negative towards young people, and that none of the candidates focused on issues relevant to youth (Hercus, 2012). These findings fit well with mobilisation theory, as repeatedly the message heard is that youth feel ignored by politicians. One of Hercus’s participants summed this up nicely:

It just felt that there was no target[ing] student votes. Maybe because they assume from previous years that students don’t tend to vote. However, maybe if they had
made an effort to be on campus, or ... did more advertising around campus, perhaps more people would have voted at the elections. Alternatively, if they presented policies that would be favourable to students ... (p. 80).

For the 2008 General Election in New Zealand, the Electoral Commission sent a text message to a sample of registered voters, reminding them to vote on election day (Hercus, 2012). The commission conducted a post-election study, which found that those individuals who received the text had a turnout rate 4.7% higher than those who did not receive it (Catt & Northcote, 2009). Although the text message reminder did not target youth, it did have a higher success rate with those voters who enrolled within the month before election day, a group which usually has an over-representation of youth voters (Catt & Northcote, 2009). This experiment indicates that mobilisation theory may be applicable to the experiences of youth voters.

**Post-materialism**

Post-materialism was popularised by Inglehart in his 1977 book *The Silent Revolution*. This revolution took place in the post-war years in Western Europe and was a shift from the older materialist values of those who were primarily concerned with economic issues. It moved onto new social movements, which looked at individualism, human rights, the environment, and overall economic well-being. It is a tool to help understand modern culture and looks at an individual’s values system and at their self-expression and autonomy.

Post-materialism may go some way towards explaining the changing political landscape in New Zealand, particularly regarding the youth vote. Instead of the traditional form of voting, Gustafson (2003) argues that alternative ways of voting may motivate young New Zealanders to express their political views. Vowles (2004) suggests that while voter turnout is steadily declining in New Zealand, involvement in non-traditional forms of political engagement is increasing. For instance, in 1985 only 5% of adults had participated in some form of consumer product boycott, and only 13% had taken part in protests or demonstrations. By 2004, these numbers had risen to 32% and 20% respectively (Vowles, 2004), and by 2017 involvement in consumer product boycotts had risen to 35%, with
participation in protests and demonstrations still at 20% (New Zealand Electoral Study, 2017). This suggests that while young people may participate less in conventional forms of participation (voting), they are increasing their participation in non-conventional forms of participation. If this is the case, then there is even greater urgency to reform the voting system so that voting will be at least a complement, rather than an unappealing alternative, to other forms of political participation.

As outlined above, a range of theories seek to explain political participation, and some of these theories may be helpful in explaining why many young people are not bothering to turn out to vote. Where appropriate, these theories will be re-examined in light of the findings of survey and focus groups. Before that, however, it is necessary to distinguish between first- and second-order elections, because the applicability of some of the above theories relates directly to turnout in second-order elections.

2.2 First- and second-order elections

Reif and Schmitt (1997) argue that national elections are known as ‘first-order elections’ because they are more dominant and critical to the operation of the country. ‘Second-order elections,’ which encompass local and regional ones as well as elections to the European Parliament, are perceived as less influential. The challenges surrounding turnout are amplified when dealing with second-order elections. Second-order theory, as defined by Reif and Schmitt (1997), is “An idea that the disparity in voter turnout between national [general] and local elections is due to the voters’ perception that national [general] elections are more important to them than local elections” (p. 110). So, the underlying assumption for second-order elections is that there is less ‘skin in the game,’ and second-order elections are perceived to be uninteresting, which results in lower voter turnout (Reif & Schmitt, 1997).

Rational choice theory has a role to play here, as voters consider the benefits of voting in second-order elections to be low and so are less willing to participate. Rallings and Thrasher (2006) elaborate on the similarities with the classical rational choice theory, stating that:
If the costs of voting are substantially similar to the two contests [general and local elections], but the expected benefits rather less at one type of election than the other, then there is less reason to turn out (p. 336).

In the early 1980s, Morlan (1984) conducted a comparative study reviewing voter turnout in both general and local elections in the United States and Europe between 1959 and 1979. He found that:

Judged on the basis of voter turnout, one fundamental aspect of public participation, citizens in all countries studied, perceived, national elections to be more important than local ones … in every instance, average turnout was higher in national [general] than in municipal elections, with the difference considerably less in Western Europe than in the United States (p. 468).

Morlan concluded that in the 2001 general and 2002 local government elections in the United Kingdom, “those who vote at both types of elections tend to have a sharper sense of civic duty and/or an incentive to vote” (p. 333). This conclusion suggests both rational choice and socio-economic theories may be relevant.

Henderson and McEwen (2010) conducted cross-sectional research on voter turnout in local government elections in nine OECD countries compared with national elections between 2003 and 2006. Their research led them to challenge aspects of second-order theory. They found that not all general election turnout rates are higher than local government turnout rates. Whilst they agreed that second-order theory might explain why general election voter turnout is usually higher than local government turnout, they did not feel it explains why there can be considerable differences in voter turnout between countries. Henderson and McEwen (2010) went on to expand the theory as “not just to explain different participation [voter turnout] rates between general and local elections, but also to explain differences in levels of participation [voter turnout] across regions” (p. 413). They consider regional governments to have more power or autonomy, which results in citizens perceiving that there is more ‘at stake’ and that their vote is ‘worth more,’ making it more likely they turn out and vote – a rational choice explanation. The authors also revisited the theory of
socialisation and stated that “the community has an attachment to their local government as they have the strongest connection with the community” (p. 413). Therefore, those who have a lower attachment to their local government are less likely to vote (Hercus, 2012). Mobilisation theory also has a role to play here, since local government elections have much less information available to them, and the voting population is not as engaged or mobilised to vote. Also, in some countries such as the United Kingdom, political parties are actively involved in local elections, while in some countries, including New Zealand, political parties play a very limited role.

Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined various theoretical explanations of political participation, and suggested how such theories could be used to explain low turnout amongst youth. I discussed the differences between first- and second-order elections and how local elections, as second-order ones, could see low youth participation.

Given our understanding of what may explain why people in general, and youth in particular, may or may not vote, in the next chapter I consider possible reforms to the practice of voting: eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age to 16 years. Have such reforms the potential to overcome some of the obstacles to voting identified in the various theories of political participation?
Chapter Three – Reforms to increase youth engagement

This chapter responds to the challenges of low voter turnout identified in chapter one, drawing on the theories, where appropriate, outlined in the second chapter. In particular this chapter focuses on ways to address low voter turnout, with particular emphasis on proposals that might engage youth voters. I review three possible ways to increase voter turnout, each of which has been debated to some degree in New Zealand and elsewhere: eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age. In each case I will: 1) explain the purpose of the reform and outline the arguments for and against; 2) consider how (or if) the reform addresses obstacles to turnout raised in the voting theories; and 3) consider where these reforms have been implemented and assess their relative success. The ultimate purpose here is to consider, from both a practical and a theoretical perspective, what solutions each reform might offer for increasing youth voter turnout. In focusing on these three reforms, I discounted other proposals that have attracted less debate, or are more extreme (like appointing rather than electing politicians) and so are highly unlikely to be seriously considered by policy-makers.

There have already been many attempts, made by many countries, to try to increase youth voter turnout. These attempts have had limited success. Two particular examples are worth noting. In the United States, an initiative called ‘Rock the Vote’ is aimed explicitly at enrolling young people to vote, and has been claimed to be successful at engaging youth and increasing voter turnout among young people (Rock the Vote, 2011). In the United Kingdom, a Youth Parliament was established in 1999. This gave students aged from 11 to 18 years an opportunity to ‘stand for office’ and be elected to a position within their local council and work on several community programmes (Children & Young People Now, 2009). Due to the success of this programme, the initiative was expanded in 2008 to include a ‘Young Mayors’ programme. This programme provided these elected young mayors access to public money to conduct programmes and projects within their communities (Children & Young People Now, 2009). Even though these methods had showed positive signs of engaging youth through various civic activities, lack of funding has resulted in slower progress than anticipated.
3.1 eVoting

Some authors suggest that voting turnout is embedded in what can be seen as an old, outdated model from the past – postal voting and booth-type voting (Krimmer, Duenas-Cid, Krivonosova, Vinkel, & Koitmae, 2018; La Grone, 2016; Zvulun, 2010). For local government elections in New Zealand, postal voting is currently the prescribed method. This requires an individual to enrol and then voting packs are sent to their postal address, as described above. Voters complete the papers and must then return their ballots by mail to the electoral office. Postal voting has been in use in local government elections in New Zealand since the 1960s (Molineaux, 2019; Zvulun, 2010). When it was first introduced as the preferred option, it led to an increase in voter turnout of around 20% from the more traditional booth-type voting (Crothers, 2015). Postal voting was seen as a more convenient method for individuals to vote, as they no longer needed to physically go into a voting booth (Zvulun, 2014). Another area which might have impacted on voter turnout in local government elections in New Zealand was the local government restructure in 1989 when the Labour Government radically reorganised the local government system by implementing the current two-tier structure of regional and territorial authorities, and reducing the number of local bodies from approximately 850 to 86 (Wallis & Dollery, 2000).

Concerns have recently been raised about whether postal voting in New Zealand in the 21st century is still the most preferred or relevant option (Zvulun, 2014). This is largely due to the reduction of postal services offered by New Zealand Post, such as decreasing the number of postal delivery days and the number of public mailboxes for posting and slower delivery times, both of which have dramatically decreased over the past ten years. Rational choice theory would suggest that if people have to travel further (increasing the ‘cost’) to post their voting papers, they are less likely to vote. In the context of this research, this raises the question: are printed postal votes still adequate in today’s world, especially for youth voters who are known to live more of a transient and digital lifestyle?

One proposal that responds to this question is eVoting. This is a popular discussion point around the world and has been on the radar for around 15 years. eVoting can be seen as one of the last frontiers of internet use (Crothers, 2015). It refers to voters being able to cast
their vote on their personal electronic device in any location that has either an internet or a data connection. In this thesis, the term ‘eVoting’ can be interchanged for similar named themes like eTechnology, electronic voting, or internet voting. ‘eVoting’ in this context does not refer to voting done on electronic machines in polling booths, as in the United States.

In New Zealand, in 2019, the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern backed the introduction of eVoting in New Zealand elections in the short term (Niall, 2019). In 2004, the New Zealand Electoral Commission submitted a long-term strategy for eVoting to the then Minister of Justice, the Hon. Annette King. She suggested that over the next three elections (starting from 2014), the government trial telephone and eVoting for people who were blind or disabled, and for those who require to make special or advance votes (Crothers, 2015). The hope was to have eVoting fully integrated by 2023 (Crothers, 2015). The trial did not come to fruition primarily because of issues with the perceived security and concern from both the Electoral Commission and the Government Cyber Security Bureau.

**Youth and eVoting**

International studies have explored the connection between eVoting and youth turnout and shown that youth are interested in the concept of eVoting and also more generally utilise the internet to gain information on elections and candidates (Schaupp & Carter, 2005; McMillen, 2004; West, 2004). Researchers also highlighted the positive benefit of eVoting for tertiary students who may be absent from their home locations, and need no longer be reliant on family members to forward voting packs or for absentee votes to be completed (Schaupp & Carter, 2005). This is not surprising: socialisation theory suggests that people like to turn out to vote with their family and friends (Unt et al., 2017). Unt et al. explain that “People discuss their political preferences within these social networks and this, in turn, shapes their individual choices,” and that “this applies also specifically to young adults, who are more likely to vote when their parents do” (2017, p. 3). However, introducing eVoting might also reduce the social aspect of voting, as eVoting can be done in the confines of your own home, at a time which is convenient to you, and without having your family and friends around you.
eVoting may have a certain appeal to younger voters (Molineaux, 2019). McCormack (2016) believes that “the lives of younger voters are increasingly defined by the digital world, and they will want the election process to reflect this”. There is no doubting that the youth of today are actively engaged online and that the internet has fostered this online citizenship (Bennett, 2012). Could these avenues of engagement be used to foster another way of political engagement? Youth also communicate in different ways from older people, particularly when it comes to learning, and adapting to the external environment. People who advocate eVoting believe that it will be less intimidating to youth voters than a paper ballot, as youth are more computer-savvy (Hall & Alvarez, 2004; Schaupp & Carter, 2005). Jaeger (2003) states that “By creating a noticeable presence government agencies can engender interest in the political process among young citizens who regularly use the internet” (p. 325). Youth in general seem to be more comfortable when it comes to the use of technology and the idea of eVoting. Enabling the use of this technology could be seen as ‘motivating’ youth to be more engaged with the political scene. Youth have more faith in technology than older generations and will most likely find eVoting to be more convenient.

Youth do have concerns that stem more from the process being legitimate and understanding the process of voting more than that standard of service delivery (Henry, 2003; Norris, 2004). Grossman (1995) made the interesting comment that “technology itself will not automatically determine the path of the future, or the nature of the political process although it’s bound to have an enormous influence on both” (p. 74). It is likely that it will take more than just a new method of voting to completely turn the tide on youth voting numbers. We need to use the knowledge that youth of today are more issue-focused, or issue-centric when it comes to political matters and we need to entice them to want to make a difference.

Problems associated with eVoting

It is important that we also consider perceived problems associated with eVoting (Goodman & Stokes, 2020). Concerns about eVoting all revolve around the necessary level of security required to ensure results are not interfered with or contaminated in any way (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998). The fairness and accuracy of any election, regardless of the method of voting, must not be compromised (Hall & Alvarez, 2004). Security is a valid concern when
looking at eVoting and the security of eVoting needs to be set to the maximum level to protect against internal and external hackers. eVoting might be a very effective tool to boost turnout by removing ‘costs’ (as rational choice theory would suggest), but this is a moot point if the voting technology is not secure.

Security concerns for digital voting fit into three categories: (i) a threat to websites, (ii) voter identities, and (iii) secure technology. Firstly, websites can be very vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Even the most protected organisations in the world, who believed themselves impenetrable, have had their websites hacked (e.g., FBI, Facebook, and Google+) (Chen, 2020). Malicious hackers are able to introduce computer bugs or viruses, which could then infiltrate an election website or application. Currently, it is not possible to give a complete assurance that a website is totally secure. An eVoting website would need the most sophisticated security, and many do not believe that the required level of security currently exists (Chen, 2020; Crothers, 2015).

The second security issue relates to the difficulty of being able to identify voters. For the democratic process to be foolproof, there needs to be an assurance that the identified person casts the corresponding vote. It is possible that unique identifiers could be assigned to individuals and that this could be used as a type of identification. However, the potential issue of people obtaining identifiers that do not belong to them and casting votes, with or without the other person’s knowledge, has yet to be solved (Crothers, 2015).

The third security issue that needs to be addressed is that specialist security technology needs to be further developed to allow voters to be identified and then have their votes transmitted securely. This technology would need to ensure that voters’ privacy is protected and cannot be accessed or altered once it has been submitted. A fundamental aspect of democracy is a requirement that a person’s vote needs to remain secure and private. This is a requirement for both physical votes as well as those cast electronically (Crothers, 2015).

A further concern about eVoting is the issue of a lack of accessibility of the internet and internet-capable devices in certain pockets of society; this is known as the ‘digital divide’ (LaGrone, 2016). This is more prevalent in the elderly and lower socio-economic populations.
who are less likely to own a smart device (of any type) than among their younger and wealthier counterparts. Socio-economic theory dictates that older citizens and those in lower socio-economic groups might not have the disposable income for a smart device and may not have the digital knowledge to use these devices correctly, which could result in them being not able or willing to utilise eVoting.

**eVoting in practice**

Even considering the security and technical risks, several countries have looked at eVoting as a means to increase voter turnout for both general and local government elections to remove a possible ‘cost’ or obstacle to voting, as it relates to rational choice theory. These have all had varying levels of success. Countries like Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom, who have reviewed or participated in trialling eVoting, have concluded that the digital platforms are just not yet secure enough (Lau, Patel, Fahmy & Kaugman, 2014).

One country that has adopted nationwide eVoting is Estonia, a small country in northern Europe with a population of approximately 1.3 million people (Unt et al., 2017). Estonia has developed legislative and technological frameworks that have made this possible (Krimmer et al., 2018; Madise & Martens, 2006; Vinkel, 2015). Estonia is well known for its use of eGovernance and development of online services (Breuer & Trechsel, 2006) and was the first country to offer unlimited eVoting (Unt et al, 2017). Estonia issues a unique identity card to every resident, which allows an individual’s identity to be authenticated, and enables them to cast a vote (Martens, 2010). When Estonia was developing their system, authorities limited the issues of a potential digital divide by continuing to provide physical voting at polling booths (La Grone, 2016). Madise and Martens (2006) caution, however, that “[t]he principles of fair elections require formal equality of voting conditions, not material quality. It is generally impossible to guarantee strictly equal conditions for all voters” (p. 15). Trechsel (2007) found that the youth voters of Estonia capitalised on the new-found ability to cast an eVote, which led to a slight increase in youth turnout. Although Le Grone (2016) considered the increase modest, Bochsler (2010) concluded that eVoting possesses the potential to increase voter turnout.
A further example of eVoting in action occurred in the United Kingdom when the government allowed the 19 wards of Swindon Borough Council, in the South West of England, to pilot eVoting for the 2002 local government elections. The pilot was reported in Henry (2003). The 127,000 eligible voters were given the choice to vote by telephone, post, polling station, or eVoting. The eligible voters received a voting pack which included a sealed voting card. This voting card provided a unique code that voters could use either over the telephone or via their eVoting platform. If voters posted or voted in person, then their code was automatically deactivated. A 3.5% increase in turnout from the 2000 local government elections was recorded, although it was not possible to conclude conclusively that this was due to eVoting, since there was also an increase in the number of postal votes. The election resulted in a 31.2% voter turnout. Whilst Swindon voting personnel reported that they had observed several attempts to hack into the website, no attempts were successful and there were no eVoting security breaches during the eVoting trial. An audit was conducted when multiple votes were received from a single IP address, and all were found to be legitimate votes. While the Swindon Borough Council deemed their trial a success, they decided not to continue with the eVoting platform in forthcoming elections, as they did not believe that it was beneficial enough to continue due to the additional resources needed and costs incurred by the Council.

Table 7 – Vote share of each voting method in the Swindon 2002 elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting Method</th>
<th>Votes Cast</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>2,028</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eVoting</td>
<td>4,293</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal</td>
<td>4,416</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling station</td>
<td>28,919</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39,650</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adopted from Henry (2003)

Table 7 above illustrates that even with eVoting being available to voters in Swindon, just over 10% of the voters chose this method of voting as their preferred option. The council had been hoping for a greater degree of uptake amongst voters.
Table 8 – Age distribution eVoting only in the Swindon 2002 local election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Votes cast</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-59</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adopted from Henry (2003)

Table 8 shows that it was not the youth of Swindon, as expected, who were the major adopters of eVoting. Instead, 48.7% of the 25- to 44-year-old age group chose to cast their vote electronically, compared to only 35.9% of the 18- to 24-year-olds.

Turning to New Zealand, eVoting has already been embraced in an array of organisations like iwi, unions, and various clubs (Molineaux, 2019). Interest in eVoting began in New Zealand in the mid-2000s and it has been considered for use in both general and local government elections as a way to combat the downward trend in voter turnout (Crothers, 2015). The report tabled by the Justice and Electoral Committee’s (2011) inquiry into the 2011 general election commented that eVoting could

Potentially make voting more convenient and appealing for voters who would otherwise have cast special votes and for the growing number of people who relate to online communities and improving access for non-native speakers of English. eVoting could also help reduce the number of errors that voters make on ballot papers and special declarations, thus reducing the number of votes that have to be disallowed (p. 30).

In 2013, the then Minister of Local Government, the Hon. Chris Tremain, announced that the government was willing to enable a working group to investigate a possible 2016 eVoting trial. Councils were able to ‘opt in’ to the trial, and the process was to be managed through LGNZ, and the Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM), with the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) having oversight. The DIA subsequently advised the
Associate Minister of Local Government of its recommendations. The DIA was not assured that councils and their election providers had enough time to develop the necessary infrastructure to meet the very high-security prerequisites and the 2016 trial was terminated. Costs associated with trialling eVoting would have become the responsibility of those local governments who had opted into the trial, and, at short notice, would not have budgeted for these new costs. Some councils had withdrawn earlier either due to cost, security requirements, or a lack of control over their own resources (Molineaux, 2019). By the time the 2019 trial planning had commenced, nine councils had opted to undertake the trial. This time round, unlike in 2016, the Auckland Council was able to participate in a limited role. While there was more lead-in and planning time available for the second trial, this trial suffered the same fate and was cancelled for similar reasons to the one three years earlier. As such, eVoting in New Zealand has not yet moved beyond the ‘pre-trial’ stage. LGNZ and SOLGM are now looking towards the 2022 local government elections, and they are planning on lobbying central government to fund the trial.

It appears that, for a country like New Zealand which operates under tight budgets, the cost and overall security concerns of eVoting in its current form is too much of a challenge for councils to overcome. The cost of holding an election (or by-election) falls on the relevant council, which will already be needing to contend with the rising costs of holding postal elections, including significant printing and postage costs. Some councils have reported postage cost increases of 70-80% between the 2016 and 2019 elections (Molineaux, 2019). This cost is then directly passed onto the ratepayers. By retaining the current postal voting system and adding eVoting to create a dual system, the costs to councils will increase.

Setting aside the cost barriers, in principle, could eVoting boost turnout in New Zealand local government elections, particularly for youth voters? A small number of studies have been undertaken to explore the opinions of New Zealanders on introducing eVoting. A 2008 Electoral Commission study found that 46% of participants preferred eVoting over other forms, while 39% did not favour a change to eVoting (Research, 2008). The Electoral Commission conducted a similar study a year later, by which time eVoting was the preferred option of only 32% of participants, with 56% preferring other forms of voting. Almost half of the younger voters (49%) indicated a preference for eVoting (Electoral Commission, 2009).
The Statistics New Zealand Household Surveys of 2009 and 2012 questioned participants about their support for the introduction of eVoting. In the 2009 survey, 57% of participants were in favour of eVoting (both for central and local government elections), which increased to 61% in 2012 (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). Those who supported the concept of eVoting tended to share similar characteristics, and were largely those who were younger, tertiary-educated, employed, European, and had a higher personal income (Statistics New Zealand, 2012).

In 2014, Massey University conducted a survey of 288 18- to 24-year-old tertiary students and asked them about the upcoming election. Of those who indicated that they were not intending to vote, 75% said that they would be more likely to vote if eVoting was available. Fifty-one percent of this same group of non-voting students indicated that they would be motivated to vote if they were offered a $50 payment (Simpson, 2014).

Increasing voter turnout is essential to a well-functioning democracy, but this is also intrinsically related to how people want to vote (Morse & Hodges, 2002). According to rational choice theory, people will vote when they feel they can make a difference, and while eVoting does not mean that their vote will make a difference, it might remove the obstacle or cost of actually casting a vote. Theoretically, eVoting can be useful to mitigate low voter turnout among youth. In terms of increasing voter turnout in those countries which have tried eVoting, this has had limited success. Goodman & Stokes (2020) found that in local elections in Ontario, Canada, internet voting increased turnout ‘only’ by 2.5 percentage points and concluded that internet voting is unlikely to solve the low turnout rates in local elections (Goodman & Stokes, 2020). Nevertheless, as postal voting is becoming more and more expensive and obsolete, there is the need to look for alternative and convenient methods for people to vote. There are security concerns regarding eVoting, not just in New Zealand, but around the world. These are realistic concerns, and need to be addressed before eVoting is seen as a viable option in practice, even if any increase in turnout is only modest.
3.2 Compulsory voting

Perhaps the most obvious way to boost turnout is to force people to vote! Compulsory voting does have an effect on the political behaviour of individuals, as it does actually increase voter turnout (Hooghe & Stiers, 2017). However, the effects of compulsory voting on political engagement, the democratic stability of the vote, and the electoral advantage to politicians are still widely debated (Sheppard, 2015). It is important to note that the term compulsory voting is somewhat of a misnomer. In reality, compulsory voting could be called compulsory turnout (Birch, 2006). Individuals in some countries that have compulsory voting can avoid voting by turning up to a booth and not selecting any options on a voting paper, or by casting an invalid vote (Hirczy de Mino, 2000). Birch (2006), stated that the term should be referred to as “the legal obligation to participate in elections” (p. 3). A primary concern is that without compulsory voting, the politicians in power may have incomplete knowledge of what the voting public actually want (Hill, 2002). This means that governments may be less responsive to the needs of the whole population, as the priorities and needs of those sections of society that have a lower voting turnout, such as youth, Māori, Pasifika, people in lower socio-economic circumstances, and less educated individuals, are not represented (Hill, 2002, 2017; Hoffman, León, & Lombardi, 2017; Keaney & Rogers, 2006; Lijphart, 1997). As such, those who participate less in elections run the risk of being excluded and alienated from the political process (Engelen, 2007).

Hill (2015) explores from a theoretical perspective the right not to vote and whether this has the same protection for individuals as the right to vote. She describes compulsory voting as more than just a right, considering it a duty. According to Hill compulsory voting:

- First promotes the right to vote itself simply by removing most of the ergonomic, practical and even psychological costs of voting that often deter votes in voluntary regimes. Second, governments elected in compulsory voting elections are more responsive to the needs to all citizens (and willing) to protect such rights as the right to equality before the law and the right to be free from discrimination (p. 188).
Louth and Hill (2005) believe that voting should be required by law in order to maximise the individual rights. Hill (2017) adds: “voting in elections is the primary mechanism by which individuals can hold their governments to account” (p. 188). She believes that compulsory voting works to protect basic human rights. According to rational choice theory, increasing the cost of not voting should in effect increase voting. However, this would require penalties to be enforced and the evidence from overseas shows that fines are minimal and rarely enforced (Sheppard, 2015).

In countries where voting is compulsory, it may not only combat low voter turnout but also establish and entrench good voting habits from an early age, in keeping with socialisation theory. According to some authors, compulsory voting not only increases voter turnout, but reduces socio-economic barriers among those voting (Jaitman, 2013; Sheppard, 2015; Singh, 2011). For example, compulsory voting was first introduced in Australia in 1924 at a federal (central government) level to help address the problem of low voter turnout (Hill, 2017). Turning out to vote moved from being a privilege of those who met the specific eligibility criteria (own property and who were male) to more of a duty for everyone who became eligible (Hill, 2017). A member of the Australian parliament who supported compulsory voting stated in the House of Representatives that “by compelling people to vote we are likely to arouse in them an intelligent interest and to give them a political knowledge that they do not at present possess” (Morris-Jones, 1954, p. 32).

Currently, only 27 countries utilise some form of compulsory voting (Birch, 2008). Out of the 27 countries, 11 have sanctions against non-voters (Hoffman et al., 2017). The types of sanctions range from having to give an official explanation as to why they did not vote, monetary fines, being ineligible to stand for election, being unable to be employed in the public sector, jail time, or being removed from the voting register (which could be counter-productive as some non-voters may actually prefer this punishment) (Solhaug, 2016). However, few of these 11 countries actively enforce the sanctions, as their relevant legislation merely states the legal intent of their citizens and the cost of implementing the law may be prohibitive (Birch, 2009; Solhaug, 2016). As stated above, compulsory voting implies that to vote is not only a right but also an obligation for individuals (Birch, 2008; Pringle, 2012; Solhaug, 2016). This relates to rational choice theory on the impact and cost
of not voting as discussed in the previous chapter, especially around voters expressing their political preferences on the voting paper.

Another strongly positive aspect of compulsory voting is that every vote is essential and is of equal value (Solhaug, 2016). Dahl (1989) wrote about the principle of inclusiveness and suggests “that all adults should be included in the democratic process” (p. 129). When compulsory voting legislation ensures nearly 100% participation of the eligible population, then the principle is met. Dahl states:

Citizens should have equal opportunities for discovering and affirming what choice would best serve their interest, and that the citizenry should retain enough political knowledge to have an enlightened understanding of politics (p. 112).

Some authors believe that compulsory voting enhances political knowledge and the information available to voters (Gordon & Segura, 1997; Shineman, 2012). However, Sheppard (2015) warns that this political knowledge and information are not necessarily distributed equally across the socio-economic population.

Many academics view compulsory voting as a valid and useful method of increasing voter turnout (e.g., Birch, 2008; Dassonneville, Hooghe, & Miller, 2017; Hooghe & Stiers, 2017; Norris, 2004; Singh, 2011; Singh & Thornton, 2013). Many proponents of compulsory voting state that this type of legislation has a positive effect on voters’ political knowledge (Birch, 2008; Gordon & Sagura, 1997; Lijphart, 1997; Singh & Roy, 2018). Lijphart (1997) promoted compulsory voting by highlighting the benefits to democracy by making individuals equal and indicated that their willingness to become more engaged ensured that they became more politically informed (Lijphart, 1997).

Despite arguments in support of compulsory voting, there are also strong arguments against. The connection between the right to vote and an individual’s freedom of expression appears to be a powerful argument against introducing compulsory voting (Lardy, 2004; Tucak & Sabo, 2015). Some believe that compulsory voting takes away a person’s right not to vote and believe it is anti-democratic (Abraham, 1955). Others also suggest that giving an
individual a choice to vote for a person on a voting ballot is not a choice at all, and that this undermines the democratic legitimacy of the election results (Twomey, 2013). Many authors have stated that abstention is also a right in itself and that abstaining from voting is also a form of political expression (Lardy, 2004; Lomasky & Brennan, 2000; Waldron, 2004). Tucak and Sabo (2015) pondered: “does the right to vote necessarily entail the right not to vote” (p. 175). Having the right to vote, like the freedom of speech, encompasses the converse right not to be compelled to vote (Lomasky & Brennan, 2000). Lardy (2004) believes that by not turning out to vote, individuals do not convey any message to society. The right of someone to vote is sometimes referred to as “the right of rights” or “the bedrock of democracy” (Waldron, 2004, p. 232). Most countries that have not ventured down the compulsory voting path have done so because they believe that the adoption of compulsory voting takes away the “protection of autonomy and freedom of choice of every citizen” (Blocher, 2012, p. 777).

The academic debate surrounding the benefits and drawbacks of compulsory voting continues amongst academics (e.g., Birch, 2008; Engelen, 2007; Hill, 2017; Hoffman et al., 2017; Lever, 2010; Pringle, 2012; Selb & Lachat, 2009). However, there is also an equally vocal contingent who believe that compulsory voting does not increase voter participation, making compulsory voting one of the most controversial instruments for trying to increase voter turnout (Hooghe & Stiers, 2017; Tucak & Sabo, 2015). Hooghe and Stiers (2017) suggest that whilst there may be benefits, there are also notable drawbacks, and have stated that “compulsory voting is associated with higher levels of electoral turnout, but it has been suggested that this leads to a trade-off with the quality of the vote” (p. 75). Other research has indicated that individuals who vote compulsorily have less interest and knowledge when they turn out to vote and that these voters tend not to vote with their political preferences in mind and can waste their vote on purpose (Selb & Lachat, 2009; Singh & Roy, 2018). Research undertaken by Selb and Lachat (2009) in Belgium looked at “the impact of compulsory voting on the consistency of the translation of political preferences” (p. 574) and found that 25% of voters who voted because it was compulsory, would not have done so if it was voluntary. They also found that compulsory voting compelled less interest in voting, and people felt less motivated to gain more knowledge regarding the particular election (Selb & Lachat, 2009). Some authors contend that having a
high turnout of poorly informed voters contributes nothing towards a stable democracy (Lau et al., 2014; Singh & Roy, 2018). Others state that compulsory voting can actively discourage voters from seeking more political knowledge and argue that voters feel obligated to turn out so are likely to react against the “oppression,” and that compulsory voting does not equal more interest or knowledge (Gratschew, 2004, p. 30). Three studies that have been conducted on compulsory voting and political knowledge have shown that there is no correlation between the two (Anderson et al, 2018; Shineman, 2012; Singh & Roy, 2018). The limitation of these three studies was that the data came from only one country. Several scholars have stated that political knowledge is a complicated concept to capture and measure in a research setting (Sheppard, 2015; Solhaug, 2016).

Whilst some researchers see compulsory voting as the solution to many political inequalities, others see it as an outdated and somewhat radical way to increase voter turnout (Birch & Lodge, 2015). Compulsory voting does, in a pure sense, increase voter turnout amongst young people, but are young people actually going to accept being ‘forced’ to participate? It has been shown that people do spoil their voting papers, or just turn up to the voting station and not actually vote, or not turn out at all even if there is the threat of some form of punishment. But is this really all necessary, or does this just add more complexity to the situation?

3.3 Reducing the voter age

A country’s legal voting age is established in legislation as the minimum age that an individual is eligible to enrol to vote. Minimum voting ages around the globe range from 16 to 21 years. Since the 1970s the majority of countries have adopted 18 years as the minimum voting age. In more recent times the debate over whether the voting age should be reduced to 16 years has arisen around the world, including in New Zealand. Reducing the voting age subscribes to the principles of socialisation theory, which suggests that motivating individuals to vote strengthens their engagement in the political process, and they become more socialised into the voting habit. If we are able to ‘capture’ 16- and 17-year-olds while they are still living at home, and provide a dedicated civics education programme at school, and if socialisation theory is to be believed, these might increase
voter turnout of this younger age group. The role of parents and school on political socialisation can exert a huge influence on youth and their political attitudes and behaviours, especially around voting (Woods, 2013; Bergh & Eichhorn, 2020).

Those in favour of reducing the voting age to 16 often cite the other rights and actions which have been granted to those aged 16 and 17 (Chan & Clayton, 2006; Folkes, 2004), such as paying tax, obtaining a driver’s licence, getting married, joining the armed forces, and consenting to sexual relations (Wagner, Johann, & Kiritzinger, 2012). Literature exploring the reduction of the voting age is mostly focused on two areas: whether this age group would be likely to vote, and whether or not they are mature enough to make an informed decision on their own (Hart & Atkins, 2011). Franklin, M. (2004) believes that those 16- and 17-year-olds would be more likely to vote than those aged 18 or 19 years, since they are more likely to have a permanent home base, and be under their parents’ influence than their older, more mobile counterparts.

As stated above, some countries have already reduced their voting age to either 16 or 17 with limited long-term success. Discussions pertaining to reducing the voting age have occurred in New Zealand, and also the United Kingdom, Austria, Australia, Canada, and the United States. A lowered voting age has been either adopted or trialled in several countries, including: Argentina, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, some areas in the United Kingdom, and some states within the United States (Bergh & Eichhorn, 2020; Birch, Clarke, & Whiteley, 2015). A decision was made to allow individuals from the age of 16 to vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. The National Assembly for Wales, have reduced the voting age from 18 to 16 years (Birch et al., 2015) and 16 and 17 years olds will be able to vote for the first time in May 2021 (BBC, 2020; Johnston & Uberoi, 2020).

Somewhat counter-intuitively, however, the younger people get, the less likely they are to vote. It has been shown by various academics that when countries have lowered their voting age from 21 to 18, this resulted in a decrease in voter turnout (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, M., 2004; Takao, 2019). Research conducted by Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) suggests that reducing the voting age can reduce voter turnout by 2% for every one-year reduction in age. Hence, a 4% decrease could be anticipated if the voting age was lowered
from 18 to 16 years. When the voting age in Austria was reduced to 16 years, voting turnout across those aged 16 to 20 was seen to decline (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013).

The question around the political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds in essence concerns whether they have the cognitive and emotional thought processes needed to turn out and vote (Electoral Commission, 2004; Folkes, 2004; Hart & Atkins, 2011; Horiuchi & Kang, 2017). Research conducted in a local election trial in Norway by Bergh (2013) concluded that 16- and 17-year-olds who were included in the study showed low rates of political maturity. Rosenqvist (2017) also believes that the risk of lowering the voting age to 16 is that those under 18 years potentially lack appropriate political knowledge. Bergh & Eichhorn (2020), state that “young people are presented as having a lower level of “political maturity” than older voters. However, we need to be careful to distinguish between general processes related to young people’s political engagement and the specific aspect of lowering the voting age to 16” (Bergh & Eichhorn, 2020 p. 3).

**Graph 4 – Distribution of public opinion regarding preferred age**

A British survey was undertaken in 2013 by Furlong and Cartmel and looked at individuals’ attitudes towards changing the voting age. The results are shown in graph 4. They found that only 16.1% of participants thought that the age should be lowered from 18 to 16 years, with the same number of individuals stating that they thought the voting age should be
increased to 21 years. Over 61% expressed that they would like to keep the status quo. Reducing the voting age was found to be more popular with males (20.4%), individuals on lower incomes (22.7%), and those individuals who identified as members of ethnic minorities (17.4%). Research conducted by McAllister (2013) in Australia reported that 94% of individuals in his study opposed lowering the voting age to 16 years and that, not surprisingly, younger participants exhibited more support for lowering the voting age than those in the older groups.

In New Zealand reducing the voting age is a very complex issue, and not something that can be achieved by a simple law change, as the relevant legislation is ‘entrenched,’ meaning that it requires 75% of Parliament to agree to a change. As stated by Geddis (2020), “the Electoral Act is completely clear only ‘adults’ (being persons 18-or-older) are permitted to register to vote,” and he goes on to say, “Not only has parliament set the voting age at 18 through the Electoral Act, it’s also made that age a specific limit on the right to vote affirmed by the NZ Bill of Rights Act, s 12(a)” (para 4). There is uncertainty as to whether the voting age is entrenched in local government elections as it is in general elections. The Make it 16 campaign is currently investigating this issue. Lowering the voting age in New Zealand, while not unachievable, would require cross-party support. Not an easy task. The Make it 16 is a non-partisan, youth-led group which is advocating for the voting age to be reduced to 16 in New Zealand. The Make it 16 suffered setbacks when the High Court around the voting age being entrenched, and are currently appealing the decision to the Court of Appeal which is likely to be heard sometime in 2021 (Make it 16, 2020). The New Zealand Youth Parliament in 2019 made recommendations that the voting age be lowered to 16 years if civics education was included from year one to year 13 (Youth Parliament Social Services and Community Select Committee, 2019).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced three possible reforms to boost youth voter turnout: eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age. In each case I explained 1) the purpose of the reform and outlined the arguments for and against it; 2) how it does or does
not address obstacles raised in voting theory; and 3) cases where these reforms have been made and their relative success.

There is no systematic evidence from overseas research as to the views of youth on these three types of reforms - or indeed, on any reforms that might address low youth turnout. This research aims to address such issues in the case of young people in New Zealand. In the next chapter, I describe my methodology for such a case study.
Chapter Four – Methodology

In this chapter, I set out the rationale for the methods I used to collect and analyse data in order to address my research question. I begin by identifying the research approach adopted before outlining in detail how mixed methods were used to collect data by means of a survey and focus groups. I conclude by discussing how I analysed the data collected.

4.1 Action research

The purpose of this research is to find out what young people themselves think about the three proposals that might boost youth voter turnout – thereby making an original contribution to the literature in this area. In order to conduct this research, I selected action research design. Action research on a continuum looks at collaborative interventions and seeks transformative change, whereby strategies arising from the research can be implemented in daily life and can inform large-scale platforms for reform (Rowell, Bruce, Shosh, & Riel, 2017). Action research places emphasis on the actions or outcomes of the research. This also fits with the purpose of research for a Doctor of Business Administration degree, where the candidate needs to show evidence that their thesis and results will make a significant contribution to applied knowledge.

4.2 Mixed methods

In addition to action research, this research prioritises the voices of young people themselves in relation to the proposals that affect them. To achieve this, I used a mixed-methods approach whereby I utilised both surveys and focus groups. Mixed methods is an approach used in the field of social scientific research (Creswell, 2018) and emerged in the 1980s with the introduction of raw data being integrated with the voice of participants. It combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, employs rigorous procedures, and is popular in the social and behavioural sciences. Researchers are able to integrate (or combine) their findings by using two different datasets. Mixed methods research is becoming more and more utilised when looking into voter turnout, with a number of studies using this approach.
A mixed-methods approach was appropriate for this study because it supports seeking solutions to complex social problems around youth (Bronstein & Kovacs, 2013). There are three advantages to a mixed-methods approach when working with youth. First, it increases the validity of the data due to a triangulation of methods. Second, it provides an opportunity to combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Third, it offers more of a holistic approach (Kinn & Curzio, 2005). This is supported by Brewer and Hunter (2006), who say that mixed methods researchers are able to “attack a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have no overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths” (p. 4).

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies provide different perspectives when they are used in a research setting. They both have limitations; for example, qualitative research can be a time-consuming process, and at times it can be challenging to verify data, whilst quantitative research cannot provide adequate representation of the population as a whole (O'Dwyer, 2014). But these limitations can be offset when both methods are utilised in the research (Creswell, 2017). Quantitative methods, such as surveys, make it impractical to seek in-depth personal thoughts and preferences with any depth of explanation, whereas exploring the personal thoughts, preferences, and beliefs, and the reasons for them, is the main focus of qualitative research. Mixed-methods methodology has continuously evolved and now includes an ability to use complex research problems and questions with multiple platforms for obtaining information (Creswell, 2017). Bronstein and Kovacs (2013) state: “Mixed methods are used when the purpose of the research dictates it” (p. 355). They go on to explain that mixed methods are valuable as a methodology when researchers need to explore and explain their research questions.

Quantitative methods have traditionally been used for researching low voter turnout, with surveys being the most widely used statistical method for capturing data (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011). Research that utilises qualitative methods has been gaining popularity in the past 10 years, with researchers increasingly using focus groups and interviews. Lall and Win (2013) used focus groups of youth when they were researching citizenship and then conducted interviews with politicians. Researchers need to choose the
most appropriate methods to answer their research question (Tashakkori, 1998). This is why I have decided to use mixed methods as the quantitative component via a survey. It allows me to identify the issues respondents consider important. At the same time, the qualitative aspect helps me to uncover the reasoning behind the views of participants. Using a mixed-method approach can provide more in-depth data to help answer the research question (Creswell, 2017), which I would not have been able to have done if I had only utilised a single method.

I used an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach to my research design. The research was set up in two phases. I conducted quantitative research in the form of an anonymous survey in the first phase. I analysed the survey results to identify key reasons as to why young people are not participating in local government elections. Once the results of this had been analysed, the data were used to build upon the qualitative aspect of my research. At the conclusion of the first phase, the data received influenced or set the direction of the second phase. These data were developed into questions for the second phase, the focus groups, in order to expand on the survey responses in greater detail. The participants of the focus group were made up of those who had completed the survey and indicated a willingness to participate in the focus groups.

Mixed methods also allowed me to engage with young people who are less likely to be represented in political research by providing them with a tool to participate in an anonymous survey without feeling judged or needing to share their political leanings and values. The youth sector could be classed as “invisible” (James, 2020, p.34); sectors of the population who are deemed invisible are often underrepresented in research (Trau, Härtel, & Härtel, 2012).

4.3 Quantitative method of collecting the data – The survey

For my research, I used a cross-section survey, which is a survey designed to collect data from participants at a single point in time. The cross-section was youth aged between 18 and 24 years, based in Dunedin and Palmerston North. My survey went live between 3 and 18 August 2019. I had 439 individuals complete the survey with 55.3% female, 31.9% male,
and 12.8% preferring not to say. Two-thirds of the respondents were aged between 18-20 years old and nearly three-quarters were attending a tertiary institution. This is not a representative sample of New Zealand voters and therefore the findings from this sample cannot be used to make generalised findings. But it the intention of this research is to uncover youth perceptions of various measures designed to (potentially) increase youth participation in elections. This research can provide a snapshot of the views of generally well-educated youth in two specific locations in New Zealand. The results are limited by none-the-less valuable as original data.

Conducting a survey such as this is a widely used quantitative technique (De Vaus, 2002). Surveys provide factual and descriptive information that allows the researcher to make systematic comparisons between data and survey questions. Quantitative research is used because it utilises typically a large number of participants who represent a section of the population (Creswell, 2018). The ability to analyse the quantitative data allows researchers to generalise the results to the wider population (De Vaus, 2002).

My survey was designed to gather information and opinions from youth based in Dunedin and Palmerston North about a number of topics, specifically eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age. Dunedin and Palmerston North were selected as the two case areas due to convenience sampling as I had in-depth knowledge of both cities. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where the sample is taken from a group of people easy to contact of research. There are some disadvantages to using this type of sampling methods: it is not a random or representative sample and may under-represent subgroups (Bornstein, Jager, & Putnick, 2017; Creswell, 2018). However, for the purposes of this research, it was a reliable method to use (see above).

The survey questions are available in appendix two. Five questions in the survey included a ‘comments’ section, where participants could provide an alternative answer to the options provided, expand on why they chose a particular answer, or provide further explanations or thoughts. The additional information gleaned from these questions helped provide further insight into the survey participants’ thoughts on the questionnaire items and were useful when developing pertinent questions for the focus groups.
With regard to survey administration, the survey was compiled using Qualtrics, a survey software system available for University of Otago staff and students. I recruited participants by sending the survey link and information sheet to youth-based organisations and student organisations within the tertiary institutions based in Dunedin and Palmerston North. The organisations were asked to place a link to the survey within an email to their members and/or to market the survey utilising their social media platforms. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Low participation rates are common for surveys involving youth. Potential issues with survey design, question layout, response options, and question-wording were all considered, and efforts made to construct a clear, concise instrument; I also ran a pilot with six post-graduate students to ensure that the survey made sense, and was easy to follow. The survey was designed to be completed within 3-5 minutes to minimise inconvenience.

While, as I stated above, the survey was advertised as voluntary, I did offer a prize draw for those who participated. Those who completed the survey were eligible to enter a draw for one of three gift cards valued at $200, $100, and $50. This incentive to participate is becoming increasingly common (Head, 2009; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Research conducted by Edwards et al. (2002) reviewed 292 random trials that used postal surveys and found that those that offered an incentive by way of cash or vouchers had more than twice the return rate. Researchers need to be aware of the potential implications of “paying for data”, and ensure ethical practices and considerations remain at the fore (Edwards et al., 2002, p. 1183).

4.4 Qualitative method of collecting the data – Focus groups

My research also conducted focus groups with self-selecting survey participants. Focus groups are defined by Morgan (1997) as a research technique that collects data through group interaction. Researchers can combine data from the focus groups and then pair this data with the results from surveys or other types of research techniques. Focus groups provide the researcher with rich, detailed data, and at times participants can give further
insights and describe behaviour that cannot be collected via a survey alone (Carey & Ashbury, 2012).

Focus groups use the social constructivist approach as a conceptual framework. This means that participants think about their experience through the environment around them, which includes other participants, in a dynamic process (Carey & Ashbury, 2012). It is a very effective framework for exploring individual participants’ beliefs and attitudes, as well as those of the focus group as a whole, due to participants forming shared assumptions and viewpoints that do not emerge in either surveys or one-on-one interviews (Schwandt, 2015). Participating in a focus group is a social context where individual participants come together to make collective sense of the questions being asked, and help others in elaborating upon their answer (Liamputtong, 2011).

Focus groups have often been used when looking into youth voter turnout as they are an excellent way to provide youth with an opportunity to explain their preferences, and to provide their underlying values and attitudes towards local government voting. Focus groups capture information in an in-depth way and help researchers to understand better the way that youth think. Focus groups were preferred to one-on-one interviews because focus group participants talk to each other and the independent facilitator. Also, some researchers view focus groups as being more of a forum for naturalistic disclosure than interviews (Albrecht, Johnson, & Johnson, 1993). However, others suggest focus group participation can be seen as both a strength and a potential limitation as participants can be affected by what is known as evolving group chemistry, and at times, ‘groupthink’ might come through (Carey & Ashbury, 2012). In the case of my focus groups, if the facilitator thought that groupthink was emerging she would steer the discussion back on track. Focus groups were invaluable to my research as the participants provided a wide range of views about specific issues, and then interacted and discussed these viewpoints with each other. This is further discussed in chapter 5.

As explained above, my research used explanatory sequential mixed methods. Before compiling my focus group questions, I analysed the results from the survey. Key themes were deduced from the survey data and used to help address the research question and
formulate the questions for the focus groups. My focus group questions are listed in appendix three.

In my research focus groups, participants self-selected based on time-slot availability, and they needed to have completed the survey to participate. A question within the survey asked whether the participant would be interested in joining a focus group in a month. In appreciation of their time and effort, a $50 koha (or gift, in this case a gift card) was offered to all focus group participants, as outlined in the ethics application.

I anticipated that four to six focus groups, split over a two-week time frame, and over the two locations (Dunedin and Palmerston North) would take place. This is in accordance with Morgan’s (1997) rule of thumb for research projects to have between four and six focus groups. Creswell (2012) suggests that a maximum of six focus groups are selected to avoid the data becoming saturated, with little novel additional information collected. Creswell (2017) recommends that focus groups need to have a small number of participants to allow more in-depth data compilation. The three focus groups of this research ranged from five to eight participants. The variation in size of my focus groups was due to the participants needing to swap time-slots due to conflicting appointments.

There were two data collection cities used in this research. I initially planned to have two to three focus groups in each of Dunedin and Palmerston North. However, focus group participants in Palmerston North were very hard to recruit, with only four participants offering their time. I am unsure why this was; I was particular to ensure that the focus groups dates were not aligned to either holidays or exams. In Dunedin, by contrast, there was an oversupply of willing participants. I decided not to schedule any focus groups in Palmerston North and to increase the number offered in Dunedin. This would have had an impact on the data gained from the focus groups as they were all coming in the same area. All of the focus group participants were students at the University of Otago so their experiences were very ‘student’ focused. The overall gender split of the focus group participants was female (58.3%), and male (41.7%).
Three focus groups were held on either 5 or 12 September 2019. The focus groups were held at the University of Otago Business School Boardroom. Focus group location is essential when considering room bookings so that “productive group discussion is enhanced by both the physical location and the internal environment of the venture” (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 57). The venue should also provide participants with a comfortable and informal environment so they feel safe, and the environment should be conducive to productive dialogue and discussion (Hennink, 2007). The focus groups each lasted approximately one hour, in keeping with literature that suggests this is the optimal length of time (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Jamshed, 2014). The conversations were audio- and video-recorded for transcribing. The facilitator (discussed further below) was conscious of monitoring research fatigue and boredom to reduce the likelihood that the conversations would become repetitive or stale.

Appointing an independent facilitator is considered best research practice and is shown as an ideal way of reducing research bias (Breen, 2006; Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018). I appointed an independent focus group facilitator to distance myself as the researcher, and to ensure that no research biases were evident. This also ensured that the line of questioning was consistent across all of the focus groups.

The facilitator began all focus groups with an information sheet, explained how the focus group would be run, and then asked all the participants to sign a consent form if they were happy to continue. The facilitator was very effective in quickly developing a rapport with the participants. I believe that this enhanced the interaction with the group, and consequently, the quality of the data. Research conducted by Carey and Ashbury (2012) states that “group members must feel that they are respected and that they are valued as experts in their experiences” (p. 29).

There are some limitations to using focus groups, especially around the amount of pre- and post-preparation time it takes for a one-hour meeting. It took approximately two hours to prepare for each focus group, and they lasted less than an hour in duration. It then took approximately 15 hours to transcribe the recordings of the three focus groups. I felt that it was vital for me to do the transcribing and not outsource this so that I would hear the tone
and emphasis of the participants, which I would not be able to gauge from a transcript alone. An additional challenge was the need to ‘decipher’ youth-specific language and terminology.

**Anonymity and informed consent**

The University of Otago ethics approval process required anonymity and informed consent. During the focus groups, anonymity was maintained, and the participants were not introduced to each other or referred to by name. Pseudonyms were created to protect the participants’ identities when writing up the results, with the identities known only to me. As LeCompte & Schensul (2015) said:

> It is the researchers’ story that ultimately is disseminated and published and [the] written or published word survives long after products are done, they form a lasting portrait of a community that colors all subsequent portrayals and influences how that community is viewed by others (p. 263).

Informed consent is central to any form of research that involves participants. Israel (2016) states that informed consent is to require that “a potential participant must comprehend the research and their role within it, and then agree to voluntarily participate” (p. 76).

As the researcher, it was my role to obtain the consent of the participants for the two stages of the study, the survey, and the focus groups. In all communications from me for the entire duration of the two phases of the study, participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time with no threat of cost or penalty to themselves. No participants withdrew at any stage. Participants were able to ask questions about the research and the focus groups – especially regarding the types of questions and what the process of the focus groups would be.

### 4.5 Data analysis

Once I had conducted the survey and focus groups, I needed to analyse the data. My mixed-method approach required analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data to be
approached separately. This is because different analytical methods are required depending on the type of data being reviewed. Results from both the survey and focus groups were completed at different periods; these were interpreted independently and then combined to see if they provided information to inform the research question.

As mention earlier, I used Qualtrics to collate the survey data and made use of its data analysis tool to generate descriptive statistics, including the number of responses and percentages, and to determine whether the results were statistically significant. The five open-text questions within the survey, which allowed for comments, were manually analysed to identify keywords and themes. For the focus groups, I read and reread the transcripts to identify five main themes.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced and discussed the action research approach used in this thesis. I discussed mixed methods research, the reasons why this will enable me to extract data from both my survey and focus groups, and the need to address my research question. I outlined my research methods, and the ways in which I recruited participants. Finally, I discussed how I analysed the data. With this methodology in place, the next chapter proceeds to discuss the results from the survey and focus groups.
Chapter Five – Young people and their views on voting

This chapter presents the results of my survey and focus groups with young people, which investigated their views on voting and specifically the three proposals to reform voting. First, I discuss the survey and focus group participants themselves; their demographics, whether they are enrolled to vote, and their intention to vote—or not—in the 2019 local government elections. I then discuss the disconnect between youth and voter participation, and reasons why youth feel they are not engaged. The remainder of the chapter outlines the themes that emerged from the survey and focus groups, which help us to understand young people’s attitudes towards increasing youth voter turnout in local government elections. The five themes identified are: 1) motivations (or lack of motivation) for turning out to vote, 2) lack of voter information, 3) the disengagement between youth and local government, 4) the need for civics education in schools, and 5) youth and their thoughts on increasing voter turnout.

5.1 Who were the participants?

Before I discuss the results of the survey and focus groups, it is important to set out some information about the participants themselves. This is necessary to better understand the voices and views that come through their responses. This overview looks at the gender breakdown of both the survey participants and focus groups members, their age, employment/occupation status, ethnicity, home location, whether they were enrolled at the time of undertaking the survey, and whether they intended to vote in the 2019 local government elections.

A total of 439 participants took part in the survey. As shown in table 9, the majority of those who completed the survey were female (55.3%), compared to just under a third who were male (31.9%), and with an eighth (12.8%) preferring not to say. The focus groups had a range of gender ratios. In the first focus group, 62.5% of participants were male and 37.5% female. Focus group two was completely made up of females; focus group three had 71.4% males and 28.6% females. The overall gender split across the focus groups was 41.7% male and 58.3% female.
Table 9: Gender

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<td>31.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>56</td>
<td>12.8</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Gender – Focus groups</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of those who completed the survey (66%) were between the ages of 18 and 20 years (see table 10). As the views of individuals between 18 and 24 years are the focus of this research, the survey responses of those aged 25 and over were removed before any analysis took place.

Table 10: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer question</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority of participants were students, with a combined percentage of 73.8%. Of those, 60.9% were based at the University of Otago, 7.5% at Massey University, 5.3% at the Otago Polytechnic, and 0.2% at the Universal College of Learning (UCOL). The rest of the participants were either in employment, or trade apprenticeships, or otherwise occupied (see table 11 for more detail).
Table 11: Current status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Otago</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otago Polytechnic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massey University</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal College of Learning (UCOL)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade apprenticeship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The large majority of participants in the survey were New Zealand European (73.3 %), with New Zealand Māori (6.1%) and Asian (3.6%) rounding out the top three (see table 12).

Table 12: Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NZ European</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ Māori</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Peoples</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a regional spread of participants from across New Zealand (see table 13). Participants provided this information in response to a question that asked them to select their home region. This reflects that tertiary students, the majority of participants, usually study at universities away from their home town.

Table 13: Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waikato</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coromandel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay of Plenty</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gisborne</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whanganui/Manawatū</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkes Bay</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Along with the demographic information, it is important to look at those within the survey who were actually enrolled to vote. Just under 80% of those in the survey stated that they were enrolled for the local government elections (see table 14). Nationwide, only 59.6% of the 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled at this time. Only 10% of the survey participants were aware that they were not enrolled, and 9.3% were unsure whether they were enrolled or not. Since enrolment status had been assessed in the initial survey, it did not form part of the discussion in focus groups. Enrolment packs were made available at the focus groups, with one participant completing the form.

### Table 14: Current enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current enrolment</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Dunedin</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Palmerston North</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, other New Zealand location</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eligible</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large percentage (57.9%) of respondents to the survey stated that they intended to vote (see table 15). The number of respondents that indicated that they intended to vote can be unreliable as they are aware that they should vote, so may give the socially desirable response indicating that they will vote, but then do not. The actual overall turnout in the 2019 local government election was 41.7% across all age groups. Information on age ranges is not available. Only 12.3% of participants indicated that they did not intend to vote, and 23.7% had not made up their mind whether to vote or not, as shown below.
Table 15: Intending to vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intending to vote</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eligible (international student)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eligible (under 18)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred not to answer</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to look at those participants who were eligible to vote in the last local government elections. The results obtained from the survey and focus groups are similar to other international studies on voter participation which shows that youth are generally the lowest percentage of voters. When looking at graph 5 and table 16, only 16.6% of the total current survey sample had voted in the 2016 local government elections. However, when the large pool of respondents who were not eligible to vote in 2016 are removed, the difference between the numbers of voters and non-voters narrows dramatically. Table 17 shows that whilst 56.5% of the 170 eligible voters in 2016 indicated that they had not voted, 40% of eligible participants stated that they had cast a vote, with a further 3.5% not sure.

Graph 5:

Did you vote at the last local government election in 2016?

- Not Eligible: 58.5%
- No: 23.4%
- Yes: 16.6%
- Not Sure: 1.5%
Table 16: Did you vote in the last local government election in 2016?\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you vote in the last local government election?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eligible</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Table of eligible voters at the 2016 local government election and voting behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you vote in the last local government election?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I was also keen to know whether participants had voted in the most recent general election (2017) and to ascertain whether there were any differences in voter turnout between this election and the last local government elections. Graph 6 and table 18 again show that just over half of the participants were not eligible to vote in the last general election. When the data is reduced to represent only those who were eligible to vote (see table 19) in 2017, nearly three-quarters of the participants indicated they had voted (72.3%), with 26.6% stating that they did not vote. However, it is possible that the participants provided what they deemed to be the most socially desirable response to this question and as such this may be an over-estimation of the number of participants who actually turned out to vote in

---

\(^3\) For some of the survey responses I have included both a graph which shows the responses as a percentage, and a table which shows the number of responses per question.
2017. However, it is encouraging that these percentages are similar to the official turnout rates recorded for the 2017 General Election.

**Graph 6:**

Did you vote in the last general election in 2017?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you vote in the last general election?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eligible</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>388</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 18: Did you vote in the last general election?**

**Table 19: Eligible voters at the 2017 general election and voting behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you vote in the last general election?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>188</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Theme 1: Motivations (or lack of motivation) for turning out to vote

Gaining insights into the thinking around voting and what motivates youth to vote is an important first step towards increasing voter turnout. Participants in both the survey and focus groups agreed that what motivated them to vote was either their civic duty to vote or being motivated by a particular issue.

*It was a civic duty*

Participants were asked to indicate which of a list of reasons was relevant to why they had voted in the previous local government elections. They could select multiple reasons. There was a strong sense that participants voted because it was a civic duty. Some 71.2% of survey participants who voted in the 2016 local government elections indicated that they did so because it was their civic duty (graph 7 and table 20). The next most commonly selected reason for voting was to support a particular candidate (31.8%), with just under a quarter of participants (24.2%) voting because they thought it would be fun/interesting. A further 16.7% voted ‘to see what it was like.’
Graph 7:

If you did vote in the last local government election in 2016, why was that? (select as many options as you wish)

![Bar chart showing reasons for not voting in the last local government election in 2016.]

Table 20: If you did vote in the last local government election in 2016, why was that?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for not voting in last local government election</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is a citizen’s duty to vote</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting particular candidate(s)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see what it was like</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought it would be interesting/fun</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family proposed to come along</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family told me who to vote for</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends were going to vote</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the importance of civic duty being provided as the most common reason for voting in the survey, the participants in the focus groups were asked to elaborate on what civic duty meant to them. John said, “I feel that I have a civic duty to vote, but I want to make sure that the Councillor and Mayor have at least one student who has put them there.” Gary thought “that it’s quite important that young people have a vote and a voice in council.” Harry indicated that “it’s a responsibility of everyone to vote,” whilst Jessica’s comments suggest that informed voting was paramount: “I think that it’s important to vote, but only if they [the voter] know what or who they’re voting for.” Brendon noted, “I don’t see a reason why not to vote really. We live in a democratic country, and I want to exercise my right to vote.” Tony went a step further and addressed the public perceptions of youth, stating: “It’s your civic duty, and people complain that youth don’t vote.” This shows an overwhelming feeling from those who reported that they voted that they did so because it was their civic duty. Respondents were able to select: “Family proposed to come along” even though local government elections are postal. Some people may need to conduct a ‘special vote’ or they may be on the unpublished electoral roll. These voters can vote at a council building and as such, may be accompanied by other people, including family.

**Lack of motivation**

While, as shown above, some were motivated to vote because of civic duty, along with other reasons, graph 8 and table 21 show that the majority of survey participants eligible to vote in the 2016 local government election (33.7%) did not know who the candidates were, whilst 14.7% did not receive a voting pack, 16.8% forgot to vote, and a further 16.8% indicated that they did not know how to vote. Other reasons for not voting were noted by some survey participants in the ‘comments’ section; these included (i) not feeling motivated to vote because they did not have enough information, (ii) not knowing anything about politics so were not motivated to read the information, and (iii) that their parents did not forward their postal voting packs and they were not inclined to change their address. Those...
additional reasons were not explored further in the focus groups due to the low numbers recording these issues and because the focus group participants did not raise them.

**Graph 8:**

If you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (select as many options as you wish)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for not voting in the last local government election</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not know about the candidates</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something more important to do</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested in seeing what it was like</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgot</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not feel obligated to vote</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not think that it would be interesting/fun</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family were not going to vote</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends were not going to vote</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not receive a voting pack</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure which political party the candidate(s) stood for</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not come from a politically active family/background</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure how to vote</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Motivated to vote for a single issue**

A discussion that came up in two of the three focus groups concerned the idea that participants felt they were motivated to vote for a single issue. Some focus group participants wanted to vote due to a single issue, or because they did not wish a particular person with views or opinions different from their own to be elected. This was the case for Susan, who said:

“I feel that I know enough about what’s going on to be able to make an informed choice, plus I think that in Dunedin there are more candidates who are starting to look out for youth. There are also a lot of climate change deniers. It’s about making sure that those that I don’t want to get in, don’t get in.”

Tony felt similarly and said, “I want to vote against those who are against climate change – the non-believers.” Louise added, “if I dislike a candidate it spurs me on to vote against them.”

The reverse viewpoint was also evident, with participants keen to give their vote to an individual who shared their beliefs and values. Mary said: “If a candidate aligns with my
beliefs, then I vote for them,” and Tony remarked: “If you have a personal issue and that’s the candidate’s platform as well, then they’ll get my vote.”

There were some youths within the focus groups who had already decided that they were not going to vote at all, like Louise, who said she was not going to vote “because I just feel that I don’t know enough.” Kerry, who was in the same focus group, affirmed this opinion saying: “I don’t really know what’s happening in local government.” Yet others felt that they should not have a say in the local government elections because they would not be living in the locality for the entire next electoral cycle. Amy indicated she was not going to vote for this reason, saying: “For me, it’s because I’m going to be leaving Dunedin at the end of this year, so I don’t feel that it’s right for me to put my voice in if I’m not going to be here.” Olivia reiterated this and said: “I’m not going to be here for the whole time that the local government [that] is chosen [will be] in action, and there are bits of me which think it’s silly for me not to exercise my right to vote, but on the other hand I don’t want to impose on other people who have more of a vested interest in what happens within Dunedin.”

5.3 Theme 2: Lack of voter information

One common theme that emerged from the data gathered in both the survey and the focus groups was that the participants felt that there is a lack of information available to voters and this discouraged them from voting. Survey participants were asked whether they had sought further information on the candidates. The data in graph 9 and table 22 suggests that 46.2% did not feel the need to seek additional information and most likely relied exclusively on the ‘Candidate Information Booklet’. However, when results from those not sure whether they had sought information are removed from the data, just under half of the voters (49.2%) felt the need to learn more about the candidates and set about gaining this information, and from a number of places. Participants were able to select as many sources of information as were applicable. Those who did seek out further information mostly did this from reviewing the candidate’s website/social media (38.5%), candidate pamphlets (21.5%), and newspapers (16.9%).
Graph 9:
If you did vote in the last local government election in 2016 did you seek out further sources for information about the candidate standing for election? (select as many options as you wish)

Table 22: If you did vote in the last local government election in 2016 did you seek out further sources for information about the candidate standing for election?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of further information sought</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council website</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate(s) website / social media</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

88
Since approximately half of the participants sought out additional candidate information it appears that the ‘Candidate Information Booklet’ is not considered sufficient to inform youth voters to a level that they require, and that this could be a deterrent to young people voting. One survey participant’s sentiment that more information needs to be “available at their fingertips” was echoed by many survey and focus group participants. Graph 10 and table 23 illustrate that 80.3% of participants believed that an increase in available information would translate into a greater likelihood that they would vote in local government elections. This question was asked of both voters and non-voters.

**Graph 10:**

If there was more information available to you when you vote in local government elections do you think that this would increase the likelihood of you participating?
Table 23: If there was more information available to you when you vote in local government elections do you think that this would increase the likelihood of you participating?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the focus groups, the lack of information and knowledge of candidates and elections was a weighty topic. Amy said:

*Actually knowing the candidates, for example, I don’t know any of the candidates or about the local elections, nothing. I don’t know anything about politics in general. I’m not actually steering away from it, but I’m not looking for information myself. I’d be a lot more interested if the information was actually given to me.*

Adele followed up on this sentiment and said “was considering not voting for the same reason, it is very hard to find any information about the candidates and what they bring … I want to know more about their policies.” Archie felt the information provided in the booklets was too scant and believed “candidates should be able to write more about themselves in the voting booklet.”

Some participants reflected on the differences between central and local government election campaigns, including advertising methods, publicity, and coverage. Mya said:

*With the national elections there is so much media coverage you can’t get away from it, but with local government, you literally don’t hear anything till they stick up a couple of posters, but it doesn’t tell you their policy or anything other than what they look like.*
Harry thought that “it’s all about National and Labour in central voting, but it’s nothing like that in local voting.”

The survey and focus group data suggest that a lack of information is an overarching reason why youth might not vote in local government elections. Participants did not seem to know who to vote for and, in the survey, they stated that they needed to seek out further information from what is currently supplied to them in the candidate information booklet. Some of the youth even stated that if more information was available then they would probably turn out and vote.

5.4 Theme 3: The disengagement between youth and local government

In conducting a survey with young people about their voting habits, it is important to explore the extent and type of engagement youth have with local government. This would indicate the extent to which youth are actually engaged with local government and support our understanding of the different forms that this engagement may take. The survey asked questions to ascertain: (i) how aware the participants were of what is happening in local government politics in their region, and (ii) if they did engage with local government, what forms does this take.

The data show that the majority of survey participants (62.6%) were not aware of what was happening in local government politics in their region. An additional 12% stated that they were not sure if they were aware (graph 11 and table 24). In total, this represents almost three-quarters of the youth sampled (74.6%) who are not aware what was happening in local government. This was also a prevalent theme from the focus groups.
Another question within the survey provided a list of activities that interested voters may undertake to increase their involvement with local government politics. Graph 11 and table 25 show that almost half (49%) stated that they were not engaged with local politics at all. However, this is closely followed by 46.5% of participants who indicated that they do read media reports about their council. Lower numbers of youth participants engaged in more involved forms of local political interaction, including 11.6% who completed submissions, 10.6% who reported they communicated with councillors/politicians, and 7.8% who had met with councillors or politicians. Survey participants were able to select as many options as they wished.
**Graph 12:**

Do you engage in any of the following activities:

![Bar chart showing activities engaged in and their percentages.]

**Table 25: Do you engage in any of the following activities?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities engaged in</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete submissions</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend council/committee meetings</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with councillors/politicians</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with councillors/politicians</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read media reports on the council</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t engage in local politics at all</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>512</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the focus groups, there was little awareness of what was occurring at local government level, with only four people stating that they engage via social media or by reading the news.
5.5 Theme 4: Need for civics education in schools

The fourth, and strongest, theme that emerged from the survey and focus groups was civics education in schools. The survey included one question on the topic. The survey participants overwhelmingly agreed (90.6%) that elections, and how to vote, should have been taught (or taught more extensively) while they were at high school; only 5.3% disagree with the suggestion more civics education should be included at high school (graph 13 and table 26).

Graph 13:

Table 26: Do you think that you should have been taught about elections and in particular voting when you were at high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seventeen participants commented in the free text field in the survey that they knew nothing about politics, voting, or how the government works. Seven participants wrote that they were unaware of how politics and the government works in their everyday lives. Nine respondents stated that they were given some form of civics education while at high school.

Within the focus groups, the majority of participants agreed with the idea of increasing civics education in high schools. Mike said: “More experience at high school, like learning about it in social studies or something like that – more education, civics education.” Mya mentioned that “high schools need to do a lot more about civics education and teaching politics in general.” Amy also agreed with more education in schools and said: “increasing education is really important, especially around the candidates and their policies are important. Actually having that as a subject at school, so that you start learning about it early, then you’re more likely to engage with elections.” John thought that high schools “need to teach us how to vote, they should have compulsory civics education.” Susan was not in favour of civics education in schools as she believed that it “can’t be done in a non-biased way.”

Focus group participants also discussed the suggestion that tertiary education providers educate youth about the political landscape. Jessica said: “even the university should be doing more, there needs to be a lot more things about voting, and candidates, and what they can do for students.” She also thought it “would be good if the OUSA could do a bipartisan, ‘here’s all the information’ kind of pamphlet for any of the elections. Saying that we don’t want you to vote a certain way, we just want you to vote. We just don’t know enough, have enough information about the candidate, their policies and what they stand for.”

5.6 Theme 5: Youth and their thoughts for increasing voter turnout

This section looks at three proposed ways that I have identified might motivate and encourage youth to turnout to vote: eVoting, reducing the voting age, and compulsory voting. The last section was about the obstacles to voting for youth; this section is about exploring what young people think about the potential solutions for low voter turnout. As
discussed in chapter three, some countries have embraced variants of these approaches. However, these types of questions have not been asked directly of youth, and their views have not been sought in relation to the three proposals before. This means that the data contained below makes an important contribution to the academic literature.

**Support for eVoting**

The topic of online or eVoting is one which has never been directly raised with youth in New Zealand before, which makes the data obtained valuable. The survey results showed the significant majority of respondents (84.2%) agreed that eVoting should be used (graph 14 and table 27). Only 7.7% were opposed to eVoting, with the remaining 8% undecided. Seven of the survey participants in favour of eVoting added comments suggesting that they believed that it was important to have in the 21st century and that it would encourage people to vote. A further 16 survey participants shared the view that eVoting would increase voter turnout, with another 13 believing that it would make voting more accessible and convenient.

**Graph 14:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 27: Do you think that we should have eVoting/online voting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was strong agreement within and between focus groups that introducing eVoting would increase voter turnout for young people. They believed that it could remove barriers and increase the convenience of voting, because individuals could do it when and where they liked. This was encapsulated by Ronan, who said: “I actually think that you’ll get far more participation with being able to vote on your [smart]phone – it’s much more convenient.” Kerry said: “Yep, I think the same too, voting needs to be more convenient, don’t have to make an effort to go down and vote, or find a post box.” Adele noted that:

> At the last national election I voted at one of the special advanced voting booths as I was going to be out of town on election day, and it was so convenient, so if I can do that from my [smart]phone or whenever I wanted to then that would be great.

For Jessica,

> The convenience factor is huge for young people, saves them having to get out of bed, out of your house, like, it’s all prepaid and you just send it, but it’s too much effort, and I can’t be bothered, but if it’s easier to do then I’d be more inclined to vote.

Felicity thought that “it would make a big difference to young voters, I think it would increase younger people to vote,” and Mya suggested that, “If people aren’t that interested in voting, this would be one less excuse, like if it’s raining, then they can still be at home and vote. It would definitely improve the youth vote.”
Other focus group participants commented that youth spend much of their days on digital platforms. Both Amy and Adele liked the idea of being able to vote on their smartphones, with Amy saying: “With post, it normally just ends up at the bottom of a pile of junk, and then I forget about it. We spend hours a day on our [smart]phones.” Adele backed this up by saying: “Especially if you get an email, oh look, it’s time to vote, oh, I’ll do that right now.” Anna thought that an app would be a good idea, “with like candidate information and before you get to the voting section there is information on who all the candidates are, and what they’re standing for.”

Survey and focus group responses also included those who supported eVoting but with some reservations. Nine survey participants commented that eVoting is a good idea, but cautioned that it needs to be implemented correctly. Ten additional participants suggested there would need to be a dual system that includes both paper and electronic methods of voting.

Many focus group participants reflected on the limited success of the 2018 online census. Liz was concerned that digital platforms are not available to everyone in the community and, while she agreed that eVoting would “increase or help the outreach to the community,” she also noted the circumstances of the online census, in which “[t]hey seemed to focus too much on the electronic side of things. There wasn’t enough outreach to the community”. Liz urged: “Voting needs to be accessible to everyone”. Susan felt similarly, but also cautioned that it may promote uninformed votes being cast:

I do think that you need to look at how the census went. That went badly. Also, old people, they might find it [eVoting] too difficult. Plus you might actually get people voting for people they don’t actually know, just doing random voting.

John also believed there were lessons to be learned from the census, stating: “The census was a good example, that’s meant to have everyone turn out, and I think it was only in the 80% range, so people can’t be trusted to do it online.” Liz concluded, “If we have eVoting, then there should be both forms of voting available [electronic and paper].” Jessica agreed,
and on a personal note added: “I do think that it [eVoting] will increase the votes of young people, but it wouldn’t work for my grandparents.”

Comments from some survey participants indicated that they did not believe eVoting would be safe enough, while others believed that it would increase voter fraud. These concerns were mirrored in the focus groups where Mike exhorted: “Russia – eVoting isn’t a good idea.” Ed was in favour, if assurances could be given as to the security of the eVoting system, noting: “If it was proven beyond any doubt that it was secure then I think that it would be a good idea, but it needs to be unable to be altered.” Tony also agreed and said: “if the technology is secure and people can’t hack it, then it [eVoting] would be OK.” John said: “at the moment we don’t have the technology. I think that it’s just too risky and open to being hacked”. Bill, on the other hand, had a range of reservations, including doubting that eVoting would change the habits of those currently uninterested in voting: “Only people who are engaged will use it. I think that eVoting would need to be accessible. I think that it could be too easy for parents to pressure children on who to vote for”.

Overall, youth in the survey and focus groups were in favour, in principle, of eVoting. They showed concern for the level of security, and suggested that a dual system needed to be in place.

Ambivalence towards compulsory voting

Whether voting should become compulsory was the second key question in the survey. The opinions on compulsory voting were somewhat evenly split, with 42.9% agreeing that voting should be compulsory in both general and local government elections, and 40% saying that it should not (see graph 15 and table 28). On this question in particular, the percentage of participants who were ‘not sure’ was high at 17.1%, compared to other ‘not sure’ responses in other questions.
Table 28: Do you think that voting in both central and local government elections should be made compulsory for all eligible voters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey comments of 19 participants strongly disagreed with compulsory voting, noting that they believed it to be undemocratic and against a person’s freedom of expression. Some focus group participants voiced similar opinions, like Ed who said: “I don’t think it should be compulsory. I think that you should have the freedom to cast a vote or not. It removes the democratic freedom of choice.” Similarly, Brendon felt that: “Democracy is all about choice, and one of those choices should be to not exercise your right to vote.” Jessica said: “No, because abstaining is a part of the freedom of voting, it’s a fundamental right of citizens.”
The idea that abstaining from voting is a political act in itself was raised in some focus
groups. Tony believed “you need to make it compulsory, but you need to give people the
option which says: ‘I do not want to vote’. You can’t make people vote. Not going to vote is a
vote in itself.” Anna continued by saying, “People can have very valid reasons for not voting,
and making people vote goes against that, so I don’t think it’s very fair to make it
compulsory.” Liz noted that she was:

Very for compulsory voting before I came to uni, but then I actually realised that
people just don’t want to engage in the system, and that’s their right. They have a
right not to vote, as much as I have a right to vote. It goes both ways.

Comments from some survey participants showed that they thought that compulsory voting
would lead to an increase in ‘wasted’ or ‘invalid’ voting and that people would continue to
be uninformed or uninterested. Archie made the point:

I think it’s just going to annoy people. If people are engaged to vote, then that’s
great, but let’s not force [them]. It’s about people having their say, and not voting is
people having their say, and that’s OK. If you’re making people vote, then they might
just waste it, and you’re not getting good representation for what the actual voting
public wants.

Grace commented: “It could drive up voter numbers, but it’s not going to make people more
informed. Making it compulsory won’t make people learn to make informed decisions. I feel
that it would lead to a lot of random votes.” Adele had a similar opinion and stated: “You
also run the risk of people doing a stupid vote. People aren’t just going to be engaged
because the law tells them. It’s just not going to work.”

Tony talked about the need for more civics education if voting was to become compulsory:

You can’t have compulsory voting without having an education, at the moment there
is no or very little civics education at school, so people aren’t aware of how politics
works. Kids need to know what politics is at school, as it defeats the purpose. People
might also make dumb votes just to prove a point.
Mya reinforced this view, saying she thought “you need to improve how to educate the voter, you’ll need a much better strategy than just compulsory voting.”

Some survey participants, however, were in favour of compulsory voting and commented that everyone does have a vote, and have a say. Some participants thought that compulsory voting is generally a good concept, but that more information would need to be made available for voters. Three participants thought that compulsory elections should only be for general elections and did not see the benefit in making them compulsory for local government. Bill from one of the focus groups was quite ambivalent on the subject and had the opposite suggestion, stating, “Maybe if it’s compulsory at the local level, I would be more open to this idea.”

There was some discussion in one of the focus groups around the Australian model of compulsory voting. Jessica said, “In Australia people can be fined, but they still don’t vote or don’t vote correctly. It’s not like it’s policed. The fine would actually need to be massive for everyone to say – ‘right: I need to do this’.” Amy felt that “you don’t want people to vote just because they’re going to get a fine. You want people to vote because they care enough about it.” John summarised the Australian compulsory vote discussion by saying: “They have a lot of throwaway results.”

Ambivalence towards reducing the voting age
In the survey, participants were asked whether or not they thought that the legal voting age should be reduced from 18 to 16 years. The results of this were 68.5% stating that they disagreed with lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 years; only 19.2% agreed that the voting age should be lowered and that this would help to increase turnout in young people, and 12.3% were unsure (graph 16 and table 29).
Graph 16:

Table 29: Do you think that the voting age should be reduced from 18 to 16 years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The common and repeated theme during the focus groups was that participants believed that 16- and 17-year-olds are too young and too immature, lack sufficient knowledge and ability, and are not informed enough to be given voting rights and responsibilities. John said: “I wouldn’t have trusted my 16-year-old self to make an informed decision. I wouldn’t have known what to do.” He continued: “You’re still a child at 16.” Archie’s views were similar: “You’re too young and have no idea on how to vote.” Susan pondered: “It’s really hard to gauge what the right age is, but I don’t think that it’s 16, they’re just not savvy enough. Politics isn’t even aimed at 16 years old anyway.”
Some focus group participants were concerned that parents, teachers or the community would have too much influence over who 16- and 17-year-olds would vote for. Liz said: “When I was 16 I just wasn’t that interested in politics. I wouldn’t have cared about policies, and I was a bit of a follower like I’d vote for someone that my friends or family were voting for.” Harry agreed: “I think that their opinions would be more coming from their parents.” John said: “My school and teachers were very liberal. At 16 you are too influenced by your family or school. It’s too biased.” Jessica was concerned with the range of pressures and expectations already placed upon 16- and 17-year-olds:

> It’s too hard to form your own opinion when you’re 16. You’ve got your parents, your school, your friends, your community; it’s a very big concern. It’s hard being 16, you’ve already got a lot of things going on, and you’re still forming who you are.

Some participants made comments about the individual variation in maturity and interest in voting between youth in the 16-18 year age group. Mya said: “It’s the same with some 18-year-olds, some are really mature and some who aren’t.” Adele was not that concerned about the idea of lowering the voting age and said: “If they’re not going to vote at 18, then they’re probably not going to vote at all. Then there’s those that want to vote at 16, and personally I was 18 a month after one of the elections and that really annoyed me that I couldn’t vote. But a lot of my friends wouldn’t care either way.” So does this mean that age is largely irrelevant?

There were some participants, however, who did not see an issue with granting 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote and mentioned that 16- and 17-year-olds do have a vested interest in being involved in political decisions, since “it is their future as well.” Two survey participants reflected that since 16- and 17-year-olds are required to pay tax, can legally drive and give sexual consent, perhaps they are old enough to also vote. For example, Jessica argued: “If you’re old enough to consent to sex, have a baby or start paying tax, then you’re probably old enough to vote. I know some people at 16 who were fully grown adults and some who weren’t.” Mya agreed, noting: “There’s definitely a shift – 16 year olds have a
lot more drive, they’re already an adult, and some have left school and work. There is not much between a 16- and 18-year-old.”

A few participants were strongly in favour of reducing the voting age and believed in the benefits of voting from a younger age. Felicity stated:

“I think the earlier the indoctrination process is started, the more awareness of how important voting actually is. And if you’re at school, there’s a community to talk about politics, which is different from talking about it at home. It’s habit forming and instilling in people the right to vote. The earlier you start, the better it is.”

Jessica shared that “Scotland lowered the voting age for the independence referendum, and they saw a big increase in people voting.”

Some participants who were generally supportive of lowering the voting age shared some reservations, and the need for voter education was raised again. As the majority of 16- and 17-year-olds attend high schools or colleges, this was seen as a good way to address the potential issue. Kerry thought that, “If everyone was going to have to vote then there should be much more education on how, but I think that 16 years olds should be able to vote.” Liz further backed this up by saying: “Yes, that’s true. If the voting age was 16, then schools can do more to prepare and help people to become more aware of what they need to do.” Susan was adamant that voting should be an informed decision:

“You could potentially lower the voting age to 16, but they should have to pass a civics test first. People don’t currently have a good understanding of what type of government we have. It’s concerning that you can vote without knowing the basic structures of how things work. People are really uneducated on how things work. Some 16-year-olds are politically aware, but I don’t think that it’s that many.”
Conclusion

My research question was: “Do young people (18-24 years think that eVoting, compulsory voting, and a reduction in the voting age would encourage them to vote in New Zealand local government elections?” The survey and focus groups put questions to young people themselves and asked them what they think about voting and the proposals to boost voter turnout. This chapter discussed how the theories from the previous chapters can sometimes relate to the themes which I identified. For example, voting for a specific issue, or not voting because you lack information and/or do not know enough about local politics related back to rational choice theory – on whether to vote or not. A call for greater civics education is linked to both socialisation and rational choice theories, leading people to think that it is their duty to vote, and/or providing people with the knowledge and confidence (internal efficacy) to make an informed choice.

The major findings of the results from the survey and focus groups are: (i) that there was support from the participants for introducing eVoting – with some provisions; (ii) that opinions were split over the issue of compulsory voting; (iii) that there was little support for lowering the voting age; (iv) that there is a lack of information for voters, and (v) there is strong support for civics education in schools. The implications of these findings are discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Six – Discussion

This chapter reflects on the theories and research on low youth voter turnout in light of the findings from the survey and focus groups. Here I consider whether these reforms will have a theoretical effect, but also, I would like to show what young people themselves think about these reforms in order to consider their potential effectiveness. To reiterate, my research question was:

“Do young people (18-24 years think that eVoting, compulsory voting, and a reduction in the voting age would encourage them to vote in New Zealand local government elections?”

This chapter is organised around the themes that emerged in the previous chapter and from the survey and focus groups data. As this is action-research, the themes are translated into actions. Also, it is important to remember that the three proposals (eVoting, compulsory voting, and reducing the voting age) can be changes to our existing Electoral law which directly impacts who can vote, and how they can vote, and which have implications for local government elections. Civics education is not a change to constitutional/electoral law. It is a policy change to education which local government would have no responsibility for or ability to administer.

6.1 Proposal 1: eVoting and youth

The debate around eVoting in New Zealand is divided between those who think that the ability to vote electronically will increase voter turnout due to increased accessibility to voters and those who disagree, and believe that it will have minimal (if any) impact on voter turnout. eVoting is considered controversial due to the expected high cost of implementation and the need for high-security requirements; however, once implemented, the cost would reduce dramatically. As shown in the last chapter, 84.2% of survey participants believe that we should have eVoting as a way to increase voter turnout. What this result shows is that the vast majority of my respondents are supportive of eVoting. This result aligns with earlier research conducted in 2008 by the Electoral Commission which
found that 46% of participants surveyed (representing all age groups) preferred eVoting over postal voting, a proportion that increased to 56% one year later (Electoral Commission, 2009). As mentioned above, in their household survey, Statistics New Zealand reported that 57% of respondents supported eVoting in 2009 and that this had increased to 61% by 2012 (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). The New Zealand Election Study (2017) stated that of those who voted in the 2017 election, 36% would have preferred to vote online instead of at a polling booth (New Zealand Election Study, 2017). In a recent television interview, the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Jacinda Ardern, said that she would like eVoting to be in place by 2022 (Niall, 2019). The Auckland Council commissioned a study of the impact of eVoting and found that those who classified themselves as ‘non-voters’ would be 21% more inclined to vote if eVoting was an option (Allpress & Rangsivek, 2020). Participants in the focus groups were all in agreement with the introduction of eVoting and the likelihood that the introduction of this platform would, in fact, increase voter turnout – especially amongst youth, even when some within the focus groups were not intending to vote at the next local government elections.

The evidence shows us that voters lack confidence, and this can put them off voting. A voting app was suggested by some focus group participants as a good idea to increase voter turnout. The idea of an app with candidate information has merit, particularly if it includes two specific functions: (i) information on candidates (see the Information section 5.4 for more on this); and (ii) the ability for the user to actually cast a vote.

However, technology was also seen as an obstacle for some. There were concerns raised about some sectors of the voting population who may not be familiar with the technology and who would still require a voting pack to be posted to them. In the focus groups, it was brought up several times that a dual system should be available. This would mean that voters could decide to vote via eVoting or could receive a voting pack in the post (or both). As the voting population gets used to the eVoting concept, demand for postal voting may decline. However, the dual system should remain for a number of electoral cycles.

There were no respondents who believed eVoting would have little or no impact on voter turnout if implemented. Security issues and the need to remove all potential for tampering
was a common concern from many survey and focus group participants when discussing eVoting. The security issues are a valid concern, and I agree that any online platform needs to be as secure as possible. However, as outlined in chapter two, not even the most secure organisations in the world are immune to cyber-attacks and I do not believe that any system will ever be proven to be 100% secure. The New Zealand Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) has said on a number of occasions that it they oppose eVoting at the current time due to security risks (Justice Select Committee, 2019). Trialling an eVoting pilot system in a small number of council elections will allow the security issues to be tested and, if found to be robust, help assure the public that eVoting is as safe as possible.

The comments from the young people consulted in my research strongly supported eVoting as a way to potentially increase youth voter turnout. This is consistent with Bochsler (2010), who concluded in his research in central Europe that eVoting has the potential to increase voter turnout. However, it runs counter to Le Grone’s (2016) work, which found that those countries which have adopted eVoting reported minimal or no changes in turnout rates. The technology for eVoting does still need to be developed and I recognise that any eVoting platform must be secure and fit for purpose and that we are not at a stage where we can introduce these changes immediately.

The introduction of eVoting is likely to be inevitable in our advancing technological world and with the support of the government, which is already evident in New Zealand, with the Prime Minister stating that she would like to see eVoting introduced. As with any projects of this magnitude, trials are essential before being rolled out across the nation. So, is eVoting a possible solution? Yes, it appears from the perspectives of young people that it is. It is important that decision-makers take this evidence into account, and this research has made an original contribution with this data.

6.2 Proposal 2: Youth and compulsory voting

The survey results on compulsory voting were somewhat of an even split, with 42.9% agreeing that it should be compulsory, and 40% saying that it should not; a large proportion (17.1%) was unsure. The survey question on compulsory voting was framed as ‘Do you think
that voting in both central and local government elections should be made compulsory for all eligible voters?’ Some thought that compulsory voting should be brought in for central government elections only and not local government – which illustrates the concept of first- and second-order elections. Some held the reverse view and thought that compulsory voting should exist only for local government elections.

Comments made in the focus groups suggested that compulsory voting was a good idea but cautioned that more information needs to be available for voters (this is further detailed below in section 5.4 Information). In the literature, Gordon and Segura (1997) and Shineman (2012) argue that voting enhances political knowledge and access to information. If New Zealand does venture down the path of compulsory voting, the evidence gathered in my study provides a unique contribution from young voters and shows that civics education in schools should be implemented prior to compulsory voting being introduced. Selb and Lachar (2009) found that 25% of Belgian voters who voted did so because it was compulsory, and would not vote if it was voluntary. They also found that people were less likely to find more information about the election or were less interested in voting, if it was not compulsory. The Australian Electoral Commission (2016) reported that at the 2016 general election, the voter turnout was the lowest since 1922, and in some seats, once informal votes had been taken into account, less than three-quarters of those entitled to vote actually cast a valid vote. The largest decrease was seen in the youth voter sector. In Australia, the turnout percentages include both formal and informal votes, so when turnout is reported it does not represent the actual number of valid votes. In the 2016 Australian election, only around 66% of those aged 18 years turned out to vote.

In my study, opinions on compulsory voting differed, with some stating that they were against compulsory voting as it was contrary to personal choice and freedom of expression, and that it was undemocratic. As noted in chapter two, no one would doubt that compulsory voting increases voter turnout, but the question is, at what cost? According to rational choice theory, when individuals believe that their vote will make a difference, voter turnout will be higher than if individuals believe that their vote will not make a difference (Heywood, 2002). But what if individuals are required to vote regardless of their perceived indifference to turning out to vote? Individuals will still turn out to vote, but in some
instances might not actually cast a valid vote. Still, they will be aware that their individual choice on the voting paper is unlikely to make any difference to the overall election result (Mueller, 2003). In Australia, the penalty for not voting if you do not have a sufficient reason is only $20. Since the penalty is both small and not rigorously enforced, people sense that it will not be imposed, so the consequences of not voting are small.

According to some scholars, voting is not only a right but also an obligation (Birch, 2008; Hill, 2015; Pringle, 2012; Solhaug, 2016). Hill (2015) explores the individual’s right not to vote from a theoretical perspective and also whether this provides the same protection for individuals as the right to vote. She concluded that voting is more than just a right, it is also a duty for individuals. Hill states that: “Voting in elections is the primary mechanism by which individuals can hold their governments to account” (p. 189). Other scholars suggest that high voter turnout does not help achieve democracy if the voters are not well informed (Lau et al., 2014; Singh & Roy, 2018). In my study, there was resistance to the idea of compulsory voting due to the belief that a number of people would waste their vote, or cast an invalid vote if they were compelled to vote. Hooghe and Stiers (2017), however, stated that “compulsory voting is associated with higher levels of electoral turnout” (p. 75), but it has been suggested that this leads to a trade-off with the quality of the vote. It is important to note that irrespective of which of the main questions were being asked, the participants in my study kept highlighting, unprompted, the need for civics education to be taught in schools. As discussed below, this is a major finding of my research.

From the perspective of young people, instead of compulsory voting, sending reminder text messages throughout the election period could be more beneficial. At the 2008 general election, the Electoral Commission sent text messages to those who registered for this service, to remind them to vote on election day (Hercus, 2012). The Electoral Commission stated that they had an increase in the turnout rate of 4.7% from those who received the text compared to those who did not. Whilst the text was sent to registered users, and not specifically youth, it did have a higher impact on those voters who had enrolled in the month before election day, who are often youth voters (Catt & Northcote, 2009). Being able to text voters was also a popular suggestion from the Auckland Council research (Allpress & Rangsivek, 2020).
Taking into account both previous research and responses from the participants in this study, I consider that voting in New Zealand should remain voluntary for the present time. Looking to the 2016 Australian general election example, we see that around 25% of votes were marked as informal on top of the already 5-10% who did not turn up to vote. This provides comparable turnout results to what we experience in New Zealand, with 79% of voter turnout for the whole population in 2017, and 69.3% for 18- to 24-year-olds.

6.3 Proposal 3: Youth voters and the voting age

While the young people involved in this study were unreservedly keen on introducing eVoting, they were much more hesitant about reducing the voting age. Their responses strongly indicated that young people are opposed to reducing the legal voting age to 16 years. It will be recalled that only 19.2% supported reducing the voting age to 16 years, with over two thirds (68.5%) opposed, and 12.3% who were not sure. I would have expected the youngest of the sample (18- and 19-year-olds) might have been interested in voting when they were 16 and felt some camaraderie towards their younger counterparts. However, the general consensus that the voting age should not be lowered to include 16- and 17-year-olds was because they were considered to lack the necessary knowledge, ability, and information to vote. There was, though, some concession that there is individual variation and that some 16-year-olds do have the maturity and political knowledge about what is occurring locally, nationally, and internationally. Another common theme was that 16- and 17-year-olds lacked the maturity and life experience to make an informed vote, and there was the suggestion that younger voters could be heavily influenced by their parents, teachers, or others. These views are in keeping with socialisation theory (discussed in chapter two), which suggests that the political attitudes and behaviour of voters are established when they are children (Torney-Purta, 2000). Both Hercus (2012) and Gross (2007) have stated that political interest and voter turnout was influenced by parents.

Reviewing the international evidence is useful to see how this sits with the views of young people. The US National Youth Survey (2002) found that when youth were told to vote by their parents, 69.1% considered it important, with only 39% independently viewing voting as
important without parental pressure (Jones, 2007). Hercus’s (2012) research (discussed in chapter two), found that several of his participants were influenced by socialising agents—mainly their parents—and that this took on either an ‘active’ or ‘passive’ form.

Those who supported the lowering of the voting age to 16 years did so because youth of this age are already subject to a wide range of ‘adult’ responsibilities. They expressed views such as: it’s their future so they should have a say, and they are old enough to pay taxes, drive, and give sexual consent, so they should have the ability to vote. Indoctrination is a good thing for young people, and other survey and focus group participants agreed that if the voting age were reduced, then civics education would be needed at school. With regard to lowering the voting age, both scholars and my participants have suggested that there is a current need to increase a sense of civic duty by instilling an understanding of the importance of democracy as a whole, which will lead to an increased inclination to turn out to vote. Ellis (2006) views the early voting years as formative, with long-lasting effects (discussed in chapter one) “The first three elections for which a voter is qualified are of defining importance, and that if voting does not become routine early in a person’s life, the potential for that individual to participate consistently may be lost” (p. 16).

I think that there needs to be further research into the area. According to the information gathered in my study, the participants subjectively believed that those under the age of 18 years are unprepared to vote (regardless of whether they are or not). Given that voter turnout might be low for 16- and 17-year-olds, based on the patterns of current youth voting in addition to concerns raised here, there exists the potential that opening up voting to the lower age group could further drive down overall voter turnout.

The point that 16- and 17-year-olds pay tax, drive, and give sexual consent is well made. However, being fully able to understand the voting process and requirements, policies of the candidates, and to make an informed decision and vote, are tasks that can remain restricted to those who are 18 and over. Reducing the voting age to 16 years may also not have any positive effect on voter turnout numbers over the long term. As mentioned above, Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) suggest that reducing the voting age can reduce voter turnout by 2% for every one-year reduction in age. Hence, New Zealand might encounter a 4%
decrease if the voting age went from 18 to 16 years. In general, however, those countries which have reduced their voting age to 16 or 17 have seen little or no impact on youth turnout rates. Findings from overseas suggest that the issues surrounding reducing the voting age make it an unrewarding proposition (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013). In a New Zealand context, I think that it is worthy of further research. There may be good reasons for reducing the voting age, but increasing voter turnout is not one of them, and this initiative is not supported by young people themselves.

6.4 Proposal 4: Lack of information for voters

Lack of information on who to vote for, what candidates stand for, and how to vote in some instances was a major reoccurring theme throughout my research. Survey and focus group participants who did not vote in the most recent local and central government elections said it was because they perceived there to be a lack of available information, or that information was too hard to find. This perceived lack of information concerned how to vote, who to vote for, and what the candidates stood for. The literature also highlights that a lack of information corresponds to a reduction in voter turnout (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Larcinese, 2007; Lasse, 2004; Palfrey & Poole, 1987; Wattenberg, 2000). Research conducted on voter turnout in New Zealand also stated that lack of information was a common reason for people not turning out to vote (Cvana et al., 2004; Local Government New Zealand, 2002; Nielsen, 2003). LGNZ found that the lack of information and knowledge about candidates decreased between 2004 and 2016. This shows that, if there have been changes in policy regarding increasing the amount of information being made available to voters, then this has not been reflected in the data from the LGNZ study (LGNZ, 2016). As mentioned above, Lassen (2005) researched Copenhagen’s municipal elections in 2000 and reported that those who felt they had been ‘informed’ increased their probability of voting by 20%. The question posed in my survey was: ‘If there was more information available to you when you vote in local government elections, do you think that this would increase the likelihood of you participating?’ A significant majority (80.3%) said yes. The youth felt as though they did not know enough about politics, and that they felt more information should be made available to them, in an easier format, and that it should be available at their fingertips (such as on their smartphones).
My findings and the international literature show that youth are discouraged from voting, do not vote, or do not want to vote due to feeling that they have inadequate information. Participants in this study thought that they did not have enough information about candidates or their policies to make an informed decision. They did not want to vote for the wrong candidate or a candidate who did not hold the same ideals as themselves. Other participants also said that they did not have enough information about politics or the process of voting and that this discouraged them from turning out to vote. Voting with an absence of knowledge can have very real consequences. Bartels (1996) postulates that if voters do not have adequate information about an election and/or candidates standing in an election, this could mean that the election results may be inaccurate because they do not reflect the make-up of the population. The academic literature (see chapter two) has established that an absence of political information can be directly linked to a decrease in voter turnout (Hercus, 2012). In addition, the less informed voters are, the less likely they are to feel their vote is important (Laseen, 2005). This, of course, relates to the rational choice theory, where voters believe that it is pointless to vote when they cannot make a meaningful and informed choice (Laseen, 2005). Larcinese (2007) summarised this when he reviewed the impact on the 1997 British General Election; he concludes: “political knowledge has a sizeable and statistically significant impact on the British citizens’ likelihood of voting” (p. 389). This also suggests that many people do not have a strong enough sense of civic duty to vote, sufficient to override their perceived lack of information or knowledge.

Survey participants also said that media coverage of local government elections was poor or inadequate, and they felt that this led them to be uninformed about what was occurring in their local areas. Opinions such as there being no ‘hype’ around local politics, and candidates just seeming to ‘come out of the woodwork’ and showing ‘no general interest in gaining the youth vote’ were voiced. Participants expressed concern that information, which was provided through newspapers, university magazines, and even candidates themselves, could be misleading and biased. Participants wanted an unbiased site where they could get all of the information they require on the voting process, the candidates, and their policies, and then actually vote: one app - ‘an app to rule all apps’ - so to speak.
Those participants who had voted either at the previous local or central elections felt that
the candidate information booklet provided lacked the required amount of information.
They felt that the short word count that each candidate was limited to was inadequate to
provide all the necessary information about themselves, their policies, and views.
Participants also thought that these blurbs lacked meaningful information and were boring
in terms of presentation. Only 15% of respondents felt that this booklet had any helpful
information. Researchers in the field note (see chapter two) that the more information a
voter has, the more likely they are to be politically engaged (Larchinese, 2007; Palfrey &
Poole, 1987).

Many participants thought that councils and political parties make little effort to engage
with youth. This is an example of mobilisation theory, whereby candidates are not
interested in youth and focus their efforts on other sections of the population. This tended
to make youth feel less inclined to vote or even search for more information. There is a
considerable amount of literature that shows that lack of concern or motivation from
candidates (or political parties) does decrease one’s propensity to turn out to vote (Gerber
et al., 2002; Niemi and Hammner, 2006; Niven, 2004; Russel, 2005; Wielhouwer & Lockerbie,
1994). This is a concern; if youth feel that they are disconnected from the electoral process
and think that candidates are not going to represent them adequately, then this does have
an isolating effect for youth.

A small number of participants wondered if having political parties in local government
elections would be a good idea. This way, they felt, they would better be able to align
themselves with a party, as they would have more of an idea of what the candidate stood
for. While this is something that was not explored further, there are obvious benefits for an
uninformed voter. If an individual voted in central elections for a particular party, it would
make it easier when selecting a candidate who stood for (or was endorsed by or could use
the party ‘branding’ of) that same party in local government elections.

Overall, the opinions of the study participants, and in the relevant literature, suggest that
the quality of information, and especially of information relating to local government
elections, is of poor quality. Youth are disadvantaged by this. It is clear that when it comes to encouraging youth to turn out to vote, having more politically neutral information available in one place would help immensely. It would be untrue to say that there is no available information, or that all of the information available is irrelevant or biased, but there is vast room for improvement and accessibility to this information for all. However, there does need to be some onus placed on youth as well; they also need to take the initiative and seek out additional information for themselves.

The candidate information booklet as it currently stands, with a maximum of 150 words, did not provide enough information, according to the survey and focus group participants. This does not give youth (or any voter) adequate information on the candidates, if that is their sole source of information. If an app was developed, this could list all of the information currently contained in the candidate information booklet, and have links that voters can click on to take them to external websites carrying candidate information. In time, this app could also be linked to eVoting, so would be a ‘one-stop-shop’.

6.5 Proposal 5: Strong support for civics education in high schools

Civics education was not a topic that I originally sought to investigate because it does not specifically look at changes and ways of increasing voter turnout. I wanted to investigate changes directly linked to voting – how it is done, who can do it, and whether we should have to do it. Civics education is a step removed from that. However, what emerged very strongly from my research was that all of the proposed solutions I explored are clearly linked to a desire for more education for young people to give them confidence, information, and motivation. Whilst there was one question within the survey about civics, this was more for clarification purposes than anything else. However, civics education was found to be a major recurring theme from participants throughout both the survey and focus groups, with the issue being linked to comments about compulsory voting and reducing the voting age. Participants resoundingly believed that if either of those reforms were introduced, then civics education in high schools would also need to be provided.
Over 90% of the survey participants said that they should have been taught civics while at high school. Many comments in the survey’s free text fields made mention of the fact that the participants themselves felt they knew nothing, or very little, about voting, the voting process, or even how central government works, let alone had any knowledge on what local government actually does or how it works. Some participants shared that they are not aware of how local government impacts their everyday lives.

Civics education was a constant theme in both the survey and focus group discussions. Overall, a shared understanding of what they expected from civics education included how a government is formed, the process of elections, and how to vote, as well as how democracy functions. No one in the focus groups disagreed with the need (or increased need) for civics education in schools. There was some discussion that civics education should not just be confined to schools, and that it could also become the responsibility of tertiary education providers to provide information on upcoming elections. While I know that many student organisations do provide information to students, it can be at times hard to make this unbiased and include enough relevant information for youth to make an informed decision. Perhaps this is something that independent organisations like the Electoral Commission could provide to high schools and tertiary education facilities.

Discussions regarding compulsory voting led to participants suggesting that civics education in schools also needed to become compulsory and needed to occur first. An increase in civics education would most likely have a positive impact on an individual’s sense of civic duty. The survey asked those participants who were eligible and voted in the 2016 local government elections why they did so – what motivated them to turn out to vote? A large percentage (71%) of participants selected the answer ‘It’s a citizen’s duty to vote.’

When related back to the concepts of socialisation, though, civic duty is positively intertwined with voter turnout (Blais, 2000). Individuals feel pressure and worry what others think of them when they fail to turn out to vote (Gerber et al., 2008). This is why socialisation can increase an individual’s sense of civic duty. Civics education in high schools for 16- to 18-year-olds will strengthen the sentiment amongst young people that they have
a civic duty to vote. This is also supported by the research conducted by LGNZ (2002) and Cavana et al. (2004).

Not only did the youth in this study strongly advocate civics education, it is also an area which has begun to receive increased attention more widely. Over the past couple of years, evidence-based research has been conducted to try to convince the Ministry of Education to engage in civics education in schools. In 2020, the ministry, with major contributions from political scientists, developed and published a document called ‘Civics and Citizenship Education – Teaching and Learning Guide’ (Ministry of Education, 2020). This guide supports both primary and secondary schools in developing an overview and understanding of what effective civics education is, and what it is to be a citizen in a democracy (Ministry of Education, 2020). The guide breaks sections down by age (primary and secondary) and provides guidance for ensuring the next generation are informed civic citizens. I am hopeful that youth currently in schools might be more aware of the importance of civics by the time they are eligible to vote in the coming election rounds.

6.6 Research limitations and future research

Some of the limitations of this research are that I only surveyed youth based in Dunedin and Palmerston North. These are both centres of tertiary education. Consequently, their views are not necessarily that of the youth population in New Zealand. The attitudes of the focus groups were also only those of university students, so there is a limitation in being able to say that these are also the same for the whole non-student youth population. There was also an over-representation of students taking Politics as a subject; they will have had a particular interest in politics, voting, and elections, likely more so than the typical student or other young person has.

It is important that while this research has obtained some interesting findings, these need to be built on. Future research could include wider sampling of New Zealand youth across a variety of rural and urban centres, and from a variety of educational and vocational settings which can also encompass unemployed youth. This way the responses would be more representative of the entire youth population. Further research needs to be conducted into
reducing the voting age. It is not possible from this research to accurately gauge whether this would lead to an increase in youth voter turnout for local government elections. Another area of valuable future research is that of civics education. While this was an area largely outside the scope of the current research, it was mentioned time and time again by participants in the survey and focus groups. Finally, because the survey was non-random, it was not possible to analyse the views of certain sub-groups, such as Māori and Pasifika, who are over-represented in non-voter statistics. A detailed study of Māori and Pasifika youth and their views on the three proposed reforms would seem a fruitful avenue for further research.
Conclusion

This thesis asked “Do young people (18-24 years think that eVoting, compulsory voting, and a reduction in the voting age would encourage them to vote in New Zealand local government elections?” I have given youth themselves a voice in this research through a survey and focus groups which solicited their opinions on these proposals. This has filled gaps in the current research on youth voter turnout in New Zealand, on the youth voice on eVoting, on how information affects the motivation of youth to turn out to vote, and on the impact civics education in schools may have on political participation. The originality of this data will serve as a base for future research. Young people, this research shows, have clear views about the three proposals explored: they support eVoting, they are divided on the issue of compulsory voting, and they do not support lowering the voting age. But perhaps the strongest message delivered by these young people was in relation to the need for civics education in schools.

I have woven together information, literature, and existing research, and considered them in relation to the findings from my analysis of the survey and focus group data. I provided an analysis of the literature on voter turnout, both from an international and New Zealand perspective. I focused on voter turnout in a New Zealand context, and finally, I discussed youth voter turnout in New Zealand. I have emphasised that voter turnout is important for any healthy democracy and that a decline in voter turnout can result in a weakened democracy. I have also highlighted the importance of having the appropriate amount of information for a voter to make an informed decision, and that without a useful level of information an individual’s motivation to turn out to vote can be negatively affected. This supports the many academics who state that the more political information a voter has, the more likely they are to be politically engaged, and the more likely that they will vote.

I selected an action research design for this project, as I wanted data and conclusions that could become collaborative and support transformational change with those in charge of the electoral process. I wanted results that could be implemented in real daily life. I believe that action research has allowed me to achieve this outcome. My research showed evidence from a theoretical point of view, but also from real-life examples of the attitudes of youth in
terms of voter turnout. Action research is about creating knowledge and distributing this knowledge to those who can put it into ‘action’. So, while the content of my research is essential in terms of plugging gaps in the literature, I believe that my recommended actions, and their potential to increase voter turnout in the future, are possibly more important.

The mixed-methods approach used here combined the best of both worlds of qualitative and quantitative research. These two approaches allowed me to integrate the findings from the survey and the focus groups and take a more holistic approach in my analysis. Furthermore, the explanatory sequential approach worked very well; the responses from the survey informed the development of the questions subsequently used in the focus groups. This was an essential aspect of the research as it provided flexibility and allowed themes to be explored that may not have been addressed if the process was not sequential.

Introducing eVoting was very much supported by the vast majority of survey participants, with 84.2% supporting eVoting as a method to increase voter turnout. The focus group youth also strongly supported eVoting being introduced in New Zealand, believing that it would have a positive effect on increasing voter turnout amongst youth. These results support those of other recent New Zealand research conducted by the Electoral Commission, Statistics New Zealand, Massey University, and Auckland Council. Not only did participants in this research state that they believed that eVoting would increase youth turnout, they also proposed and supported the idea of a voting app. The participants asserted that an app that listed candidate information and allowed eVoting directly would not only increase the convenience of voting but would potentially increase youth voting.

Participants from this research were opposed to reducing the voting age to 16 years, with 68.5% thinking that it should not be reduced. While there were some valid arguments supporting its lowering, the majority of the participants thought that 16- and 17-years-olds lacked political knowledge and were too immature to vote. I believe more research needs to be conducted on this aspect. The same can be said for reviewing the provision of a dedicated civics education programme within schools, particularly since the Ministry of Education has recently developed guidelines on this for schools. It is also important to
include 16- and 17-year-olds in these discussions to ask them what they think about being offered the chance to vote.

Participants were ambivalent about making voting compulsory in New Zealand. While the percentage of those wanting compulsory voting was only 3% higher than those not in favour of it, the general comments were against the change. Some participants in favour of compulsory voting preferred it to be for central government elections and not local government elections. Having reviewed all the data from the surveys and focus groups, along with the international literature, and statistics from the 2016 and 2019 Australian General Elections, I do not believe that compulsory voting would have the overall effect on youth voter turnout that some suggest it might. The Electoral Commission could reintroduce the sending of reminder texts to enrolled voters during the election period encouraging them to vote. This was also a popular suggestion with participants in the Auckland Council survey in 2019. The majority of the current study participants thought that if either the voting age was reduced or voting became compulsory, then some form of civics education needed to be introduced into schools.

There is ample international literature and research on voter participation, voter turnout, and what motivates individuals to vote. The problem is that it is primarily directed towards general or central elections. There is minimal research dedicated to voter turnout for New Zealand, with even less concerning local government, and the literature is virtually non-existent when it comes to youth turnout. This research goes some way to addressing this gap in the knowledge and lays the foundations for further research in the future.

My hope for this research is that the information provided by my findings is reviewed and adopted by those who can make changes in the New Zealand electoral system. We need youth to be motivated to participate in the various forms of democracy. There is truth in the old cliché: the youth are our future.
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Appendix One – Candidate Information Booklet

Scout BARBOUR-EVANS
Independent
My principal place of residence is in the Dunedin City Council area. I am also standing for Councillor, Dunedin City Council.
Scout Barbour-Evans is a second time mayoral and council candidate standing on a platform of proven integrity and compassion. They are a big believer in finding sustainable, holistic solutions for issues that won’t leave out the little guy. Having lived in the city since their own childhood and recently planted more permanent roots here for their daughter’s future, Scout has a personal stake in ensuring that the decisions made today facilitate a safer, kinder future for us all. This is our future, Dunedin.

Finn CAMPBELL
Independent Youth
My principal place of residence is in the Dunedin City Council area. I am also standing for Mayor. Dunedin is my home. I went to school here and attended the University of Otago. When I think of the place that is most important in the world to me, I think of here.
I am running because young people are poorly represented in New Zealand politics and current decision makers are not prioritising our needs. To guarantee a future for young people in Dunedin - we need action on climate change. To do that - we need a seat at the table. Too many councillors have been thinking about the next 3 years and not the next 30 - and that I not going to cut it. I have spent the last four years advocating for climate change solutions in Dunedin. I know the issues we will face in the future and I have a clear set of solutions to get Dunedin there.

Neville K JEMMETT
Independent
My principal place of residence is in the Dunedin City Council area.
I work hard to achieve the necessary results. Since 1980, I have worked with council members and served on council committees, gaining recognition within council and a sound knowledge of council operations. There are some concerns within council that worry me, such as, cycle lane placements and resulting safety issues, loss of parking spaces, limited heritage support and promotion, low public awareness of proposed city re-development and lengthy consent delays. As a new face on council I will promote a review of the way city re-development projects are presented to ratepayers and the public. As chairperson of the Trust advancing the return of the Mornington Cable Car route I know the importance of public support and how best to achieve results. As an independent I am willing to work for and with the people of Dunedin in improving our city without prejudice by providing advocacy at council level.
Appendix Two – Survey Group Questions

Participation of Young People in Local Government Elections

Q1 Are you enrolled to vote in this year’s local government election?

- Yes, I’m enrolled in Dunedin (1)
- Yes, I’m enrolled in Palmerston North (2)
- Yes, I’m enrolled elsewhere in New Zealand (3)
- No (4)
- Not Eligible (5)
- Not Sure (6)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you enrolled to vote in this year’s local government election? = Not Eligible
Skip To: Q2 If Are you enrolled to vote in this year’s local government election? = Yes, I’m enrolled in Palmerston North
Skip To: Q2 If Are you enrolled to vote in this year’s local government election? = Yes, I’m enrolled in Dunedin
Skip To: Q2 If Are you enrolled to vote in this year’s local government election? = No
Skip To: Q2 If Are you enrolled to vote in this year’s local government election? = Yes, I’m enrolled elsewhere in New Zealand
Skip To: Q2 If Are you enrolled to vote in this year’s local government election? = Not Sure
Q2 Are you intending to vote in the next local government election in October of this year?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Sure (3)
- Not Eligible (International Student) (4)
- Not Eligible (under 18) (5)
- Other (please state in the comments box) (6)

Q3 Did you vote at the last local government election in 2016?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Eligible (3)
- Not Sure (4)
Q4 If you did **NOT** vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many options as you wish)

- [ ] Did not know about the candidates  (1)
- [ ] Something more important to do  (2)
- [ ] Not interested in seeing what it was like  (3)
- [ ] Forgot  (4)
- [ ] Did not feel obligated to vote  (5)
- [ ] Did not think that it would be interesting/fun  (6)
- [ ] Family were not going to vote  (7)
- [ ] Friends where not going to vote  (8)
- [ ] Did not receive a voting pack  (9)
- [ ] Not sure which political party the candidate/s stood for  (10)
- [ ] Do not come from a politically active family/background  (11)
- [ ] Not sure how to vote  (12)
- [ ] Other (please state in the comments box)  (13)

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Skip To: Q8 If you did **NOT** vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Did not know about the candidates

Skip To: Q8 If you did **NOT** vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Something more important to do

Skip To: Q8 If you did **NOT** vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Not interested in seeing what it was like
Skip To: Q8 If if you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Forgot
Skip To: Q8 If if you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Did not feel obligated to vote
Skip To: Q8 If if you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Did not think that it would be interesting/fun
Skip To: Q8 If if you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Family were not going to vote
Skip To: Q8 If if you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Friends where not going to vote
Skip To: Q8 If if you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Not sure which political party the candidate/s stood for
Skip To: Q8 If if you did NOT vote in the last local government election, why was that? (selected as many option... = Other (please state in the comments box)
Q5 If you did vote in the last local government election in 2016, why was that? (select as many options as you wish)

☐ It is a citizen's duty to vote (1)

☐ Supporting particular candidate/s (2)

☐ To see what it was like (3)

☐ Though it would be interesting/fun (4)

☐ Family proposed to come along (5)

☐ Family told me who to vote for (6)

☐ Friends were going to vote (7)

☐ Nothing important to do that day (8)

☐ Was easy and straight forward (9)

☐ Click to write Choice 11 (10)

☐ Other (please state in the comments box) (11)

________________________________________________
Q6 If you did vote in the last local government election in 2016 did you read the 'Candidate Information Booklet' which was contained within your voter pack?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Sure (3)

Q7 If you did vote in the last local government election in 2016 did you seek out further sources for information and the candidate standing for election? (select as many options as you wish)

- No (1)
- Council website (2)
- Candidate/s website/social media (3)
- Newspaper (4)
- Candidate Pamphlets (5)
- Communicated directly with candidate/s (6)
- Not Sure (7)
- Other (please state in the comments box) (8)
Q8 If there was more information available to you when you vote in local government elections do you think that this would increase the likelihood of you participating?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Sure (3)

Q9 Do you believe that the current form of voting for local government elections (postal voting papers) is easy and straightforward?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Sure (3)
- Other (please state in the comments box) (4)

Q10 Are you aware of what is happening in local government politics in your region?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Sure (3)
Q11 Are you engaged in local government politics? For example, do you complete submissions, attend Council meetings, meet or communicate with Councillors?

☐ Yes (select as many options below as you wish) (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ Complete Submissions (3)

☐ Attend Council/Committee Meetings (4)

☐ Communicate with Councillors/Politicians (5)

☐ Meet with Councillors/Politicians (6)

☐ Read media reports on the council (7)

Q12 Do you think that we should have eVoting/online voting? (Please use comment box to add more information).

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ Not Sure (3)

☐ Comment: (4) ________________________________________________________
Q13 Do you think that the voting age should be reduced from 18 years to 16 years? (Please use comment box to add more information).

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Sure (3)
- Comment: (4) ________________________________

Q14 Do you think that voting in both general and local government elections should be made compulsory for all citizens/residents? (Please use comment box to add more information).

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Sure (3)
- Comment: (4) ________________________________

Q15 Do you think that you should have been taught about elections and in particular voting when you were at high school? (Please use comment box to add more information).

- Yes (1)
- Click to write Choice 5 (2)
- No (3)
- Not Sure (4)
- Comment: (5) ________________________________
Q16 If you would like to take part in a focus group either in Dunedin on Thursday 5 September 2019 or Palmerston North on Tuesday 10 September 2019 please indicate below and state your email address. All focus group participants will be given a $50.00 Prezzi card for their time.

- Yes (1) ________________________________
- No (2)

Q17 Did you vote in the last general election in 2017?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Eligible (3)
- Not Sure (4)
Q18 What is your current status?

- □ Employed (full time) (1)
- □ Employment (part time) (2)
- □ University of Otago (3)
- □ Otago Polytechnic (4)
- □ Massey University (5)
- □ Universal College of Learning (UCOL) (6)
- □ International Pacific University (IPU) (7)
- □ Trade Apprenticeship (8)
- □ Other (9)
- □ Prefer not to say (10)

Q19 Gender

- □ Male (1)
- □ Female (2)
- □ Prefer not to say (3)
Q20 Age

- 17 (1)
- 18 (2)
- 19 (3)
- 20 (4)
- 21 (5)
- 22 (6)
- 23 (7)
- 24 (8)
- 25+ (9)
- Prefer not to say (10)
Q21 Ethnicity

- NZ/European (1)
- Māori (2)
- Pacific Peoples (3)
- Asian (4)
- Middle East (5)
- Latin American (6)
- African (7)
- Other (8)
- Prefer not to say (9)
Q22 What part of New Zealand do you consider to be your home region?

- Northland (1)
- Auckland (2)
- Waikato (3)
- Coromandel (4)
- Bay of Plenty (5)
- Gisborne (6)
- Taranaki (7)
- Whanganui/Manawatu (8)
- Hawkes Bay (9)
- Wellington (10)
- Nelson/Tasman (11)
- West Coast (12)
- Canterbury (13)
- Otago (14)
- Southland (15)
- Other (16)
- Not Sure (17)
- Prefer not to say (18)
Appendix Three – Focus Group Questions

1. In all honesty, who is going to vote in this year’s local government election? If you’re not, then that’s ok.
   
a. So why are you going to vote?
   
b. So why aren’t you going to vote?

2. Do you feel that it’s important to have a say in local government elections when you might only be here (Dunedin) for a short period of time? Why/why not?

3. What do you think gets people interested enough to vote?

4. How do you feel about the idea of electronic (eVoting)?

5. How do you feel about the idea of reducing the voting age to 16? Why/why not?

6. How do you feel about the idea of making voting compulsory for both local government and general elections? Why/why not?

7. What are your thoughts on the differences between local government and general elections. Is one more important than the other? Why/why not?

8. What changes do you think could occur that would enable voter turnout in youth to increase in local government? [looking for ideas]

9. Is there anything else that you’d like to bring up regarding youth voter turnout in local government elections?