Before we can begin to identify weaknesses in Aotearoa's democracy, we must define what liberal democracy (Aotearoa's type of democracy) is. To do this we must go back to the origin of the idea of democracy from ancient Athens. The word 'democracy' comes from the ancient Greek words 'demos' meaning common person or citizen, and 'kratos' meaning power. If we put this together, it means 'people power'. Whilst Athenian democracy was a direct-democracy, our form of democracy is a representative democracy. This shows us that what exact constitutional arrangements democracies have can vary, but at their core they all have the concept of 'people power'. The word liberal comes from the Latin word 'liber' meaning free with the suffix -al meaning relating to or characterized by. This gives us the meaning of 'characterised by a free mind.

Put these two words together and you get liberal democracy, a democracy with a particular emphasis on having legally enshrined individual rights and freedoms. As previously mentioned, Aotearoa's form of democracy is a representative democracy. The people of Aotearoa elect a parliament every three years, with measures in place to ensure that the parliament mirrors the general population such as the Māori electorates. The government of Aotearoa has three different branches, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The legislative branch is all the members of parliament as well as their staff and is responsible for creating law. In Aotearoa, as representatives of the people, the supreme power is vested in the legislature. The executive branch is all the ministers, inside and outside as well as all the public servants who work for them and is responsible for enforcing the laws passed by the legislature. The judiciary is the judicial system which interprets the laws passed by the legislature. Each branch is independent of one another but all three branches work together on many things. Individual rights and Individual freedoms are usually enshrined in a country's one constitutional document but in Aotearoa's constitution isn't one singular document but made up of various documents that are important. Some of these documents are Te Tiriti o Waitangi, He Whakaputanga, the 1986 Constitution Act, the New Zealand Bill of Rights, the 1993 Electoral Act, the Letters Patent 1983 as well as the common law created by judiciary.

Now that we have defined what a liberal democracy is and explained Aotearoa's political and constitutional structure we can start identifying weaknesses in Aotearoa's democracy. One significant weakness of Aotearoa's liberal democracy that we have identified is people not participating in it. According to the Electoral Commission, at Aotearoa's last general election the turnout was 77.5%. This means that 22.5% of eligible voters didn't vote at the last election and engage in Aotearoa's democracy. A demographic where this is particularly significant is amongst young people. We did the maths using the Electoral Commission data and according to our calculations at the last election, the voter turnout of people between the ages of 18 to 35 was 71.2% which was significantly lower than the general population's voter turnout. In contrast to this, the voter turnout amongst people aged 60 and above was 84.5%. This 13.4% difference signals a difference in voting behaviours between generations with young people being less likely to vote. This becomes even clearer when you look at historic voter turnout data from the Electoral Commission which shows a reduction in voter turnout in the 21st century. From the 1981 election to the 1999 election voter turnout was constantly between 93% and 84% yet from the 2002 election to the 2023 election voter turnout has been between 82% and 74%. This shows us that less people are engaging in elections regularly than there used to be. This leads to a significant lack of representation for young people in parliament, leading to the needs of young people in Aotearoa not being met. It also likely would result in a long-lasting deficit in engagement from young people, as if the government doesn't meet their needs when they are younger, they will likely assume it won't meet their needs when they are older, so will not bother to engage. This leads to a huge gap in the representation of Aotearoa's population in parliament, meaning it is unable to effectively serve the people.

An effective way to increase voter turnout for the future would be to make sure that young people, when they are eligible to vote for the first time, go to the ballot box and vote. This gives them the highest likelihood of voting the second time they are eligible to vote and so on. According to political science professor Eric Plutzer in his 2002 study *Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood* young people who vote for the first time when they are first eligible to vote are more to build a lifelong habit of voting and engaging in democracy. The best way to ensure that young people vote is to educate them about the importance of voting and the structures of Aotearoa's political and constitutional structures. To do this successfully we have identified school as the best place to do this as this is a place where young people go a lot.

We believe that teaching young people about democracy needs to be added to the school curriculum. We believe this needs to include traditional lesson style education as well as more practical experience with interacting with democracy more practically within the school environment.

We propose amendments to the curriculum that encourage engagement in democracy at all levels.These amendments are designed to cover existing gaps in the curriculum in a fun, age appropriate manner. The main focus is encouraging kids to engage in democracy. This would be through mock elections. These would be held in time with the local body elections, and would give limited control of small decisions on the classroom or school communities in order to foster an understanding of the responsibilities a democratically elected representative holds on behalf of the community they represent. For example these decisions could be long term vs short term gratification, such as the choice between weekly movie lunches for a term or a movie day at the end of term. Students would campaign for their choice and would then be in a position of responsibility to help organize whatever they were elected to do.

This would be paired with annual teaching through more traditional education styles in order to teach about democracy, with a focus on the logistics on how Aotearoa's democracy functions at both the national and local levels. At younger ages, this will have a focus on local council, moving on to central government as students get older. This is because local government dynamics are less complicated, and the effects are easier for young children to physically see, as the decisions of local government directly impact the environment these students are living in. At intermediate age, the focus would evolve into building the understanding of national governance and how the MMP system works in Aotearoa. In high school in year 9 students would learn about constitutional structure, the different branches of government, the checks and balances on democracy, with a particular focus on the role of individuals and the importance of participation in democracy. At year 10 the focus would be on developing a nuanced understanding of democracy around the world, different systems of government, and comparing and discussing nz democracy to different democratic and non democratic governments around the world; looking at the balances of power maintained by the judicial, representative, and executive branches of government. Included in this would be weaknesses of democracy, why we choose a democratic system, and why it's so important to defend democracy and how you do that. We could also recommend a one time lesson in year 13 with how to register to vote and a reminder of why it's so important. The video we have submitted should be considered an example of a video that could be shown to students as an introduction to the curriculum.

These amendments we have proposed remedy many issues in the current system. In 2008, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study found that Aotearoa scored 14th out of the 36 countries tested on their students' civic and citizenship knowledge. While common comparison countries like the U.S.A. and Australia did not take part, England did, and scored above Aotearoa at 13th place. This study also found that Aotearoa has the greatest knowledge gap between students - Aotearoa had the highest gap between its best scoring and worst scoring students out of any participating countries, and Māori and Pasifika students consistently had the lowest scores. It is also important to note that Aotearoa does not have a formal civics curriculum - some knowledge of civics and citizenship is throughout the social sciences curriculum, but it is not well signposted and it is not formally an element of the curriculum. In 2023, Alyssa Shearer of the Union of Concerned Scientists reported on the "civic education hypothesis" explaining why students with university education are more likely to vote. The civic education hypothesis posits that education gives individuals the understanding and skills necessary to become an active voter and engage in democracy, and is supported by countless studies, explored further in Shearer's article. Engaging students in democracy and politics from a young age and providing them with a full and complete understanding of democracy and the context surrounding it will help students to foster voting as a lifelong habit, and understand their place in a democracy, helping them to participate and thus further strengthen our democracy.

Source Directory

2023 General Election Voter turnout statistics, voter turnout statistics for the 2020 General Election, ICCS - What do New Zealand students understand about civic knowledge and citizenship, What Makes the College-Educated More Likely to Vote? - Union of Concerned Scientists Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood

By Charlie Sheppard, Asterion Briscoe and Gustav Schwind.