

The most effective way to enact change in society is to change how young people are educated. The youth of today are the ones who will shape New Zealand's future, and they need to know their role in our democracy for it to function as intended: as quoted by Sir Anand Satyanand; "democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy is therefore education" - Franklin D Roosevelt. It has been said that the strongest counterargument to democracy is a five minute interview with the average voter. Thus, making sure that voters know the worth and influence of their vote is incredibly important. It is shown that people who don't vote the first few times they are eligible to are less likely to vote in the future. The education of young people should therefore be the target for improvement in order to strengthen our democracy. This is why they are our chosen demographic.

In a time where history is evolving faster than ever, the urgency is on the young people to take the reins of the long white cloud and steer it towards a better future, which is possible through the power of democracy. Democracy can turn visions of a brighter future into action. The best way to advance society is by harnessing people power. The greatest power on earth. Throughout history, people power has helped us develop as a society, and rebound from adversity. Which word translates to people power, you may ask? *Demokratia*. **Democracy**. Every three years, people in New Zealand can harness people power, where New Zealanders vote for our choice of government to take our country to better places. However, every time, young Kiwis, the future of this country are neglecting their right to make decisions for their own future.

A huge roadblock in regards to democracy that hinders its ability to operate in our country at its full potential is that our chosen group - youths, are not participating in democracy. Statistically, people aged 18-30 have the worst voter turnout in general elections for decades. In the 2017 general election, less than 70% of enrolled voters aged 18-29 actually voted, per stats NZ. These numbers slightly increased in the 2020 and 2023 elections, but they are still a far way off the voter turnout seen by older age groups. Voter turnouts for people aged 55+ are consistently above 85%, and youths need to strive to get this level of turnout. If you asked a random young person on the street who they want to shape the future of New Zealand, they would likely say people like them, because they are the people who will live with the decisions of today, in the future. However, unless they change their ways, they will continue to be underrepresented in decisions that affect them the most. A large part of the issue may be because they are unaware on how democracy in New Zealand works, and they don't bother understanding it. All youths in New Zealand should know the basics of democracy, in our beautiful country of Aotearoa New Zealand.

New Zealand is a representative democracy, which is currently made up of 123 members of parliament who comprise the 54th New Zealand Parliament. These 123 made it to parliament in two ways, because in New Zealand, we use a MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) system that allows us to have two votes. We vote for who we want to represent our electorate, which is the area we live in, and then a party vote, where we vote for what party we want to govern us. Currently, there are 72 electorate MP's, and 53 list MP's, and the number of list MP's for a party is decided by the percentage of vote they receive as a party vote. On a global scale, the New Zealand democratic system is very strong because we operate as a liberal democracy. This means there is a system of checks and balances that operates, so not one person or group(or branch of government) holds too much power and control over the decisions in our country. The New Zealand democracy has three branches of government - Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. The legislature is Parliament, which

includes all of our MP's who debate about our country, and pass laws. The executive branch involves a select few MP's who are high ranking such as the Prime Minister, and ministers such as the minister of Transport or Education etc. The Judiciary are independent from the government, as they are the judges and courts, who interpret laws, and apply them. It is very important that the Judiciary stays apolitical but professional. The final part of checks and balances is the most important part. People. New Zealanders are lucky to live in a society where the public can hold the government accountable, without consequence. This has been highlighted by Sir Ian McKinnon who is no stranger to the political structure and democratic processes of New Zealand, who has stressed that the most important part of having a free and strong democracy is again, having an educated population New Zealanders decide if they want to kick out a government through elections, which not every country does. For example China, and The *Democratic* People's Republic of North Korea. New Zealanders also have the ability to protest, and according to the United Nations, this is a fundamental human right, which is unfortunately overlooked by many countries. Protesting was seen in New Zealand to great effect in late 2024, opposing a controversial treaty principles bill. Tens of thousands of inspired kiwis rallied together to contest the bill, which was eventually shut down, and the protests were a huge reason for this. As former Prime minister Chris Hipkins said... Power through protest.

However, democracy is fragile and has many weaknesses. Democracy can easily be torn apart by misinformation, corruption and wealth influence, media bias among many other factors. Firstly, misinformation is on the rise globally, correlating with the rise of social media, and it poses a real threat to democracy. Misinformation is the purposeful spreading of false information. This has been observed on huge scales, in early 2021, where thousands of people organised on social media to swarm the U.S Capitol, based on claims with no evidence that the 2020 USA election was fraudulent. This was even observed in New Zealand in early 2022, when a large group of people, rallied by misinformation, protested the various vaccine/covid mandates and covid regulations as well as many other issues and camped for weeks on Parliament grounds. A final weakness is the threat of corruption, which is when people in power act for personal gain, rather than for the good of the country. For example bribery, misuse of money and nepotism.

Most importantly; how can we actually increase understanding of democracy, and encourage young people to actively participate in democracy? It all starts in the schools, where youths should be given a mature, and engaging education about democracy before even being eligible to vote. There are many effective ways to educate youths on democracy in the classroom to help them learn about different aspects of democracy. Firstly, students can write mock submissions to their local MP, about issues in the local community that they think need changing. By doing this students learn good formal, polite writing skills and how to structure an argument - all important skills for influencing the democratic process. If the school can set up for the MP to visit, or email the students thanking them for their submissions, it will give the student's work a sense of meaningfulness, and connection to the real world. Class elections, another teaching tool, may be seen as "silly" by students but it is a timeless method of teaching and practicing democracy. The teacher can give the students an issue that they have the power to control for the kids to make a decision on, such as what they want to learn next, if music will be played in class, or if they will be allowed brain breaks. Students pick up researching, leadership, debating/argumentative and public speaking while also exercising their power to vote, which are all fundamental principles of liberal democracy.