Submission on the Inquiry into the 2014 General Election To the Justice and Electoral Committee

This submission is from the National Youth Advisory Group (NYAG).

Representative of the National Youth Advisory Group wish to appear before the committee to speak to our submission.

The contact person for this submission is Brad Olsen, a member of the National Youth Advisory Group.

We wish that the following appear in support of our submission: Jason Sebestian Josiah Tualamali'i Brad Olsen Wikiwira Pokiha

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"If you want change - you have to be part of it."

1. Executive Summary

NYAG is a representative body of over 50 young people, aged 12-24, selected to provide government and community agencies with timely advice on many different issues.

NYAG ran an online survey of 200 young people, and held a number of nationwide focus groups to gauge young peoples' views.

From this, the National Youth Advisory Group makes the following recommendations, which are further detailed in Part 6:

- Civics Education
- New Voters Information
- Enrolment incentives
- Increased levels of pertinent information during the Parliamentary term.
- Using 'youth friendly' language
- Increasing Accessibility
- Improving advertising of elections
- Promoting the message "Young people are important too"
- Mobile technology
- Secure online voting
- More youth enegagement with the functions of politics

The two main recommendations that we see as being the most important to increasing participation are:

A. Introduce compulsory civics education in schools

Young people said that they need to be engaged early to stay engaged in the electoral process.

Many young people reported that they did not vote



because they did not think their vote made a difference.

The sessions could be delivered by specialist teachers with support from young people, or alternatively by young people themselves in a peer-to-peer format, to actively engage youth. They have to be engaging and interactive sessions to combat the perception of politics as nerdy.

B. Produce New Voters Information

"Teach real matters in school - but cater it to the audience."

A second key reason for not voting was because they did not understand what the parties stood for, and the political process.

This suggestion is to produce a booklet to cover parties and their policies, candidates and also how the political system works, especially MMP. Put in easily understood "youth friendly" language. We understand that there is currently the Get Ready and Vote Booklet published by the Electoral Commission, however youth are looking for further information on parties' policies and candidates, delivered in a non-partisan way that might help guide their decisions.

2. Introduction

The Terms of Reference for this Inquiry are "to examine the law and administrative procedures for the conduct of Parliamentary elections in light of the 2014 general election". In making this submission, the NYAG have used data published by the Electoral Commission.

This data shows that of enrolled youth aged 18-24, 62.73% (212,204) voted, while over a third, 37.27% (126,065) did not vote. More relevant data will be referenced throughout this submission.

The total number of enrolled youth aged 18-24 was 338,269. The 2013 New Zealand Census Data shows that the youth population in New Zealand aged 18-24 is 408,528, meaning that nearly one in five, 17.2% (70,259), of the youth population aged 18-24 were not enrolled. Furthermore, the voter turnout for youth aged 18-24 was 51.9% (212,204 out of 408,528) However, some young people are not eligible to vote e.g. not New Zealand citizens.

The Y Vote 2015 Survey and focus groups ("Y Vote"), conducted by the National Youth Advisory Group and administered by the Ministry of Youth Development, was conducted online and with specific groups for one week (16-23 March 2015). In total 200 respondents gave their view online, which, when combined with the 56 participants in the focus groups, gives a good spread of youth views from a range of demographics (culture, gender, etc.) The Electoral Act 1993, as amended, outlines the registration process of electors and how people can vote. The relevant sections will be outlined when discussed in this submission.

3. About the National Youth Advisory Group

The Ministry of Youth Development ("MYD") National Youth Advisory Group ("NYAG") is a representative body, selected to provide government and community agencies with timely advice on many different issues.

Members of the NYAG are selected to ensure a broad cross-section of youth around New Zealand. Various demographic profiles influence the makeup of the group, including, but not limited to, age, geographic location, gender and ethnicity. This allows the NYAG to provide well-rounded advice and insight.

To aid NYAG in providing a comprehensive submission, a small survey was undertaken with assistance from the Ministry of Youth Development. The results from this survey of New Zealand will be used throughout this submission. This information was combined with information taken from focus groups run by NYAG to give a well-balanced 'youth' view to the Select Committee.

4. Youth Enrolment

4.1 Why youth enrolled

Young people in New Zealand often find the act of enrolling a relatively simple act, if it occurs early on before an election. Enrolment is best facilitated inside schools and other places where young people gather. Many schools receive visits from the Electoral Commission, often getting entire cohorts of Year 13s to enrol, meaning all students are enrolling at the same time, which adds healthy peer pressure to enrol because "everyone else has to enrol as well".

"It's one of the only ways we get to have a say in who runs our country, and

make our views heard."

4.2 Why youth didn't enrol

Many young people do not understand the process of enrolment, or what this means. For those that don't enrol early on and/or at high school, the process of enrolling is foreign. While many young people know that it is a legal requirement to be enrolled, many are too unsure of the process and what the ramifications are of this action - for example many are worried they will become bombarded with information on politics etc.

At a time when many young people are disengaged from politics and the civics of society, the inaction that comes with non-enrolment causes systematic inactivity and lack of further engagement with young people - they often will never enrol. Non-enrolment starts a cycle of non-participation within young people, which perpetuates itself in the youth community as many youth peers are not demonstrating the advantages of enrolling (and then voting). More youth role models are needed to champion enrolment to youth and encourage them to participate.

4.3 Enrolling and being engaged

Section 82 of the Electoral Act 1993, sets out that all New Zealand citizens aged 18 years old or over must be registered to vote, and that they can register to be on only one roll, the General or Maori roll. Enrolling as soon as possible through schools (via Paragraph (2)) is a crucial aspect of engaging young people, as many are exposed to politics and general civics through classes, but often after leaving school do not engage in elections etc. While many youth find the enrolment process 'cumbersome', the ability for Electoral Commission staff to assist students during school operatives makes this process ensure for

during school enrolment drives makes this process easier for youth, and thus means more youth are likely to enrol.

It is important that young people are enrolled and engaged to ensure <u>fair representation</u> in Parliament. To do this, a culture of engagement and participation needs to be fostered. For many youth, the mentality that "I don't know much" translates to "[voting] doesn't mean much to me". Many youth don't realise the impact of their vote, often thinking that their vote won't make a difference, when in fact if enough young people voted, they would have a sizable cohort of votes that could bring about real impacts during elections.



"I want to have a say in who leads the government and what policies I want to live by."

5. Youth Voting

5.1 Why youth voted

Interestingly, 62% of Y Vote respondents said they "definitely will vote" once they turn 18, while 30% said they "may vote". This compares to the 51.9% youth voter turnout at the 2014 General Election.

56% of those youth who voted in the 2014 General Election did so because they wanted to have their voices heard, and wanted their vote to make a difference. They often felt it was their responsibility to vote so that they could help shape their own future. These young people exercised their democratic right to vote, and wanted to make a point.

16% of young people voted because they wanted to voice their opinions on a number of topics, from the current Government agenda, to individual parties' policies - especially in regards to

topics of interest to youth. These could include tertiary education, employment, taxes, apprenticeships, the Youth Guarantee scheme, information technology, and a number of other areas. They felt strongly about these issues and voted to convey their feelings to politicians who have the power to change these issues.



Many regarded it important to vote because

those in power have the ability to bring about change that has huge ramifications for young people's lives.

"[My] Children are important to me ... so I want to support real change and ensure Government has the right priorities in terms of children and families."

5.2 Why youth didn't vote:

Disengagement

According to the Electoral Commission's Report into the 2014 General Election, 46% of those youth that did not vote didn't even think about the decision not to vote. 38% gave little thought to their decision and only 16% gave lots of thought before deciding not to vote. This clearly shows widespread youth voter apathy, as many didn't think their vote was important, nor whether it would actually influence who would be elected, i.e. many felt it was a waste of time to vote. Compounding this voter apathy is the disconnect between youth voters and current political parties and candidates. Often, current politicians are largely unknown by young people, who, because they cannot identify with politicians, do not vote for any candidate or party. This stems from a lack of information not just about parties and their political positions but also on being aware of how the government affects their daily lives.

"There's not enough of a breakdown on voting for me to know where my vote

goes or how it could contribute to any change."

Many young people aged 18-24 who did not vote in the 2014 General Election were not interested and engaged in politics. Others felt that there was no party or candidate that listened to and campaigned on the interests of young people. Transport was also a barrier for some, with a lack of transport leaving youth without access to polling stations. Youth are seen to be 'transport disadvantaged' and are often unable to move around freely, independent of others.

Other commitments on polling day

Youth are also often busy on Saturday with sports and other social engagements, meaning that when they realised it was voting day, they were not prepared to vote because they had other things to do. This was often compounded by the idea that their vote didn't matter, so if they did



have something else on, it was easier not to vote. Many youth are also employed, and didn't vote because they were otherwise engaged working.

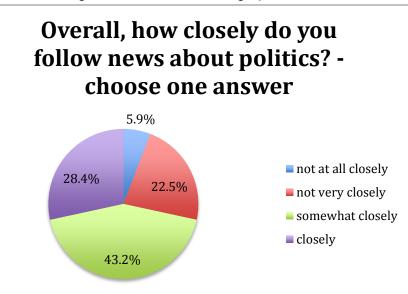
However not many youth would be aware of the provisions of Section 162 of the Electoral Act 1993, where paragraph (1) states that electors must be released from work at 3PM on polling day to vote if they have not had the chance to do so yet, and paragraph (2) states that where the employee is required after 3PM on polling day, they must be given a period of 2 hours to vote during the day itself.

Need for more information

The most important issue surrounding those youth that didn't vote was the lack of understanding/information they had about different parties, candidates, and policies. By far the most common concern from young people was that they did not feel informed enough to make such an important decision about who should control the country's agenda for the next three years. This analysis is confirmed by Table 25 in the Post Election Report, where 10% of youth wanted "more info on party policies/candidates," higher than all other demographics in the 2014

Election. Specifically, information about the process of how to enrol and vote was lacking, as well as information about how MMP worked.

Y Vote 2015 data shows that 29% of youth are not following news about politics with any great depth, with 43% following 'somewhat closely' and only 28% feeling they followed this news closely, indicating a possible reason behind the lack of information. Moreover,



50% had very little or no involvement or engagement with politics. This lack of information is addressed in Point 6.3

A number of youth, often already disenfranchised by their lack of information, become even further disenfranchised by perceived 'biased' media reports surrounding the issue of youth non-participation. Youth are often unfairly portrayed in the media as being lazy when it comes to voting rather than recognising their lack of engagement stems from a need for more information.

5.3 Perceptions around youth voting

A number of young people have negative perceptions surrounding the act of voting, and in general about being engaged in the democratic civics process. These youth see interaction at election time to be 'nerdy'. An oft-heard remark made in relation to politics is that 'it's boring'. Young people are not interested in politics, often because they don't know enough about it for something to have piqued their interests.

Another common misconception is that "youth don't matter". This comes in two parts; one that political parties don't focus enough on young people and young people feel neglected by the lack of innovation and help from parties' policies, and secondly that their individual vote won't make a difference - no change will occur because they voted. It is important to recognise here that young people often undervalue the strength of their position because they do not fully understand the implications of their voting (or lack thereof) - more information needs to be disseminated to youth about the value they bring to society by voting and being engaged.

There is often extremely high push back on voting and politics in general amongst youth in New Zealand. Youth are easily disenfranchised and are not aware of their ability to make a difference to the final outcome of elections. Many often think that the status quo will prevail and that they as young people cannot change this - in fact, the opposite is true, they have the ability to make a difference to society and how it is shaped.

"A lot of young people don't think it is worth the effort because one vote doesn't matter. We need to change that feeling."

5.4 Advertising the 2014 General Election to youth

Young people live in an increasingly connected age, where the Internet and social media facilitates large transfer of important information. Political parties and candidates, now more than ever, are moving to adopt these new technologies to connect better with young people. However, often the information disseminated by both organisations such as the Electoral Commission and political



parties are in the 'wrong' format. They are often long press releases that young people do not read, or are highly technical in their vocabulary. Young people often consume large sets of information in the shortest available time and space, often utilising infographics and other multimedia to remain engaged. Youth often connect better with issues, such as politics, when they are engaged together, such as it sports teams, school classes or other extra-curricular, community groups.

Overall, voting is seen to be 'uncool'. This perception needs to be changed if youth are to ever become better engaged in the democratic process. This will rely on a systematic change in the way civics is 'marketed' to young people, and will also require 'youth champions' to enhance its profile in the community at large. If a large enough group of youth was motivated to vote - or if youth were positively influenced by their peers to vote, voting might then become "cool".

Positive feedback has been received on the Electoral Commission's 'orange cartoon man'. The information shared via this particular promotion is easy to understand and has high distribution throughout a variety of media streams, meaning a large number of young people have been reached, often numerous times.



6. Recommendations

6.1 Getting youth to enrol

Young people, most of whom are in school below the age of 18, need to get engaged in the civic process early to ensure they remain engaged. Here it is important to ensure that young people become enrolled to vote. To increase the number of youth enrolled, we recommend deeper integration in schools. Not just a one-off visit to schools every three years by Electoral Commission staff, but a continued discussion with students about civics throughout successive school years by teachers (integrating it within the school system). This approach could be

championed by senior school staff but also by students in leadership positions (Prefects, student councils etc). The idea of 'civics education' is expanded further in Point 6.3. Furthermore, multiple additional engagements with Electoral Commission staff could also foster relationships and encourage a new societal norm of close youth connections with the Electoral Commission - more young people would become engaged this way as it will eventually becomes the norm.

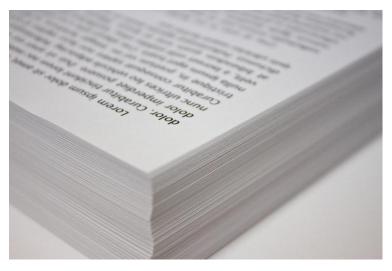
"Schools should definitely push for young New Zealanders to enrol."



Incentives could also be used to get youth enrolled perhaps a prize draw for those that enrol within a certain time. Within the same vein, a concert or other youth-related attractions or activities could mean a large number of young people are assembled together and could be encouraged to vote in order to gain entry into this sort of event i.e. youth organisations collaboratively organising a concert, wherein you get a ticket only if you have enrolled.

6.2 Keeping youth engage

Providing pertinent information to young people throughout the parliamentary term. Youth related news and information about process, bills and other happenings related to politics would foster more interest in elections and politics as a whole and lead to better understanding of the processes. Youth shouldn't be targeted as a demographic during the election year alone but should be engaged continually as different



issues arise. Youth don't need to just be engaged on issues relating to education or employment - but on all other matters too. If the youth of today are truly the leaders of tomorrow - why not start now and treat them as decision makers in waiting instead.

Demonstrating benefits of political engagement

Provide further detail and information on the benefits of being engaged. When educating youth on how to enrol or on voting - the benefits of voting should be clearly stated and explained in a way that youth can understand. Outlining how government works, how voting can influence decisions are key to ensuring youth understand the importance of voting. The message that

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youth can only affect change if they are a part of the process needs to be communicated thoroughly.

Youth friendly information

Provide information on elections and voting in a youth friendly manner. When getting youth to enrol or when educating youth on why voting is important - it is crucial to provide information in a way that youth can understand instinctively. Information should not be provided in a technical or highly complicated medium - but in a way that youth can relate to and in a language that is informal, practical and "everyday". Getting youth to design how this information might look like would be an ideal step.

6.3 Getting youth to vote

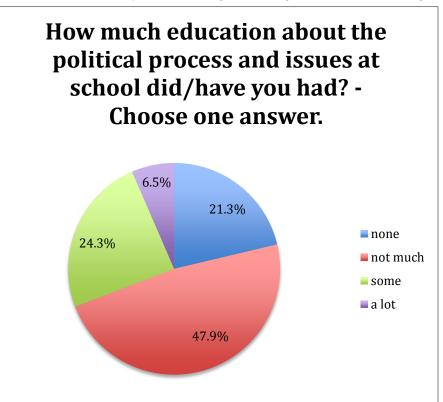
Civics education

"The only thing our school did was have the enrolment people come to our school to sign people up."

47% of Y Vote respondents stated there that wasn't enough education or exposure to political processes or issues at school and 21% of respondents said there was none at all. Furthermore, 34% of Y Vote respondents recommended compulsory civics education in schools. Introducing civics education in schools would aid immensely in increasing knowledge and understanding

about the election process and why it is important to vote.

Civics information would also need to be delivered in a setting where young people would retain it, as it would be designed to be easily taught and remembered, rather than generalised mass audience targeting with election announcements that occur during the election period.



Young people suggested that either specialist teachers conducted these sessions, or that they were delivered by trained youth who acted as peer to peer educators to their fellow youth. Many also suggested that this education should take the form of interactive, engaging sessions so to encourage youth to fully participate. This could also be integrated into the 'careers' area in secondary schools, with a "Preparation for Life' guide being mooted with essential information being included about elections. Ensuring that almost every student who leaves school is aware of why it is important to vote as part of career or 'life' preparations would contribute to changing

the paradigm of how society views voting and being engaged in civic processes.

"At school there needs to be more education done in a 'youthy' way to get youth to understand the whole system and where votes go."

Youth have also identified the types of information they would find the most interesting, engaging, and



informative. This information relates to: MMP, the electoral process, Parliament and the role of Select Committees, how the Government functions, how public policy operates, and how decisions on funding occur. Because many young people do not feel they have enough information to make a well informed vote, these topics would show them not only how their vote matters, but also how the overall process works.

"I feel that compulsory civics education at a young age (primary school for example) until the last year of high school would be a good initiative as it would inform young people about their rights and privileges as citizens."

New Voters Information

The Electoral Commission's Report into the 2014 General Election noted that 10% of youth wanted "more information on party policies/candidates". This is echoed in the Y Vote results where 11% of youth indicated that more information on these would be a viable way of boosting youth voting. As such, the National Youth Advisory Group suggest a new voter's booklet with information about parties' policies and candidates. This could take the form of one page per party and one page per candidate to use however they want to spread their message. This

could be sent out with EasyVote packs with reserves held at polling stations on Election Day. It could also contain information on how MMP works and what the role of Government was - this would aid youth in understanding how their vote would make a difference to their everyday lives. Again, all this information should be presented in a youth friendly medium in a language that is easy to understand.

"Actually educate the young people on how to vote and what all the political jargon means so they know what they are actually voting for."

Using Youth Friendly Language

Youth find the current range of election-related information filled with highly complicated vocabulary, which clouds the information that is trying to be disseminated. This clear, youth friendly, language would make the information more appealing to younger audiences. Currently, many youth have to ask older adults about different concepts, the responses to which often includes unsolicited 'guidance' on who to vote for, undermining the individual vote of the young people.

Other vital information for youth is the provision of information surrounding the Maori vs General Roll enrolments. Many young Maori are unaware of the process surrounding this and what the difference in Rolls means for those voters. An increased availability of information documents in other, non-English languages should be identified as a way to facilitate an increase in the spread of information

We should also look at making it easy to understand the entire process more interesting and easier for youth to understand - for example, by providing a simplified 'roadmap' of how elections work and how the process of party lists, the makeup of Parliament etc. works.

Increasing acknowledgement of the importance of young people voting is also essential. How a single vote can make a difference and how this is all a part of being a well informed, participating member of society needs to be better communicated. The idea that the decisions made now will have far-reaching implications for youth in the future needs to be communicated better.

"Making the language of politics more youth friendly."

Increasing Accessibility

We should similarly look at options of making voting more accessible to youth. In 2014, early voting trends increased significantly compared to previous years. This means that 2014 was more accessible than previous years for voters. There is however more room for improvement in ensuring it is relatively easy and accessible for youth to vote. This might include looking at

options for collaborating with other parties to provide transportation options for younger people to vote.

We also recommend that the Electoral Commission investigate the use of more 'youth-friendly' polling stations, located in places such as

schools, near libraries, in community centres etc. Some respondents in our focus groups highlighted the fact that having a voting booth nearby their place of education was instrumental to ensuring they did vote. Increasing the accessibility to a voting booth by bringing it to the people instead of having people go to the booth might drastically improve our society's voting results. We also recommend that consideration be given to increasing the number of youth helping



staff at polling stations, to ensure youth feel more at ease with the voting process (especially if it is their first time) and to be more willing to participate if other youth are present around them.

"Setting up the voting booth somewhere where (young) people hang out a lot."

We also suggest that due consideration be given to increased promotion of advanced voting to young people. An increased number of young people cast an advanced vote in the 2014 General Election, commonly because they were otherwise engaged on the Saturday of polling. Because young people are busy, transient people, the ability to vote early provides an excellent way for them to contribute but not be hampered by their social nature.

Many young people are employed, and often cannot vote on election day because of their work commitments. Paragraphs (1) and (2) of Section 162 of the Electoral Act 1993, as amended, provide for workers to be released for part of election day to cast their vote - it may be that this provision needs to be marketed harder or stricter rules introduced to ensure all workers have a fair ability to cast their vote and exercise their democratic right, especially youth.

Improving Advertising of Elections

The nature of election-related advertising also needs to change to further engage youth. While many young people positively receive the messages presented by the 'orange cartoon man', many youth feel that better connection could be reached with prominent New Zealanders providing the information, or even having young people themselves promoting election-related information. Increased youth input into planning and rolling out election advertising campaigns in some way, would be crucial to increasing the uptake of information by young people.

Within these types of advertising - an opportunity can be taken to further educate youth by including information about how by choosing who is in power, young people can influence who has control over their taxes, and can influence decisions on education spending etc.

Promoting the message "Young people are important too"

Equality also comes across as an issue with youth voting. Anecdotal evidence suggests preference for voting is given to other voters, including older voters. It appears this is not simply borne out of assisting those that need extra attention, but appears belittling for young people, who, by virtue of being a registered voter, are now equal with all others voting, are subject to bias because of their age. If youth are to believe that their vote is worth exactly the same as everyone elses, they need to be treated fairly at polling stations.

Mobile Technology

Many young people are also prolific smartphone users; as such, many young people suggested the Electoral Commission investigate the viability of an 'app' that contains information on how the voting process works, what the policies of particular parties and candidates are, and also where polling station are located, in an effort to increase the information held by young people in relation to elections.

6.4 Longer-term continuity of youth engagement in elections:

We strongly urge the Government and the Electoral Commission to continue to investigate online voting to simplify access to voting for young people who are currently integrated into a digital world. It is important to recognise that a large proportion of young people in the 2014 General Election who did not feel the voting booth was private — only 56% of youth rated

privacy as "5-Excellent," far lower than all other demographics. Youth may be more receptive to online voting because of its inherent 'normalness' to youth. While security around online voting is a real concern, a valid avenue for further investigation could be having online voters login securely using their IRD number or RealMe account.

As discussed previously in Point 5.3, increased education throughout the curriculum on the topic of civics and how society is



governed could also provide avenues to better engage young people. We need to take a serious look at how we educate and introduce our youth into the "real world" and recognise that voting and being aware of their civic responsibility is an essential part of being prepared for life.

Overall, in the long term, a systemic change is needed to transform the norms of New Zealanders towards voting especially amongst the youth cohort. Politicians need to engage with young people more frequently, and not just on matters that impact young people. Young people need to be taken seriously and not be subject to potentially belittling behaviour when they do attempt to exercise their democratic right. Current societal norms view young people as lazy, with no desire to be engaged. In fact, the opposite is true - young people do want to be engaged but are often not in a position to do so, because they do not feel comfortable enough or lack sufficient clarity on why it's important to do so.

Politics needs to be communicated to young people in a way that is engaging and interesting. Young people people want to be a respected part of this process - and with sufficient information and support, will be able to achieve this. We recognise that there is no overnight fix to fixing the problem of increasing civic participation in New Zealand - however we do need to start somewhere, and starting with our youth and future leaders is the first step.

> "I think it is important that we contribute to democracy early so we can have control over our futures."

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