

Youth19: Youth Voter Enrolment

Voting in Aotearoa New Zealand

The first step in voting in Aotearoa, is enrolling to vote. Enrolment is compulsory, although voting is not. When a young person turns 17 they become eligible to enrol, although they can't vote until age 18. Young people today are less likely to enrol and vote compared to older generations and we need to understand why. From research with adults, we know there are differences in the way people vote by age, ethnicity, gender identities, and sexual identities.^{1,2} However, to our knowledge, no one has explored these differences for young people in Aotearoa.

Youth19

In 2019, researchers from four universities surveyed nearly 8,000 13–18 year old students in schools across Auckland, Northland, and Waikato. This is “Youth19”, the latest in the Youth2000 survey series. Youth19 included questions on enrolment and voting: students aged 17 or over, were asked if they were enrolled, if not, if they planned to enrol, and if the answer was not, why not. Those aged under 17 were asked if they planned to enrol, and if not, why not. In this Brief, we summarise these findings. For more about Youth19 see www.youth19.ac.nz



Summary of main findings

- Most students (81.4%) aged 17 or older were enrolled to vote, however this differed by ethnicity.
- Intention to enrol for young people differed across ethnic identities. Pakeha/European youth report greater enrolment intention than other ethnic groups, suggesting current strategies to recruit Māori, Pacific and Asian youth are inadequate.
- School visits by the Electoral Commission and going online were the most common ways young people aged 17 or older enrolled to vote.
- Strategies to increase youth enrolment may consider policy interventions to increase culturally relevant targeting of messaging, including school visits and raising awareness online.
- The top three reported reasons students did not want to enrol were: Lack of interest in politics: 58.9%; Not knowing enough about politics: 26.6%; Not knowing how to enrol: 14.4%.



Youth Voter Enrolment findings

1. What encourages young people to plan to enrol/enrol?

First, 81.4% of those aged 17 or older said they were enrolled. We asked those who were enrolled how they enrolled. Most young people had enrolled through school visits from Electoral Commission representatives. Overall, 34.1% of those enrolled did so after a visit from a representative of the Electoral Commission. However, there were some key differences in how different groups of young people enrolled. When we break down this answer by participants' ethnic identity, only 23.7% of Pasifika students who were enrolled, did so after a visit from an Electoral Commission representative. The number jumps to 30.1%, 39.0%, and 40.9% for Asian, European, and Māori students respectively.

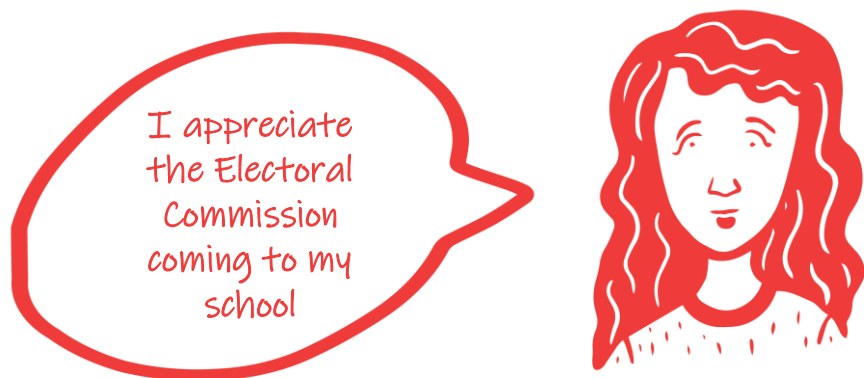


Table 1. How those aged 17 or older enrolled to vote

Someone from the Electoral Commission came to my school	34.1%
Online	20.7%
A friend or family member gave me an enrolment pack	7.3%
I visited an Electoral Commission stand at an event	7.1%
Through a Post Shop	6.1%
I sent a text to get an enrolment pack	3.4%
Can't remember	10.1%
Some other way	11.1%

Youth Voter Enrolment findings

2. Who is more likely to choose to enrol?

We asked those aged 17 or older if they were enrolled or planning to enrol, and all younger students if they were planning to enrol. 72.3% said they were enrolled or planning to enrol.

Young people aged 17 or older were the most likely to plan to enrol/be enrolled, with 16-year-olds reporting the second highest intent to enrol. 15-year-olds had a slightly higher intent to enrol than 14-year-olds. Participants 13 and under reported the lowest intent to enrol.

Pākehā/European youth were more likely to report intention to enrol than Asian, Māori and Pasifika students. In particular, Pasifika students were least likely to report intention to enrol.

Girls/women were somewhat more likely to plan to enrol than those identifying as boys/men.

Lesbian/Gay and Bisexual youth were slightly more likely to plan to enrol/be enrolled than their straight peers. Gender diverse youth reported slightly lower intent to enrol than cisgender youth.

Table 2. Plan to enrol/are enrolled: demographic breakdown

Gender Identity	Girls/Women	74.8%
	Boys/Men	69.1%
Cisgender or Gender Diverse	Cisgender	72.4%
	Gender Diverse	64.9%
Age	13 and under	60.7%
	14	69.7%
	15	72.2%
	16	76.1%
	17 and over	81.4%
Ethnicity	Māori	65.4%
	Pasifika	63.6%
	Asian	68.4%
	European/ Pākehā	81.2%
Sexual Identity	Lesbian/Gay and Bisexual	76.8%
	Straight	72.3%
	Unsure	69.9%

Youth Voter Enrolment findings

3. Why will some choose not to enrol?

We then asked those who said they would not choose to enrol why they would make this choice, using a list of common reasons from past research (participants could select multiple options).

For students who did not plan to enrol, the most common reasons were not being interested in politics (58.9%) and feeling like they did not know enough about politics (26.6%) or how to enrol (14.4%).

Table 3. Why young people are not planning to enrol/are not enrolled*

I am not interested in politics	58.9%
I don't know enough about politics	26.6%
I don't know how	14.4%
I'm not from New Zealand	14.1%
I don't trust politicians	12.8%
My vote wouldn't make a difference	9.6%
It takes too much effort	8.7%
I don't want the government knowing my information	5.4%
Some other reason	21.3%

*Participants could choose multiple options



Summary

In summary, Youth19 data shows:

- 81.4% of students in secondary school aged 17 or older were enrolled to vote.
- Enrolment for young people differed by age and ethnicity.
- School visits by the Electoral Commission and going online were the most common ways young people aged 17 or older enrolled to vote.
- Rainbow students were more engaged in enrolment and intention to vote, except for gender diverse youth.
- Intention to enrol for young people differed across ethnic identities. Pākehā/European youth report greater enrolment intention than other ethnic groups, suggesting current strategies to recruit Māori, Pacific and Asian youth are inadequate.
- Strategies to increase youth enrolment may consider policy interventions to increase culturally relevant targeting of messaging, including school visits and raising awareness online.
- The top three reported reasons students did not want to enrol were: Lack of interest in politics: 58.9%; Not knowing enough about politics: 26.6%; Not knowing how to enrol: 14.4%.

For more information on enrolling to vote, please see the Electoral Commission website:

<https://vote.nz/enrolling/enrol-or-update/enrol-or-update-online/>

Find out more at www.youth19.ac.nz



References

1. Vowles, J. (2010). Electoral system change, generations, competitiveness and turnout in New Zealand, 1963–2005. *British Journal of Political Science*, 40(4), 875–95.
2. Foster, J. & Taylor, D. (2019). Voter turnout decline in New Zealand: A critical review of the literature and suggestions for future research. *New Zealand Sociology*, 34(1), 1–26.

The fact sheet was compiled by Kaylee Brink, Daniel Barnett, Sarah Bickerton and Lara Greaves.

Suggested citation: Brink, K. G., Barnett, D., Bickerton, S., & Greaves, L. M. (2023). *A Youth19 Brief: Youth Voter Enrolment*. The Youth19 Research Group, Te Herenga Waka–Victoria University Wellington and The University of Auckland, New Zealand

Funding and acknowledgements

The Youth 19 project is an output of Health Research Council of New Zealand project grants 17/315 and 18/473. Thank you to our funders, the young people who participated in Youth19, and their families and schools.