

Age, Socioeconomic Status, Ethnicity, and Declining Voter Turnout in Auckland's Local Elections

Name Weiyi Zhang
Course Politics 774
Date 23/10/2015
Organization Auckland Council / Election Services

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
1.1 Introduction.....	4
2.1 Literature Review.....	8
3.1 Analytical Framework.....	11
4.1 Method.....	12
5.1 Age and Non-Voting.....	14
6.1 Socioeconomic Status and Non-Voting.....	17
7.1 Asians and Non-Voting.....	19
8.1 Summary of Analyses.....	22
9.1 Conclusion.....	24
Reference List.....	26
Appendix – Consent Form.....	29

Executive Summary

Introduction

- Voter turnout in Auckland's triennial local elections has steadily declined.
- In 2013, Auckland turnout fell from 51% to 36% (national average = 41.3%)
- This report aims to answer four research questions:

Why are younger Aucklanders less likely to vote?

Why are less-educated Aucklanders less likely to vote?

Why are Asian Aucklanders less likely to vote?

What are the theoretical and practical implications of these findings?

Theories of Political Participation

- Theories have aimed to explain participation at micro and macro-levels.
- Explanations of why people participate in politics vary from micro-level variables (e.g. correlation between education and turnout) to macro-level variables (e.g. impact on legal institutions on turnout).

Analysis

- The analysis explains declining turnout in Auckland using secondary literature, and domestic and international case studies.
- Research on youth non-voting suggests that young people tend to be less informed and knowledgeable about politics, and face administrative barriers.
- Research on socioeconomic status suggests that higher education generally equals greater participation due to increased knowledge/interest in politics.
- Research on Asian voting behaviour suggests that lack of knowledge, as well as lack of cultural integration with other ethnic groups, may result in lower levels of turnout among Asians.

1.1 Introduction

Local democracy is an ‘important, some say the most important’ part of a democracy (LGNZ, 2013). For the past three decades, however, voter turnout in Auckland’s triennial local elections, including mayoral, city council and district council elections, has steadily declined (DIA, 2008, p. 20-29). Compared to the rest of New Zealand, Auckland has historically experienced lower turnout than the rest of the country (DIA, 2008, p. 20-29). In 1989, for example, turnout in Auckland’s regional council elections was below 40% - the lowest level in the entire country (DIA, 2008, p. 26). This level of low turnout would be repeated in Auckland’s 2007 regional council elections (DIA, 2008, p. 29). While turnout in Auckland’s 2010 local elections reached 51%, turnout fell sharply to 36% in 2013, around 5% lower than the national average of 41.3% (LGNZ, 2013).

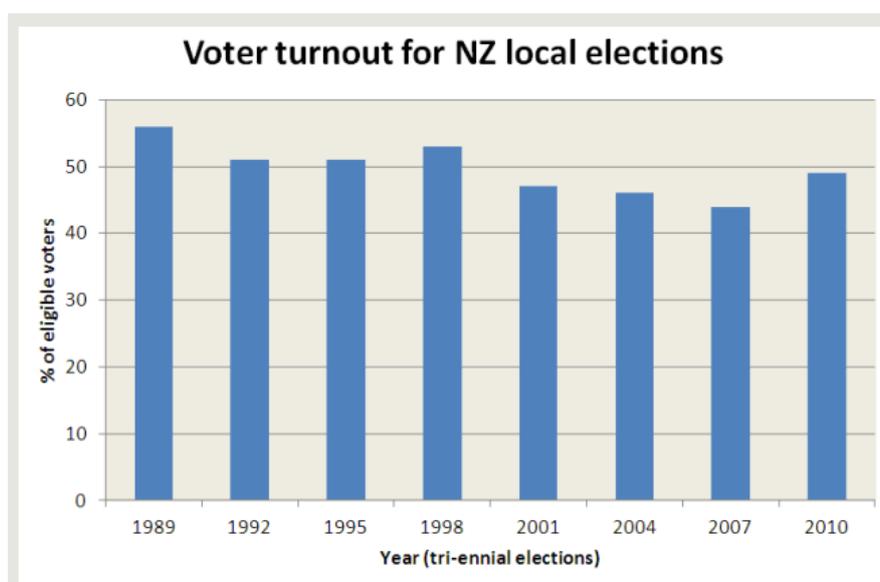


Figure 1. Voter turnout for New Zealand local elections (LGNZ, 2013).

The trend of declining voter turnout is, however not unique to Auckland. As Figure 1 show, turnout in New Zealand’s local elections has steadily declined since 1989.¹ At a national level, the decline in voter turnout has been ‘regarded

¹ According to the Department of Internal Affairs, the higher turnout in the 2010 elections was ‘partly attributable’ to ‘increased local voting for the first Auckland “super city” election’, in addition to increased turnout in Christchurch after the 2010 Canterbury Earthquake (DIA, 2013).

with such concern' that a Committee was set up to investigate why turnout fell (LGNZ, 2013). Eventually, the Committee's recommendations were put in place via the Local Electoral Act Amendment Act 2013, which aimed to improve the transparency of the election process, improve the quality and availability of candidate information, and the efficiency of the pre-election process (DIA, 2015). More recently, a report on the feasibility of replacing the existing postal voting system with online voting was created by a working group from the Department of Internal Affairs (Online Voting Working Party, 2014).

In Auckland specifically, the sharp decline in turnout has spurred considerable attention from both the media, as well as politicians in office. In the aftermath of what Claire Trevett called the 'worst local body election turnout' in history (Trevett, 2013), a debate emerged on identifying the root causes of the decline in voter turnout. Minister Chris Tremain, for example, has openly called for the introduction of electronic voting to replace postal voting (Trevett, 2013). In contrast, other analysts have pointed towards political factors – such as a lack of voter engagement - as the root causes of the problem. For example, Andy Asquith of Massey University argued that civic education and engagement are the keys to improving turnout, particularly among young people (Asquith, 2015).

1.2 Research Questions

In light of declining voter turnout in Auckland's local elections, this report aims to provide preliminary answers on why this decline has occurred. A recent study by Auckland Council on 1,880 voters in Auckland's 2010 local elections presented several important findings on voting behaviour in Auckland (Stones-Havas, 2015).² Three important findings from the study have been summarized in Figure 2. First, there is a significant correlation between age and turnout – the

² While the population average of respondents in the Auckland Council study states that 62% voted in the 2010 Auckland local elections, in reality only 51% voted. This may be because people, who actually responded to the original questionnaires on voting, may be more interested in voting and politics to begin with. For an explanation of a similar oversampling problem in a New Zealand study of political participation, see Park (2006, p. 8).

older a voter is, the likelier he or she voted in Auckland’s 2010 local elections. Second, Asians³ were less likely to vote than the populations as a whole. Third, highly educated Aucklanders (e.g. tertiary education) were more likely to vote than Aucklanders who were only high school graduates. The three findings drive my four research questions, which aims to explain:

- Why are younger Aucklanders less likely to vote?
- Why are less-educated Aucklanders less likely to vote?
- Why are Asian Aucklanders less likely to vote?
- What are the theoretical and practical implications of these findings?

Age Segment	% Who Voted in the 2010 Auckland Local Elections
15 - 24	33%
25 - 39	53%
40 - 64	70%
65 and over	87%
Demographic Groups	% Who Voted in the 2010 Auckland Local Elections
Asians	53%
High school certificate Or equivalent	54%
Highest qualification levels (Masters, PhD, Diploma)	74%
Population Average	62%

Figure 2. Comparison of voters and non-voters: results from the General Social Survey 2013 (Stones-Havas, 2015)

³ All definitions of ethnic groups in this report follow definitions provided by Statistics New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2015).

1.3 Structure of the Report

This report is divided into nine sections. In Section 1, an overview of Auckland's declining turnout in the context of New Zealand is provided. Section 1 also provides an overview of the four research questions this report aims to answer.

In Section 2, I provided an overview of the theoretical literature on political participation, as well as a sketch of the literature on political participation in New Zealand. I also provide briefly describe how this report fits into existing research.

In Section 3, I clarify the theory-based, analytical framework that will be used to answer the four research questions. In Section 4, I describe and justify the methodologies I have used in gathering information for this report.

Section 5, 6 and 7 answers the first three research questions respectively: age and non-voting, socioeconomic status and non-voting, as well as Asians and non-voting. Section 8 summarizes my analysis. Section 9 concludes the report with a reflection on how further research in this area may be developed.

2.1 Literature Review

In this section, I provide a sketch of four major theories of political participation that forms the analytical framework which my subsequent analyses draw upon. The four theories of political participation considered here are: the socio-economic theory, the civic literacy theory, the institutional theory and the mobilization theory.⁴ I shall also provide a sketch of the historical and recent literature on voter turnout in Auckland and other parts of New Zealand, and explain how my research fits into the existing literature.

2.2 Thinking Theoretically About Political Participation

Broadly speaking, the theoretical literature on political participation makes a distinction between two ‘types of forces that shape political activity’ (Powell, 1986, p. 17). The first force consists of the ‘attitudes and characteristics that individuals brings to the participatory arena’, while the second force is facilitated by the ‘institutional context within which individuals act’ (Powell, 1986, p. 17). In other words, the theoretical literature on political participation points towards both micro-level variables (e.g. individual attitudes) as well as macro-level variables (e.g. culture) as the key drivers of participation.

One of the earliest – and most frequently applied - theories of political participation is the socio-economic theory (Park, 1996, p. 22). First advanced by Verba and Nie in *Participation in America*, this theory argues that participation is generally facilitated by one’s socioeconomic resources, as well as by one’s levels of political awareness (Verba & Nie, 1987). In other words, the socioeconomic theory posits that the wealthier, better educated and better informed someone is, the likelier that person will participate in politics (Verba & Nie, 1987). Education is particularly important to the socio-economic theory, as

⁴ It should be noted that the purpose of this literature review is not to judge the “correctness” the theories. Rather, the aim is to illuminate the multitude of possible explanations behind political participation, and to highlight the notion that no ‘silver bullet’ explanation is likely to adequately and fully explain why Auckland’s voter turnout is declining.

it provides voters with the skills, knowledge and civic duty necessary to effectively take part in politics (Sheerin, 2007, p. 15-16).

Similar to how socio-economic theory emphasizes the role of education, Milner's civic literacy theory argues that the availability political knowledge (for example, information about the electoral process) is the key driver behind political participation (Milner, 2002). If there is abundant political knowledge available (for example, media coverage or pamphlets distribution), it becomes likelier for the public to participate in politics (Milner, 2002). On a related note, Converse and Niemi has theorized that younger people are less likely to vote than older people, as they are less integrated into society (Converse & Niemi, 1971). Consequently, young people are more likely to lack political knowledge and are less exposed to the electoral process (Converse & Niemi, 1971).

While the previous theories mostly analyses participation at a micro-level, the institutional theory explains participation at a macro-level. In "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies", for example, Jackman makes the argument that political institutions and electoral laws provide an important 'incentive structure' for voter turnout (Jackman, 1987, p. 406). Similarly, Powell has argued that 'legal rules, social and political structures, and configurations of partisanship' provides individuals with conditions that 'shape his or her choices' (Powell, 1986, p. 17). In short, the institutional theory emphasizes the structure of political and legal institutions as the most important variable that drives political participation.

Between the micro-level socioeconomic theory, and the macro-level institutional theory, lays Rosenstone and Hansen's mobilization theory (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Mobilization theory examines participation at the level of local communities, arguing that the more embedded an individual in his or her community, the likelier that individual would participate in politics (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). In other words, whether civic engagement occurs is dependent on the degree to which one is exposed to social networks, local organisations, and community groups (Sheerin, 2007, p. 19-20). Hence, mobilization theory

argues that beyond individual interests, 'strategic mobilization by political parties, interest groups and government elites, constitutes the other half' of the political participation puzzle (Park, 2006, p. 24).

2.3 The Literature on Voting and Non-Voting in New Zealand

Over the past thirty years, there has been a steady built-up of academic literature on political participation in New Zealand. Vowles, for example, had in 1994 produced a detailed study of New Zealand non-voters between 1938 and 1990 (Vowles, 1994). More recently, the literature has turned towards analysing declining civic engagement in New Zealand, particularly towards understanding why voter turnout and political participation has been declining for the past several decades (Vowles, 2004; Sheerin, 2007; Iustini and Crothers, 2013; Webster, 2014). In addition to the growing academic literature on political participation in New Zealand, there has also been a build-up of research from government agencies on both local and general elections. The Electoral Commission, for example, has published a number of studies on electoral participation in New Zealand, with particular focus on the voting behaviours and patterns of young adults and Maori (Electoral Commission, 2015). Moreover, the Department of Internal Affairs publishes, every three years, an extensive report on the previous year's local elections across New Zealand (DIA, 2013).

As noted earlier, the purpose of this report is to build on existing research by the Auckland Council. While the statistics shows *who* have voted less than others, they give little indication to *why* they vote less. Thus, this report aims to provide policy-makers with a more complete understanding of why certain demographics vote less than others from a theoretical perspective, utilizing domestic and international case studies, as well as a wealth of secondary literature. While this report serves a practical purpose, it should also be of theoretical value as well, in that applications of theories of political participation may also shed light on the explanatory power of these theories.

3.1 Analytical Framework

As outlined in the literature review, political participation can be explained by both micro-level and macro-level variables. At a micro-level, political participation is driven by one’s level of education, level of political knowledge, and level of civic literacy. At a macro-level, political institutions, such as one’s social and cultural environment, may also determine turnout. Between the micro and macro-level variables, community engagement and exposure to political mobilization and networks may also drive political participation. Figure 5, shown below, is a visualization of this report’s analytical framework.

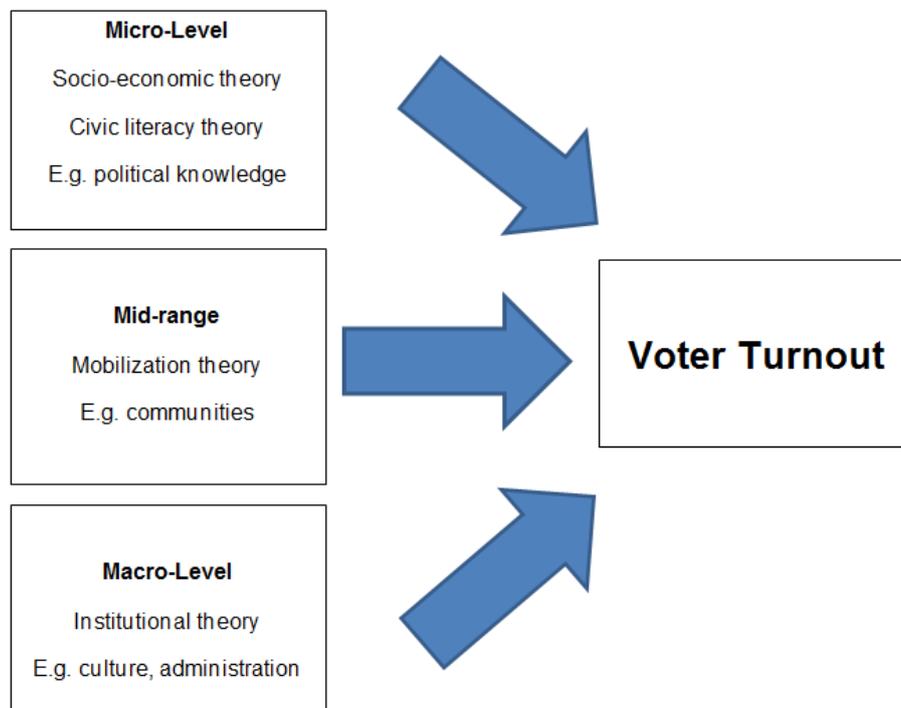


Figure 3. Analytical Framework

The purpose of using multiple theories in explaining voter turnout illustrates the complexity of political participation. As Vowles’ research has shown, the major theories of political participation all have some basis in empirical foundations when applied to a New Zealand context (Vowles, 1994, p. 109). However, individual theories have been insufficient in explaining the ‘whole story’ behind voter turnout and patterns of participation in New Zealand (Vowles, 1994, p.

110). Similarly, recent research has also discovered a ‘myriad’ of reasons why some people participate while others do not (Sheerin, 2007, p. 93). Through deploying multiple explanatory theories, I aim to paint a more complete picture of what drives voter turnout, and what can be done to ultimately improve turnout.

4.1 Method

My analysis of declining voter turnout in Auckland is based on two sources of data: primary data sourced from three unstructured expert interviews, and a recent study on voter behaviour authored by the Auckland Council.⁵ My analysis also draws upon a considerable amount of secondary literature, from both domestic and international sources, to explain why certain demographics in Auckland are less likely to vote than other demographics.

The three unstructured interviews were completed during early September, with three managers from Auckland Council. The first interviewee manages Kids Voting, Auckland Council’s civic education programme for children aged 11-15 (Auckland Council, 2015). The second interviewee is an elections planner at Auckland Council, while the third interviewee manages Auckland’s Youth Advisory Panels. The interviewees were chosen both due to their familiarity with the election processes, and also because they were identified and recommended by my placement supervisor. I acquired consent from all three interviewees beforehand, who signed a consent form pre-approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. A copy of the form has been attached to the appendix of this report.

The three interviews were recorded, transcribed and imported into the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. The transcripts were coded according

⁵ It should be noted that a study of this type and scale may certainly benefit from an extensive survey (say, on political attitudes among Auckland youths). However, my research project faced time, financial, and institutional constraints. A survey of 2,000 people, for example, may cost up to 10,000 dollars (Park, 2006, p. 250). In addition, as an intern, I was not allowed to independently solicit interview subjects, which limited the type of interviewees I could contact.

to the categories based on my analytical framework. Three nodes were created for this purpose, titled “Micro-Level”, “Mid-Range” and “Macro-Level” respectively. Finally, the coded data was read over several times, several emerging themes were identified, and the data was recoded under four nodes, named ‘education’, ‘age’, ‘ethnicity’, and ‘communication’.

My primary rationale for using the format of unstructured interviews was to leverage interviews as a personal learning opportunity. As Cohen and Crabtree notes, unstructured interviews allows the researcher, who may not have ‘fully understood’ a given experience or setting, to ‘test out his or her preliminary understanding’ while allowing new understandings and ideas to develop (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Since the interviews were mostly unstructured (beyond an introductory statement on the nature of my project), the interviews resembled brainstorming sessions. Hence, while I have avoided citing these interviews in the actual report to prevent anecdotalism, the interviews were nonetheless extremely useful as a learning tool at the beginning of my research project.

Beyond interviews, this report also utilizes extensively quantitative data from a recent study on voter behaviour authored by the Auckland Council (Stones-Havas, 2015). This study is in itself a secondary analysis of data gathered from the 2013 New Zealand General Social Survey, a ‘two-yearly national survey conducted by Statistics New Zealand that provides information on the well-being of New Zealanders aged 15 years and over’ (Stones-Havas, 2015, p. 2). A total of 1,970 Aucklanders were interviewed by Statistics New Zealand between April 2012 and March 2013, using household and personal questionnaires. Households were randomly selected at random, with a response rate of 78% (Stones-Havas, 2015, p. 5). Auckland Council’s study presented data for a ‘representative sample of 1,880 Auckland respondents of voting age’, and identified several demographics that were less likely to vote based responses to the question: ‘Local government elections also happen every three years. The last time you can remember a local government election in an area you were living in, did you vote?’ (Stones-Havas, 2015, p. 5-6)

5.1 Age and Non-Voting

Age Segment	% Who Voted in the 2010 Auckland Local Elections
15 - 24	33%
25 - 39	53%
40 - 64	70%
65 and over	87%
Population Average	62%

Figure 4. Comparison of voters and non-voters: age (Stones-Havas, 2015)

The statistics from Auckland Council, shown in Figure 4, demonstrates a strong correlation between age and voter turnout in Auckland's 2010 elections. The key finding here – that the younger an Aucklander is, the less likely he or she would vote – is consistent with Converse and Niemi's theory on young people's voting behaviour (Converse & Niemi, 1971). Indeed, Aucklanders who were 65 and over were almost three times as likely to vote compared to younger Aucklanders between the ages of 15 and 24. Domestically, the findings here are consistent with comparatively low youth turnout around New Zealand during past general and local elections (Catt, 2005). Internationally, low youth turnout in Auckland is consistent with low turnout in other OECD countries such as the United States (The Economist, 2014) as well as Britain (Dinsdale, 2015).

Why, then, are young people less likely to vote? According to Converse and Niemi, young people tend to be underexposed to political knowledge and the election process, and are thus less likely to vote (Converse & Niemi, 1971). Results from existing qualitative research on youth turnout in New Zealand have partially confirms Converse and Niemi's hypothesis. A recent study of young voters and non-voters in Dunedin, for example, noted that local elections were poorly covered by the media (Hercus, 2011). As a result, local elections failed to generate the same 'hype' as the general elections, and that some were 'unaware of the elections altogether' (Hercus, 2011, p. 11). In addition, interviewees also report that media coverage of local elections were of poor quality, which hampered the ability for voters to properly understand the candidates (Hercus, 2011, p. 11). Another recent study of Christchurch youths and their voting behaviours discovered strikingly similar findings. According to Sheerin, a predominant theme among her interviewees was that a lack of knowledge – about candidates, policies, or politics in general – was responsible for their non-voting behaviour (Sheerin, 2007). The lack of knowledge was cited as the primary reason why the several of her disinterested interviewees did not vote (Sheerin, 2007, p. 115-116).

Although the lack of knowledge and information has been often cited as the reason why youths do not vote, difficulty with the election process itself has also negatively affected youth turnout. Sheerin, for example, makes the distinction between 'disinterested' and 'inconvenienced' non-voters (Sheerin, 2007, p. 115). While 'disinterested' non-voters avoid politics due to a lack of knowledge and relevance, 'inconvenienced' non-voters cite administrative issues as the main reason why they did not vote (Sheerin, 2007, p. 116). These administrative issues include, for example, difficulty navigating the elections website, as well as problems with actually receiving the enrolment pack (Sheerin, 2007, p. 88). Similarly, Hercus's study on Dunedin youths pointed towards the difficulty of understanding the STV (Single Transferable Vote) system as an administrative barrier that discouraged Dunedin youths from voting (Hercus, 2011, p. 19).

Perhaps the most surprising finding from recent studies, however, is that non-voting may also be deployed by youths as a tool of political participation in itself. Sheerin encountered one interviewee who argued that ‘young people can have a greater influence on politics through alternative means of engagement than through voting at general elections’ (Sheerin, 2011, p. 92). While such examples may well be outliers among youths, Sheerin’s finding nevertheless sheds light on the ‘myriad reasons behind the decisions not to vote’ (Sheerin, 2011, p. 93). As Verba and Nie have pointed out, political participation goes beyond voting, as activities such as watching political television, signing petitions and, indeed, non-voting may all qualify as political participation to different extents (Verba & Nie, 1987, p. 31).

The analysis from secondary literature suggests that the root causes behind youth non-voting have tended to be deeply intersectional. In other words, explaining the phenomenon of youth non-voting is not easily generalizable by any given theory on political participation. However, the experiences of youths non-voters in other New Zealand local elections shows that a lack of knowledge, deficiency in civic literacy, and administrative barriers have all deterred youths from voting. The issue of youth non-voting may be more significant in Auckland than anywhere else, considering that Auckland’s population is relatively young than the rest of New Zealand, with ‘particularly large proportions of residents aged between 20 and 44’ (Auckland Council, 2014, p. 16).

6.1 Socioeconomic Status and Non-Voting

Demographic Groups	% Who Voted in the 2010 Auckland Local Elections
High school certificate Or equivalent	54%
Highest qualification levels (Masters, PhD, Diploma)	74%
Population Average	62%

Figure 5. Comparison of voters and non-voters: socioeconomic status (Stones-Havas, 2015)

The 2015 Auckland Council study found that there is a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and turnout - 54% of high school graduates voted, compared to 74% of tertiary graduates. Why, then, are people who are less educated less likely to vote than those who are better educated? The socioeconomic theory posits that people who are wealthier and better educated have more resources (e.g. interest in politics, political knowledge) available, and are thus more likely to participate in politics (Verba & Nie, 1987). These theories are well-supported by ample evidence from overseas. The international literature on civic education has found, for example, that 'the more knowledge citizens have of civic affairs, the less likely they are to experience mistrust of, or alienation from, public life' (Galston, 2001, p. 224), while research in American politics revealed that the 'dominant feature of nonvoting in America is lack of knowledge about government' (Galston, 2001, p. 224).

In the context of New Zealand, the case of Pacific peoples presents interesting insights into the relationship between socioeconomic status and political participation. As Lustini and Crothers observed, Pacific peoples 'are over-represented in a wide range of adverse economic, social, educational and health outcomes in New Zealand' (Lustini & Crothers, 2013, p. 158). According to a 2002 report by Statistics New Zealand, Pacific peoples generally tend to earn less, are less educated, and experience higher unemployment compared to the New Zealand population as a whole (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). The relatively low socioeconomic status of Pacific peoples correlates with Lustini and Crothers' finding that Pacific peoples also tend to be less interested in politics, and that Pacific peoples 'report lower self-rated knowledge about politics' compared to other New Zealanders (Lustini & Crothers, 2013, p. 171).

More recently, qualitative research on the political experiences of Pacific peoples in Auckland have provided additional answers into why people of a lower socioeconomic status, such as the Pacific peoples, are less likely to vote.⁶ Focus group sessions with Samoan youths from South Auckland, for example, revealed that a majority of participants do not participate in elections, as politics is viewed as an 'abstract concept' too distanced from everyday life to be relevant (Baice, 2011, p. 77), while another interviewee stated that politics is something he has 'no control over' since it is something that 'white people do in Wellington' (Baice, 2011, p. 78). Furthermore, interviewees have found problem understanding policies. Issues such as the environment and the economy are perceived to be too complex, difficult to relate to, and irrelevant for the individual (Baice, 2011, p. 77). In short, the experiences of Pacific peoples suggest that political apathy and a lack of political knowledge are two factors which may drive non-participation among the socio-economically deprived.

The case of Pacific peoples shows that there may be significant intersection between issues of youth non-voting and non-voting among the less educated.

⁶ To be sure, the activeness of Pacific voters has been cited as the reason why Len Brown won the Auckland mayoralty back in 2005 (RadioNZ, 2011). With sufficient mobilization, even a group that historically have participated less in New Zealand politics may vote in large numbers – a nod, perhaps, to validity of mobilization theory.

For one, the Pacific population is comparatively younger than the New Zealand population as a whole (Statistics New Zealand, 2002).⁷ It may also very well be speculated that the “average high school graduate” in New Zealand is younger than those who are highly educated. Regardless, the case of Pacific peoples in Auckland seems point towards similar issues that drive non-voting behaviours among youths: a lack of knowledge, and deficiency in civic literacy about policies and politics. From a theoretical perspective, the analysis above supports the theoretical groundings of both socioeconomic and civic literacy theories: with a higher level of education, one is more likely to be politically educated, and thus more like to participate in politics and vote.

6.1 Asians and Non-Voting

Demographic Groups	% Who Voted in the 2010 Auckland Local Elections
Asians	53%
Population Average	62%

Figure 6. Comparison of voters and non-voters: Asians and non-voting 2013

(Stones-Havas, 2015)

Auckland is home to two-thirds of New Zealand’s Asian population (Auckland Council, 2014, p.8). As the second largest ethnic group in Auckland, Asians make up 23.1% of Auckland’s population (Auckland Council, 2014, p. 8).

⁷ Indeed, the Maori population – who are also comparatively less well-off than the rest of New Zealand – are also comparatively younger, and participate relatively less in politics (UMR, 2006).

Worryingly however, voting incidence is among the lowest for Asians. As shown in Figure 6, only 53% with Asian ethnicity voted in the 2010 local body elections compared to the population average, 62%. Indeed, the findings here are generally consistent with levels of Asian turnout in other democracies that has experienced waves of Asian immigration. For example, a 1993 study on five Montreal ethnic communities found that turnout among Asians was the lowest (Lapp, 1993). In addition, a 1992 Australian survey discovered that Asians, along with other ethnic minority groups, were less likely to participate in politics compared to White Australians (McAllister & Makkai, 1992). In the United States, it is generally observed that Asian-Americans also participate less, and vote less compared to other ethnic groups (Park, 2006, p. 34).

Why do Asians vote less, and participate less, than the population in general? One explanation, at a micro-level, points towards a lack of awareness and a deficiency of civic education. In her analysis of Montreal ethnic communities, Lapp noted that Chinese Canadians were unfamiliar with Canadian politics, and were unaware of how local issues affected them (Lapp, 1993). The lack of civic literacy, in other words, resulted in low turnout among Chinese Canadians. Similarly, a 2002 survey on Asian voter turnout in New Zealand found that 43.4% of the 915 respondents did not vote in their last election, as they 'Didn't know about politics' (Park, 2006, p. 48). As Park points out, since most 'Asian New Zealanders were recent immigrants with limited political knowledge' (Park, 2006, p. 47), Asians similarly scored lower than the population average when quizzed about the New Zealand political system. For example, just 31.9% of Asian respondents were aware that the term of the New Zealand Parliament was not four years, but three (Park, 2006, p. 100).

A macro-level explanation has pointed towards the lack of cultural integration – or 'acculturation', as the reason why Asians tend to vote less. Teske and Nelson define 'acculturation' as the process in which the culture of one society is modified as a result of contact with other societies. Applied to the context of Asian voters specifically, the acculturation explanation argues that immigrants need to acquire the necessary 'language, knowledge, confidence and

qualifications' to participate in politics (Park, 2006, p. 26) – all of which takes time. Indeed, the literature on political participation, particularly among Asians, has found that the acculturation is one of the most important variables in determining levels of participation among Asian immigrants (Park, 2006, p. 91). In the case of New Zealand, Park discovered that there was a clear correlation between 'voting rate and the period of residency' for Asian New Zealanders (Park, 2006, p. 95). Only 38.7% of Asians who lived in New Zealand for 5 years and under voted in the 2002 General Election. In contrast, 85.7% of Asians who lived in New Zealand for 21 to 25 years voted (Park, 2006, p. 96).

A lack of interaction between Asians and other ethnic groups may also have led to a lack of cultural integration, driving a lower level of turnout. Vice versa, interaction between ethnic groups sharpens both language skills, and helps members from different groups attain 'political information and stimuli through their contacts' (Park, 2006, p. 99). Indeed, Park's case study found that 83.4% of Asians who claimed to have 'Lots of interaction' with Pakeha voted in their last election while 48.6% of Asians who claimed to have 'No interaction' with Pakeha voted in their last election (Park, 2006, p. 99). The problem of cultural integration is further highlighted in a 1997 survey of 80 New Zealanders by Zavareh, who observed that locals most often perceive a lack of integration with local culture as a negative characteristic of Asian immigrants (Zavareh, 1997). There is evidence, moreover, that Asians in Auckland may be at the risk of becoming more segregated from other ethnic groups in recent years, as clusters of ethnic groups have formed among the landscape of Auckland (Friesen, 2015), . In areas such as Botany Downs and Dannemora, for example, just over half of the population consisted of Asians (Friesen, 2015, 30-31). 'Clustering', notes Friesen, 'can be regarded as detrimental to migrant integration, especially in relation to English language acquisition' (Friesen, 2015, p. 55). These evidences suggest that the increase in ethnic clustering, and the lack of cultural integration as a result, may be responsible for the lower-than-average turnout among Asians in Auckland's 2010 local election.

As the previous analysis on age and turnout, the secondary literature on explaining why Asians tend to vote less points towards an intersection of different explanations that cannot be easily covered by one theory. At a micro-level, a deficiency of civic literacy among Asians has led to lower levels of turnout both internationally and in New Zealand. At a macro-level, a lack of cultural integration between Asians and other ethnic groups may also have led to lower level of turnout. This latter explanation may be particularly relevant for Auckland, which has experienced increasing ethnic clustering in recent years. As the Asian population in Auckland is projected to continuously increase for the next decade (Auckland Council, 2014), the issue of integration is at the risk of perhaps becoming more salient in the future.

7.1 Summary of Analyses

As noted earlier, political participation is a complex social phenomenon that is not easily explainable by any given theory. Nonetheless, through the lenses of theories on political participation, I have provided possible, plausible explanations towards why certain demographics in Auckland vote less than others. The answers to the four research questions are summarized below.

First, why are younger Aucklanders less likely to vote? Research from local elections in Christchurch and Dunedin suggests that a combination of a lack of political knowledge, civic literacy, and administrative barriers may have all proved to be obstacles for young people to vote and participate. Furthermore, non-voting in itself may be utilized as a tool of political participation.

Second, why are less-educated Aucklanders less likely to vote? International research shows that education correlates with greater political knowledge and interest in politics, and hence a higher likelihood of participating in politics. In the case of Auckland's Pacific peoples, who are historically less well-educated New Zealanders in general, apathy and a lack of knowledge may have contributed towards a relative lack of interest towards politics.

Third, why are Asian Aucklanders less likely to vote? The literature shows that a lack of awareness of issues, as well as a lack of political knowledge, may prove to be an obstacle for Asians to participate in politics. Furthermore, the lack of cultural integration between Asians and locals may have also led to a lack of turnout among Asians. This problem may be particularly pronounced in Auckland, where clusters of ethnic groups have emerged.

Fourth, what are some of the theoretical and practical implications of these explanations? From a theoretical perspective, the findings in this report seem to point towards a lack of knowledge about politics and elections, from Milner's civic literacy theory, as the main explanatory variable in explaining why certain demographics might vote less than others. Indeed, the issue of information availability suggested in this report is consistent with existing surveys. The Auckland study found that 23% of non-voters did not vote due to a lack of knowledge about people standing for the election (Stones-Havas, 2015, p. 4), or about the election in general, while a 2001 LGNZ survey found that 31% of respondents did not vote as they 'Didn't know enough about the candidates' (LGNZ, 2013). With that said, every theory of political participation has been plausible in explaining voter turnout in Auckland to different extents. Perhaps most importantly, the findings of this report reaffirm Vowles' observation that while each theory has some empirical grounding, none are sufficient on their own to provide a fuller picture (Vowles, 1994, p. 110).

What are some of the practical implications of my analyses? One recommendation would be to extend the scope of civic education provided by Auckland Council. Currently, Auckland Council operates Kids Voting, a civics education programme run for young people aged between 11 and 15 (Auckland Council, 2015). Statistics shows that students who experienced Kids Voting have successfully reported greater familiarity with politics and election processes than before they took part in the programme (Ziegler-Peri, 2013). Similarly, Auckland Council could devote additional resources to operate civics education programme for other demographics, such as high school and university students and new Asian immigrants. Additionally, from the

perspective of those running for office, their political campaigns could focus more on issues that affects specific demographics. For example, GOTV ('Get Out of the Vote') campaigns in the United States have successfully leveraged short, succinct messages tailored for specific demographics (e.g. students) to vote prior to Election Day (Green & Gerber, 2008).

9.1 Conclusion

To be sure, this report cannot, and does not intend to be, a completely exhaustive account of voter turnout in Auckland. Rather, I intend this report to be the beginning in a series of research on Auckland turnout from both academia and the government. This report provides two directions that deserve further research. Since this report has predominantly used secondary literature to analyse turnout in Auckland, it may be extremely fruitful (if time and budget allows) to administer a survey among Aucklanders to gauge their opinions on participation, voting, and politics. Similarly, further qualitative research on the experiences of non-voters may provide additional insights into, say, why specifically Asian Aucklanders are less likely to vote. In addition, further research on strategies to lift turnout - through civic education, or marketing, or other tactics - may prove to be of additional use for Auckland Council.

Voter turnout in New Zealand's local elections have declined in the past three decades, and turnout in Auckland experienced a sharp drop in the 2013 elections. In this report, I have identified three demographics - younger people, the less educated and Asians – as less likely to vote compared to the Auckland population as a whole. Viewed from the lens of political participation theories, factors such as a lack of information, apathy, and a lack of cultural integration may all have played an important role in damping voter turnout in Auckland. Despite the complexities behind political participation, I have aimed to clarify some of the possible causes behind why Auckland voter turnout might have declined, utilizing overseas case studies and secondary literature. It is hoped

that the analysis presented in this report prove useful, so that Auckland's turnout may once again increase in the next election in 2016.

Reference List

- Asquith, A. (2015). *Andy Asquith: E-voting no silver bullet for low turnout*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/technology/news/article.cfm?c_id=5&objectid=11518350
- Auckland Council. (2014). *Auckland Profile - Initial results from the 2013 Census*. Retrieved from <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/planspoliciesprojects/reports/Documents/aucklandprofile/initialresults2013census201405.pdf>
- Auckland Council. (2015). *Kids Voting 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/ABOUTCOUNCIL/HOWCOUNCILWORKS/ELECTIONS/Pages/kidsvoting2013.aspx>
- Baice, P. T. (2011). *Sufiga o le tuaoi; 'ali 'i sia, ala 'l kolonga: Understanding the impacts of youth agency on the political participation of Tongan and Samoan youth in Tonga, Samoa and South Auckland, Aoateroa* (Master's Thesis). University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Catt, H. (2005). *Children and Young People as Citizens*. Retrieved from <http://www.elections.org.nz/sites/default/files/plain-page/attachments/Youth%20Participation.pdf>
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Unstructured Interviews*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeUnst-3630.html>
- Converse, P., & Niemi, R. (1971). Non-voting among young adults in the US. In W. Crotty, D. Freedman & D. Gatlin (Eds.), *Political Parties and Political Behaviour* (pp. 443-466). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- DIA. (2008). *Local Authority Election Statistics 2007*. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs.
- DIA. (2013). *Local Authority Election Statistics 2013*. Retrieved from https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Services-Local-Elections-Local-Authority-Election-Statistics-2013?OpenDocument
- DIA. (2015). *Questions and Answers about the Local Electoral Amendment Act*. Retrieved from http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Resource-material-Our-Policy-Advice-Areas-Questions-and-Answers-about-the-Local-Electoral-Amendment-Act?OpenDocument
- Dinsdale, W. (2015). *Young People's Participation in the Voting Process*. Retrieved from <http://www.mm-research.com/Young+People's+Participation+in+the+Voting+Process>
- Electoral Commission. (2015). *Participation Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.elections.org.nz/research-statistics/research/participation-research>
- Friesen, W. (2015). *Asian Auckland: The multiple meanings of diversity*. Auckland: Asian New Zealand Foundation.
- Galston, W. (2001). Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9(4), 217-234.

- Green, D., & Gerber, A. (2008). *Get out the vote: how to increase voter turnout* (2nd ed.). Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Hercus, J. (2011). *Youth Voter Turnout in New Zealand*. Retrieved from <https://nzpsa.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/josh-hercus-paper.pdf>
- Iustini, L., & Crothers, C. (2013). Turnout and voting choices at general elections of Pacific peoples in New Zealand. *Political Science*, 65(2), 157-177.
- Jackman, R. W. (1987). Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies. *The American Political Science Review*, 81(2), 405-424.
- Lapp, M. (1993). Ethnic group leaders and the mobilization of voter turnout: evidence from five Montreal communities. *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal*, 31(2), 17.
- LGNZ. (2013). *Voter turnout in New Zealand local authority elections – what’s the story?* Retrieved from <http://www.lgnz.co.nz/home/nzs-local-government/elections/voter-turnout-in-new-zealand-local-authority-elections-whats-the-story/>
- McAllister, I., & Makkai, T. (1992). Resource and social learning theories of political participation: Ethnic patterns in Australia. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 25(2), 269-294.
- Milner, H. (2002). *Civic Literacy*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Online Voting Working Party. (2014). *Online Voting in New Zealand*. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs.
- Park, S.J. (2006). *Political Participation of “Asian” New Zealanders: a Case Study of Ethnic Chinese and Korean New Zealanders* (PhD Thesis). University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Powell, G. B. (1986). American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective. *The American Political Science Review*, 80(1), 17-43.
- Radio New Zealand. (2013). *Labour working to win back South Auckland Pacific vote*. Retrieved from <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/election-2011/91420/labour-working-to-win-back-south-auckland-pacific-vote>
- Rosenstone, S.J., & Hansen, J. M. (1993). *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: MacMillan.
- Sheerin, C. A. (2007). *Political Efficacy and Youth Non-Voting* (Master’s Thesis). University of Canterbury, New Zealand.
- Statistics New Zealand. (2015). *People and Communities*. Retrieved from http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities.aspx
- Statistics New Zealand. (2002). *Pacific Progress*. Retrieved from http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress.aspx
- Stones-Havas, T. (2015). *Comparison of voters and nonvoters: Results from the General Social Survey 2013*. Auckland: Auckland Council.

Teske, R., & Nelson, B. (1974). Acculturation and Assimilation: A Clarification. *American Ethnologist*, 1(2), 351-367.

The Economist. (2014). *The Economist explains: Why young people don't vote*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/10/economist-explains-24>

Trevett, C. (2013). *Local elections 2013: Low turnout spurs look at vote system*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11139617

UMR Research. (2006). *Maori Electoral Engagement – A Review of Existing Data*. Auckland: Author.

Verba, S., & Nie, N. (1987). *Participation in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vowles, J. (2004). *Civic Engagement in New Zealand: Decline or Demise?* Retrieved from http://www.nzes.org/docs/papers/Inaugural_2004.pdf

Vowles, J. (1994). Dealignment and demobilisation? Nonvoting in New Zealand 1938–1990. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 29(1), 96-114.

Webster, K. (2014). Social capital and voter turnout: the case of the Auckland Supercity. *Journal of African & Asian Local Government Studies*, 3(3), 1-24.

Zavareh, M. G. (1997). *Investigating Public Attitude Towards Asian and European Immigrant Groups* (Master's Thesis). University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Ziegler-Peri, J. (2013). *Kids Voting Evaluation Results 2013 – Students*. Auckland: Auckland Council.

Appendix – Consent Form



Te Pokapū Pūtaiao Pāpori
School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts
Politics and International Relations
Building 201E, HSB, 10 Symonds Street
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, 1142, NZ
Telephone: +64 9 923 7537
j.curtin@auckland.ac.nz

POLITICS 774: POLITICS-POLICY INTERNSHIP PROJECT: CONSENT FORM FOR STAKEHOLDERS PROVIDING EXPERT ADVICE

I have read the Participation Information Sheet. I understand the nature of the project that the student will be working on, and why I have been asked to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate, on a voluntary basis, and I agree to provide expert project advice to the student for use in their final report.

- I agree / do not agree (please strikethrough whichever not necessary) to take part in this project.
- I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time.
- I understand that my organisation may be revealed in the project report, but that only materials relating to my expert advice will be used by the student in the final report.
- I understand the materials gained from my expert advice to the student will not be shared with any third parties, except the host organisation.
- I understand that I may request relevant sections of the final report that relate to my expert advice, before 23rd October 2015.
- I understand that all related materials will be kept in a locked cabinet for 6 years in the care of the Course Coordinator and after that time they will be destroyed.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Organisation: _____ Date: _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 17 June 2015 for 3 years, Ref Number 015081. This form will be held by the Course Coordinator in a secure place for a period of six years.