Political Efficacy and Youth Non-Voting:

A Qualitative Investigation into the Attitudes and Experiences of Young Voters and Non-Voters in New Zealand

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Abstract

This thesis examines political efficacy and youth non-voting in New Zealand. Drawing from a focus group discussion and depth interviews with 20 young people, I compare and contrast the attitudes and experiences of 18-24 year-old voters and non-voters. I assess whether the theory of political efficacy is a useful conceptual tool for distinguishing between their attitudes, and evaluate the ability of efficacy theory to explain youth non-voting in New Zealand.

The thesis draws attention to the oft-overlooked benefits of using qualitative methods to conduct political science research. Based on my research, I find that the standard (quantitative) operationalisation of efficacy obscures the complex and nuanced nature of young people's thoughts about politics. Depth interviews and focus groups are found to be valuable means to gain insight into the political attitudes of young people, as – unlike quantitative methods – they allow participants to elucidate themselves using language and ideas of their own. A purposive sampling strategy using snowball referrals also proved to be a useful way to recruit young non-voters, indicating to future researchers that such an approach may be a good way to access disengaged populations.

Contrary to the predictions of efficacy theory and to the findings of research in the quantitative tradition, I find fewer differences between young voters and non-voters than expected: the interviews and focus group in fact reveal surprising similarities in the political efficacy of young voters and non-voters. Through my research I identify three types of young non-voters: 'disinterested', 'inconvenienced' and 'principled' non-voters, each of whom give different and diverse explanations for their non-participation. These findings suggest that the usefulness of efficacy theory as an explanation for youth non-voting may have been overstated, and my research highlights the need to remain open to other explanations for youth electoral disengagement – such as rational choice and post-materialist theories.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Problem of Youth Non-Voting in New Zealand

Historically, New Zealand has an enviable record of voter turnout at General Elections. Up until 1984, voter turnout rates were consistently high, often above 90 percent.[1] However, since 1984, on aggregate, New Zealand voter turnout has been declining, officially reaching only 77 % in 2002 – the lowest level in a century.[2] Though this rose to 81% in 2005, turnout was less than expected given the competitiveness of the election and the record number of enrolled voters. Over-represented amongst non-voters are three distinct groups; Maori, Pacific Islanders, and 18-24 year-olds. The purpose of my thesis is to consider in detail this third group of non-voters – young New Zealanders.[3] In 2002 a significant 38 % of young people did not vote (www.elections.org.nz)[4], for reasons we do not fully understand, and my research seeks to address this gap in the literature.

Political efficacy – broadly defined as a person's self-belief in their own ability to understand politics, be heard, and make a difference politically (Catt, 2005: 1) – has long been considered a powerful predictor of voter participation, and much research suggests that youth non-voting may be explained by low levels of efficacy (Campbell et al., 1954; ICR, 2006; Russell et al., 2002; UK Electoral Commission, 2006). Efficacy theory comprises two different components: internal efficacy, which refers to beliefs about one's

[1] With the exception of the 1978 election.
[2] With real turnout even lower, estimated at just 72 % of the voter-age population. Electoral turnout is commonly measured in two ways: official turnout refers to turnout as a proportion of the *registered* electorate, while voter-age population turnout (VAP) refers to turnout as a proportion of the total voting age population (i.e. including those not registered to vote). This thesis makes use of both official and VAT figures, and I have taken care to specify which measure is used wherever I discuss turnout statistics.
[3] For the purposes of my thesis, youth are defined as 18-24 year olds. This is the standard definition used in most studies concerning voter demographics or youth voting, both in New Zealand and internationally (New Zealand Electoral Commission, 2006; UK Electoral Commission, 2006).
[4] The figures for 2005 were not yet publicly available at the time of submission.

own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics; and external efficacy, which refers to perceptions about politicians and elections as responsive to citizen demands (Lane, 1959; Niemi et al., 1991; Kenski and Jomini, 2001).

As a theory of electoral engagement, political efficacy is currently receiving renewed attention in academic discussion and policy development in New Zealand and abroad. In the New Zealand Electoral Commission's Briefing to the Incoming Minister 2005, political efficacy is identified as a key grounding theory for policy development, and improving New Zealanders' political efficacy is set out as a strategic goal for the Commission (New Zealand Electoral Commission, 2005). However, while political efficacy has a fifty-year research history, surprisingly few studies have focussed specifically on efficacy and *youth* electoral engagement – particularly in New Zealand. This is a deficit I wish to address. As such, this thesis evaluates the usefulness of political efficacy as a conceptual tool for understanding youth non-voting in New Zealand, using original qualitative data gathered from a focus group discussion and depth interviews with 20 young New Zealanders.

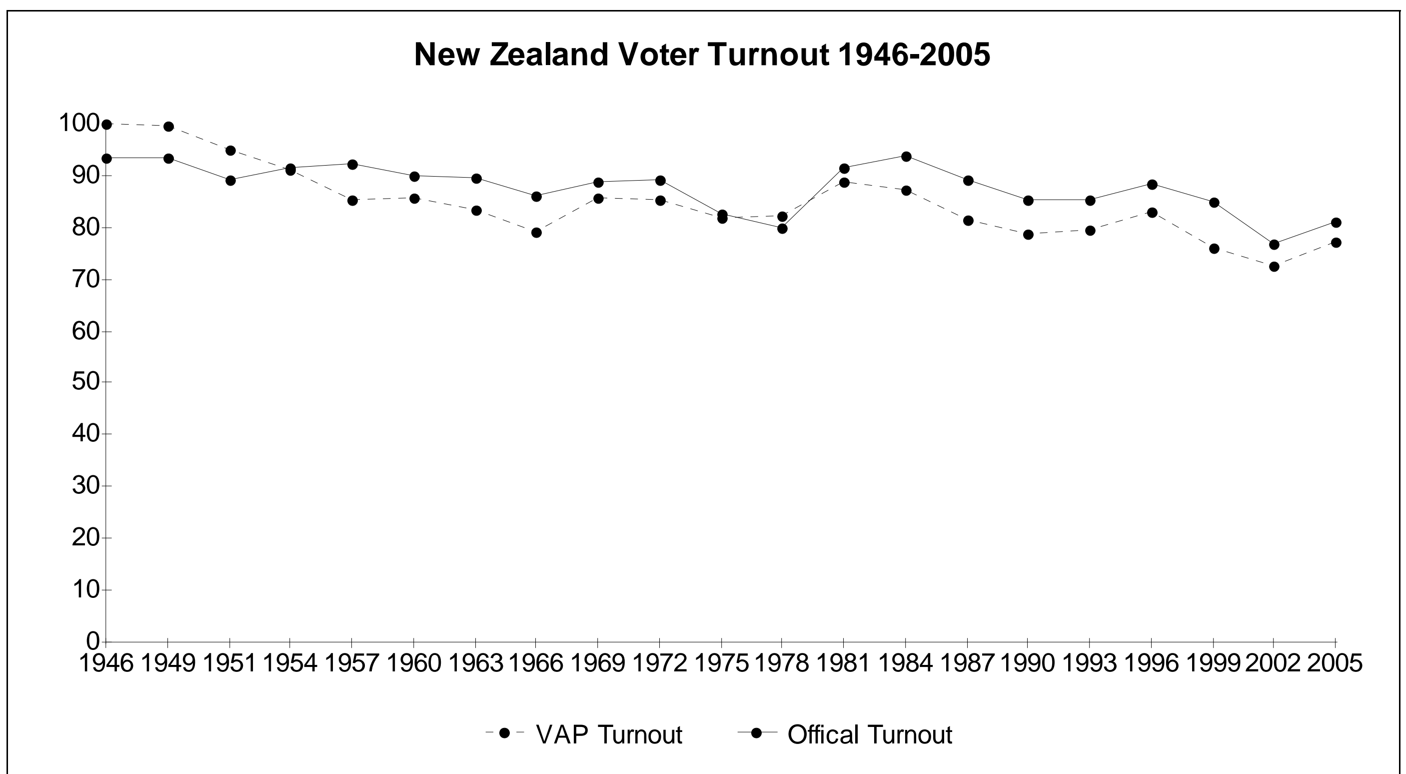
In this introductory chapter, I seek to outline the problem of turnout decline and youth non-voting in New Zealand. Following, I provide an overview of the thesis' structure and explain why it is important to study youth political efficacy and non-voting. This will provide a clear indication of what I hope to achieve in the thesis, as well as justifying why it is important that I do so.

Turnout Decline and Youth Non-Voting in New Zealand

It is well established that voter turnout is declining in most post-industrial democracies, including the US, Canada, the UK and most of continental Western Europe (Inglehart, 1990; Bakvis ed., 1991; Peters, 1991; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Vowles, 1994; Norris, 2003; Wattenburg, 2002, Ellis, 2006). As one of the world's oldest modern democracies, New Zealand is no exception, and has experienced a long-term pattern of turnout decline since 1946. Figure 1.1 illustrates this pattern clearly.

Whether following official turnout figures or voter-age turnout estimations, the trend of turnout decline is clear. Turnout in New Zealand peaked in the 1940's and remained at a level around 90% in the fifties, during the heyday of two-party politics. It declined moderately but steadily in the sixties and seventies, although rose again at the 1981 and 1984 elections. Following this recovery, turnout fell steeply in 1987 and 1990, and remained low at the 1993 election, during a period of strong public discontent with government. Turnout temporarily recovered at the first MMP election in 1996, only to fall again to record lows in 1999 and 2002.

Figure 1.1[5]



While turnout levels in New Zealand remain higher than in many other established democracies, such as the UK, France, Germany, Canada and the US, we have in fact

[5] VAP figures are from www.idea.int, and official figures from www.elections.org.nz .

experienced the eighth steepest decline in turnout amongst established democracies since 1945 (Franklin, 2004: 11). As Vowles has noted, New Zealand's reputation for high turnout is increasingly undeserved, and the trend is undoubtedly cause for concern (Vowles et al., 2002: 99).

Of particular concern are high levels of youth non-voting. Amidst levels of turnout decline in many established democracies, 18-24 year olds have lower levels of engagement compared to general populations. At the 2002 New Zealand general election, 18-24 year-old turnout was 62%, compared to 77% overall – a significant 15 percentage point difference (www.elections.org.nz), while in other established democracies the gap between youth turnout and total turnout has been even greater at recent elections.[6]

While we lack detailed information about youth voting trends over long periods of time, the figures suggest that youth voter turnout is not only lower than total turnout, but is in fact decreasing. The 38% of potential young voters who did not cast a ballot on Election Day in New Zealand in 2002 represent an increase on youth non-voting in 1999, when 31% of eligible 18-24 year-olds did not vote (www.elections.org.nz). This thesis intends to further understanding of the reasons behind youth non-voting in New Zealand, with the hope that better understanding can aid development of solutions to address the problem.

Thesis Structure

This section introduces the six remaining chapters in this thesis. Chapter 2, 'Literature Review: Theories of Voter Participation', summarises the major competing theories of electoral engagement into a useful typology that makes sense of the voluminous literature available. Rational choice, socio-economic, socialization, mobilisation, post-materialist and psychological theories are reviewed, and discussed with reference to turnout decline and youth non-voting in New Zealand.

[6] For example, the difference between 18-24 year-old turnout and total turnout was 24.4 percentage points in the UK in 2005, 21 percentage points in Canada in 2004, and 18.3 percentage points in the USA in 2000 (UK Electoral Commission; Canadian Electoral Commission; www.idea.int; Patterson, 2003).

Chapter 3 'Youth Political Efficacy: Findings from the International Literature' begins with a review of the existing New Zealand research on youth political efficacy, revealing significant gaps and limitations that need to be addressed. In light of the lack of domestic research on youth political efficacy, the chapter then assesses the major findings of international studies. The international literature suggests that there is strong evidence that young non-voters in established democracies have lower levels of both internal and external political efficacy compared to their voting peers, although it also indicates that there may be a sub-group of non-voters with high internal efficacy who are engaged in alternative ways. I argue that the dominant concept of political efficacy fails to account for young non-voters who are politically engaged in alternative ways, and propose that by viewing efficacy as a matrix we may be able to gain a richer understanding of the relationship between internal efficacy, external efficacy, and political engagement. Based on the findings of international research, at the close of this chapter I identify six key research questions that will form the basis for my practical research:

1. Does *internal* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
2. Does *external* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
3. How do young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement? Are these explanations related to efficacy?
4. Are some young non-voters politically engaged in alternative ways? If so, what motivates this engagement?
5. How useful is political efficacy as a theoretical construct for studying youth electoral engagement?
6. How useful are qualitative methods for conducting research on young people and politics?

In Chapter 4 'Research Methodology', I explicate my practical research approach to address these questions. I consider the methodologies previously employed in studies of

youth political efficacy, and identify the strengths and weaknesses inherent in such approaches. In particular, I argue that qualitative techniques have been under-used, and may yield rich data on young people's attitudes towards politics and voting. The chapter describes how I used depth interviews, a focus group and a purposive sampling strategy to gather material for analysis, providing a clear justification of the methods used and a consideration of research ethics and validity.

Chapter 5 'Research Findings' then presents the findings from the depth interviews and focus group discussion I conducted with young New Zealanders. Making ample use of quotes from the young people I spoke to, the chapter presents surprising and important findings about youth political efficacy in New Zealand and about the relationship of efficacy to youth non-voting. I compare and contrast the efficacy of young voters and non-voters, and examine some of the reasons behind youth non-voting in New Zealand – drawing on the testimony of young non-voters themselves. I find three distinct 'categories' of 18-24 year-old non-voters: 'disinterested' non-voters[7], 'inconvenienced' non-voters and 'principled' non-voters, each of whom give different and diverse explanations for not voting in 2005.

The implications of these findings for efficacy theory and research methodologies are then discussed in Chapter 6, 'Research Analysis'. In light of my original research findings, this chapter provides a critique of efficacy theory, and evaluates whether the concept of political efficacy is really a useful tool for explaining youth non-voting in New Zealand. Based on my research, it also debates the benefits of using qualitative methods – particularly depth interviews, focus groups and snowball sampling – to conduct research on young people and politics, concluding with some useful suggestions for future researchers in the field.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings for each research question. Drawing on the experiences of young non-voters, in this chapter I also make

[7] The term 'disinterested' here refers to a lack of interest in politics (as opposed to a holding a neutral stance towards politics). The term has been widely used in this way in the international literature on youth participation – Russell et al. (2002: 27) and ICR (2006: 42) are two such precedents.

suggestions for promoting higher youth voter turnout in New Zealand, covering a range of educational and institutional possibilities. I then conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the thesis and indicate possible avenues for future research in the fields of efficacy and youth non-voting.

Rationale

Having outlined the problem of youth non-voting in New Zealand and the approach of my thesis, I now discuss *why* the study of youth non-voting and political efficacy is important in detail. Three components need to be addressed here: Why study non-voting? Why study *youth* non-voting in particular? And why study political efficacy? In this section of this chapter, I provide a strong rationale for dedicating an M.A. thesis to these issues.

Why study non-voting?

In general, five broad arguments can be make to justify the study of non-voting. First, and perhaps foremost, voting is important for democratic representation. The expression of opinions through voting is what representative democracy is all about, and low turnout implies that certain groups are not voting in large numbers (Wattenberg, 2002: 109, Ellis, 2006: 12). In turn, low turnout leads directly to biased representation, with groups that turnout in large numbers having disproportionate influence on the makeup of government, the issues that get on the political agenda, and ultimately policy outcomes (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 276).

Second, high turnout increases the democratic legitimacy of the elected government (Dalton, 2002: 32). Indeed, the more people that vote, the greater the consent to winning candidates and parties to exercise the powers of government. Third, high turnout also acts as a buffer against political extremism, and is thus important to democratic stability (Patterson, 2002: 13). These points seem straightforward, and although turnout decline in

New Zealand does not pose any immediate problem to democratic legitimacy or political stability, they are concerns that should be kept in mind.

Fourth, and perhaps more intrinsically significant, it can be argued that voting may strengthen citizenship and the quality of democratic civic life. As Kymlicka has described, this is an argument that goes back to Rousseau and John Stewart Mill, 'who believed that political participation "enlarges the minds of individuals, familiarizes them with interests which lie beyond the immediacy of personal circumstance and environment, and encourages them to acknowledge that public concerns are the proper ones to which they should pay attention" (Oldfield, 1990, cited in Kymlicka, 2002: 303).[8] More recently, Putnam has argued that 'the act of voting itself encourages volunteering and other forms of good citizenship' (Putnam, 2000: 41), and in Australia, Print has argued that healthy democracies need actively participating citizens (cited in McDonald, 2005). However small the act of voting may seem, democratic participation may therefore act as a 'vehicle' to build wider citizenship and community values (Ellis et al, 2006: 12).

Fifth, the potential closeness of elections also makes it clear that voting does indeed matter, and can make a tangible difference to election outcomes. For example, in the 2000 US Presidential election, failure to mobilise voters in Florida has been recognised as critical to Al Gore's defeat (Wattenberg, 2002: 109), and in a small democracy with a PR system like New Zealand, individual votes can have an even greater impact. In the 2005 General Election, for instance, the Greens only just managed to retain seats in Parliament, scraping in with 5.3% of the party vote (www.elections.org.nz). Individual votes can also make a big difference to who wins electorate seats in New Zealand – Darren Hughes' margin of victory in Otaki in 2005 was just 382 votes – and under MMP electorate seats can also be crucial to parliamentary representation for minor parties that cannot reach the 5% threshold (www.elections.org.nz).[9]

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[8] The merits of this argument can of course be debated, and Kymlicka (2002) provides an enlightened discussion of its limitations. However, it still serves as a good justification for the study of non-voting.

[9] In 2002, for instance, the Alliance party lost Parliamentary representation when Laila Harre failed to win in the Waitakere electorate.

Why study *youth* non-voting?

Distinct from justifications for the broader study of non-voting, there are two particular reasons it is important to consider non-voting by young people specifically. First, youth are overrepresented amongst non-voters in New Zealand and many other established democracies, and their interests may indeed be underrepresented in legislative chambers. 18-24 year-olds stand to gain from higher youth turnout by exercising increased influence over the political agenda and policy outcomes.[10]

A second important reason is highlighted by Mark Franklin (2004). Franklin's generational theory of turnout decline draws particular attention to the importance of youth turnout, arguing that the habitual nature of non-voting means low youth turnout today will have serious implications for long-term turnout patterns. Franklin's argument directly challenges the traditional understanding of youth non-voting, which assumed that young people vote less because they are less socially integrated and have less 'at stake' in society – obstacles which were presumed to be overcome with time as people age and their political concerns mature.[11] Instead, Franklin argues that early experiences of non-voting inform voting habits for life, making new cohorts with low turnout *permanently* less likely to vote (Franklin, 2004). In New Zealand, a recent study by Vowles (2006) has indicated support for this argument, providing evidence that successive cohorts of young New Zealand voters have indeed become less and less likely to establish life-long habits of voting (Vowles, 2006: 7). Youth non-voting today may therefore have a negative long-term effect on voter turnout and democratic health, and surely warrants further study.

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[10] For example, the absence of youth-related issues within party manifestos and in the course of election campaigns may (at least in part) be due to low levels of youth voting.
[11] Proponents of the life-cycle theory generally argue that children, debt, home ownership and taxes prompt people into voting (Russell et. al., 2002).

Why study political efficacy?

As noted, political efficacy has recently received renewed academic and policy-making interest in New Zealand and internationally. The New Zealand Electoral Commission has identified political efficacy as a key grounding theory, and the Australian and UK Electoral Commissions have commissioned research into the relationship between efficacy and voter participation (New Zealand Electoral Commission, 2005; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004, 2005; Russell et al., 2002; UK Electoral Commission, 2006; ICR, 2006). In academic circles, numerous recent publications in the fields of political participation, political psychology and election studies have focussed on, or debated political efficacy (Branngart and Branngart, 1998; Southwell and Everest, 1998; Miller and Rahn, 2002; Moffet and Albowicz, 2003; Kenski and Jomini 2004; Catt, 2005; Woodly, 2005; Kahne and Westheimer, 2006).

As I began reading around the issue of youth non-voting in preparation for this thesis, political efficacy quickly emerged as an interesting and important concept. While I found that many studies had found political efficacy to be a significant factor bearing on propensity to vote, I discovered that little research had debated the nature of efficacy in much depth, or analysed the efficacy of young people in the 18- 24 age-group. I was also surprised at the lack of detailed research on efficacy in New Zealand, and that few researchers had used qualitative techniques to find out more about political efficacy, given that it is closely concerned with attitudes and opinions (ICR, 2006; Kirshner et al, 2003). These gaps led me to believe that there were many ways in which my thesis could contribute to the existing literature on political efficacy.

Conclusion

The study of youth political efficacy in New Zealand is both timely and important, and my research fills a significant gap in the New Zealand literature. It is hoped that my research can provide unique and original insights into the problem of youth non-voting in

New Zealand, the usefulness of efficacy theory as an explanation for voter participation, and on the value of qualitative research methodologies in the field of political science.

Chapter 2 now turns to review the theoretical literature on voter participation, summarising the major competing theories and assessing how they might explain turnout decline and youth non-voting in New Zealand. This discussion will provide the necessary theoretical background for debating the international findings about youth political efficacy and electoral participation in Chapter 3, and for researching youth non-voting in New Zealand in Chapters 4-7.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Theories of Voter Participation

There are many ways a citizen can participate politically in established democracies. For example, they can contact their MP, express their views in a letter to a newspaper, sign petitions, take part in protests, or boycott products for political reasons. While recognising that all forms of political participation may have important effects, the focus of this thesis is on voting. Voting in general elections remains the primary vehicle by which citizens make authoritative decisions and hold decision-makers to account, and as argued in Chapter 1, voting is important for reasons of distributive representation, political legitimacy and stability and the quality of civic life (Ellis et al., 2006; Wattenburg, 2002; Dalton, 2002).

In this literature review I summarize the major competing theoretical explanations for voter participation, and assess their ability to explain turnout decline and youth non-voting in New Zealand. The literature review seeks to make sense of the voluminous theoretical material available by developing a useful typology for organizing the major explanations of voter participation, and in doing so sets the necessary theoretical background for studying youth non-voting and political efficacy in New Zealand.

Theories of Voting: A Typology

The typology developed here identifies six broad theories of what motivates people to vote.[12] These are: rational choice, socioeconomic, socialization, mobilization, post-materialist, and psychological theories, which encompass the dominant theoretical trends

[12] Another useful typology of voter participation is provided by Heywood (2002). This typology however, is more in depth and covers a broader range of theories.

and the most influential theorists.[13] The discussion examines the strengths and weaknesses of each theory, and considers how they might account for turnout decline and the problem of youth non-voting in New Zealand.

Rational Choice Theories

"Political institutions and electoral laws provide an important incentive structure for voter turnout"
(Jackman, 1987: 407)

Perhaps the most influential theory of voter participation since the 1950's has been rational choice theory, and this typology therefore takes this for a starting point. Beginning with the publication of 'An Economic Theory of Democracy' (Downs, 1957), rational choice theory has had a significant impact on the study of voter turnout, experiencing particular popularity in the late 1970's and 1980's. As defined by Heywood (2002), rational choice theory is an approach to voter participation 'based on the assumption that individuals are rationally self-interested actors; an 'economic' theory of politics' (Heywood, 2002: 430).

Rational choice theories therefore explain voter motivation in terms of individuals' utility maximisation, and look toward electoral law and political institutions to explain turnout levels. According to a rational choice analysis of voting, if potential voters think their vote is highly likely to make a difference, electoral turnout will be high, and if they perceive their vote as unlikely to make a difference, electoral turnout will be low. Amongst rational choice theorists, there is broad agreement that competitiveness (i.e. the level of competition between parties), electoral proportionality (i.e. the translation of votes into seats), multipartyism (i.e. the number of parties forming a Government), and

[13] In establishing this typology I acknowledge that tensions and debates exist within each school of thought.

the number of legislative chambers are important factors in determining voter turnout (Downs, 1957; Powel, 1986; Jackman, 1987; Blais, 2002; Franklin, 2002, 2004).[14]

Rational choice theory seems to offer some insight into changes in New Zealand's turnout pattern since the 1940's. For example, turnout in New Zealand was highest during the forties and fifties when the two-party system was at its peak and the level of competition between Labour and National was strong (Vowles, 1994: 109), and high turnout at the 1981 and 1984 elections could likewise be attributed to the competitive nature of those elections.[15] Rational choice theories might also point to the introduction of MMP to explain increased turnout in 1996.

However, despite these insights, rational choice theory also suffers several limitations in explaining turnout change in New Zealand. For instance, the expected increase in turnout following the introduction of MMP in New Zealand was very short-lived, and rational choice theory cannot seem to explain low turnout in 1987 and the early nineties – which is instead commonly described as the product of voter dissatisfaction with both Labour and National governments over that period (Miller, 2005; Vowles, 1994; Miller and Catt, 1993).

But, more significantly for this thesis with its focus on youth, rational choice theory cannot seem to account for the problem of youth non-voting in New Zealand. Although Franklin (2004) has argued that electoral competition has a strong effect on young potential voters, recent research from Canada has found that perceived competitiveness had *no* significant effect on young people's decision not to vote in the 2000 election – a finding which may well be applicable to New Zealand youth. (Blais et al., 2001: 56;

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[14] Within rational choice theory there are clearly more than these five institutional factors that may bear on voter turnout. The frequency of elections, availability of voting facilities, whether elections are held on weekdays or weekends, and the efficiency of voter registration procedures are examples of other factors that have been discussed in the rational choice literature (Ellis, 2006). The five factors briefly explained here are simply thought to be the most influential and have commanded the most attention among academics.

[15] Lack of competitiveness might also explain the all-time low election turnout in 2002, and the slight increase in turnout in 2005 could be explained as the result of revived electoral competition with the increased popularity of National.

Pammet and Le Duc, 2003). Indeed, Vowles has recently argued that factors other than electoral competitiveness probably affect the likelihood of a young New Zealander voting (or not voting) at their first few elections (Franklin, 2006: 19).[16] The next school of though examined in this typology – socioeconomic theory – takes a vastly different approach to understanding voter participation, although similarly suffers limitations in accounting for youth non-voting in New Zealand.

Socioeconomic Theories

"The educated classes posses the keys to political participation"
(Almond and Verba, 1963: 381)

The socioeconomic school of thought gained popularity during the 60's and 70's, and during that period dominated interpretations of voter participation. In contrast to rational choice theories, socioeconomic theories look to class differences, and particularly to the role of education, to explain why citizens vote or do not.[17] The seminal works authored or co-authored by Sidney Verba in the 1960's and 70's – 'The Civic Culture' (1963), 'Participation in America' (1972), and 'Participation and Political Equality' (1978) – present substantial and detailed evidence to support the strong role of class differences and education in determining who participates and who does not.

The role of education in socioeconomic theory is key for two main reasons. First, socioeconomic theory posits that the more educated a potential voter is, the more likely they are to be endowed with the necessary skills, knowledge, interest and sense of civic duty to cast a vote (Almond and Verba, 1963: 380-1). [18] Second, educational level is

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[16] However, Vowles also notes that lack of longitudinal data limits the ability to assess what these other factors might be (Franklin, 2006: 19).

[17] It is important to note here that voting is merely one measure of political participation that socioeconomic theorists consider. Other measures of participation that such theories analyse include, for example, belonging to a political party, campaign activity, or contacting a member of parliament (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978: 51-56). However, for the purposes of this thesis, the focus of the summary provided here will be on voting.

[18] Political skills and knowledge can include such things as the basics on how to vote, domestic institutional and electoral systems, information about different political parties and policies, and how to make a choice about who to vote for.

arguably linked to income and occupational status, which are the two other key variables employed in the socioeconomic model (Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba and Nie, 1972). Research based in the socioeconomic school has also found that highly educated people are more likely to follow and discuss elections compared to those with low levels of education (Almond and Verba, 1968: 380-1).[19]

Several important criticisms of socioeconomic theories can be made. First, the assumption that education directly affects income and occupational status can be disputed. There are clearly many cases where income and occupational status are unrelated to education. Second, the role of education in fostering a sense of civic duty in socioeconomic theory could also be criticised, because depending on a persons' political reality,[20] being educated about politics could reasonably foster feelings of cynicism or political distrust. Devra Woodly has provided evidence of this kind in her paper on young black people and participation in Chicago (Woodly, 2005).

A more damaging criticism posits the following question. If education is indeed the major motivational force behind voting, why is it that voting patterns in many established democracies show a downward trend at a time in history when higher education has become more readily available and accessible? And why are so many young people not voting when more 18-24 year-olds are educated to a secondary or tertiary level today than in the past?

In New Zealand since the 1940's, levels of education have risen significantly yet voter turnout has fallen. For example, the percentage of the population educated to university level was 5% in 1963 compared to 20% in 2002 – a period during which turnout fell from 89.6% to 77%.[21] The percentage of 18-24 year-olds with secondary and tertiary

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[19] Almond and Verba also argue that educated citizens are more aware of the impact of government on their lives than less educated citizens (Almond and Verba, 1968: 380).

[20] Political reality is defined as the political environment experienced by an individual in their unique situation.

[21] Similar trends can be noted in other established democracies. In the US, for example, voter turnout was only 49.3% in 2000 (www.idea.int), when a large proportion of the voting-age population had completed high school or college education, while turnout in the 1960's averaged 62%, when a much smaller

qualifications has also increased considerably in New Zealand since the heyday of high turnout, as higher education has become more accessible (Vowles, 1994: 105, Vowles, 2004b: 202).[22] Broadly speaking, socioeconomic theory therefore seems unable to explain long-term turnout decline and youth non-voting in New Zealand.

Socialization Theories

"From an early age, children learn about government and politics and begin to prepare for their adult political roles, through processes which neither they nor those who instruct them are especially conscious of, but which nevertheless provide the basis for democratic political participation"
(Greenstein, 1965: 5)

Socialization theory essentially states that political attitudes and behaviours are established early on in life, and that they remain relatively stable throughout adulthood (Tourney-Purta, 2000: 82). In other words, what we learn about politics and participation as children has a strong connection to our propensity to vote and to be politically active as adult citizens. Socialization theory was first popular during the 1960's, and has experienced a recent revival stemming from the work of Torney-Purta (2000). The summary provided here draws on a wide range of socialization literature, including Greenstein (1965), Hess and Torney (1967), Connell (1971), Jennings and Niemi (1974), Sapiro (1998), and Yates and Youniss (1999) and Torrney-Purta (2000).

Early socialization theorists argued that socialization agents, such as family, school, and church, inculcated political attitudes and behaviours on children and adolescents. Political socialization was largely understood as a mechanism to ensure that younger generations adopted the political orientations of their parents, although the socialization process occurred without deliberate instruction by agents (Greenstein, 1965; Hess and Torrney,

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percentage of the population had attained a high school or university level of education (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 211)

[22] However, it should also be noted that increases in income inequality and unemployment in New Zealand since 1984 may have offset gains in education and average income, and contributed to – but not primarily caused – overall turnout decline (Vowles, 1994: 102).

1967; Connell, 1971; Jennings and Niemi, 1974). Studies conducted in the sixties, most notably Greenstein's research on New Haven elementary students, provided evidence to support the socialization thesis.[23] As Torney-Purta has higlighted, early socialization theorists assumed homogeneity of values within societal groups, and argued that what was learned form one socialization agent was complemented and reinforced by others (Torney-Purta, 2000: 88-89).

This assumption has been questioned in the more recent socialization literature, and contemporary theorists within the socialization school of thought have adopted a more interactive understanding of political socialization. The socialization process is now understood as complex and diverse, with many institutions and movements influencing children's political development – including the media, peer groups, New Social Movements, and informal means of education, as well as family, religion and school (Sapiro, 1998; Yates and Youniss, 1999; Torney-Purta, 2000).[24] Tourney-Purta has also argued that the messages of different socialization agents may contradict each other, so the transmission of political attitudes, values and behaviours will unlikely remain unchanged from one generation to the next (Torney-Purta, 2000; 88-89).

The complex and (potentially) contradictory nature of political socialization may account for generational changes in voter turnout, although this is not a relationship which has yet been substantiated. From the perspective of this thesis, while socialization theory offers insight into the nature of children's political development, there is a lack of connective evidence between voting and political socialization, especially within New Zealand. The next school of thought summarized in this typology attempts to address the issues of electoral turnout and turnout decline more directly.

[23] Greenstein's pioneering research found that children learned about politics affectively, from socialization agents, rather than cognitively (Greenstein, 1965; 154). For example, the New Haven research, presented in 'Children and Politics', found that children acquired party attachments – from the separate or combined influence of family, school or church – long before they could distinguish between the policies or values of political parties (Greenstien, 1965: 154).

[24] For example, Sapiro has discussed the role of New Social Movements, such as the women's movement, in political socialization, while Yates and Youniss have collected evidence that suggests youth community service has an important role to play in the socialization process (Sapiro, 1998; Yates and Youniss, 1999).

Mobilization Theories

"People participate in electoral politics because someone encourages them to take part" (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 161)

The fourth major school of thought summarized in this typology is mobilization theory. Instead of looking to institutional structures, class differences or socialization experiences to explain why a citizen votes or not, mobilization theories attribute participation to the influence of mobilizing agencies such as political parties, churches, and social networks. Two major works have been particularly influential within this school of thought: 'Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America' by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), and 'Bowling Alone' by Robert Putnam (2000).

In 'Mobilization, Participation and Democracy', Rosenstone and Hansen argue that turnout decline is a result of changes in the intensity of the efforts of mobilizing agencies, and specifically the strategic decisions of political parties not to mobilize large sectors of the population (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993, 211-212). The effects of decreased efforts of political parties in recent years to mobilize voters, they argue, outweigh the gains in educational levels and reduced legal barriers to participation since the 1960's that should otherwise have bolstered electoral turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 212-214).

Decline in electoral mobilization seems a persuasive explanation – at least in part – for falling voter turnout in New Zealand. Party membership in New Zealand has fallen steeply since the 1950's, when approximately 22% of the adult population belonged to a political party, compared to less than 5% today (Vowles, 2004a: 5), while the efforts of the major political parties to mobilise voters have also become less intensive (Miller, 2005; Vowles, 2002). In 'Party Politics in New Zealand', Raymond Miller argues that grassroots campaign mobilization has increasingly been replaced by a post-modern style of campaigning, characterised by advertising, TV performances, and PR exercises (Miller, 2005: 174). With respect to youth specifically, political parties in New Zealand today (with the exceptions of the Greens and the Maori Party) seem to make minimal

effort to recruit young members or candidates. As Miller (2005) has highlighted, compared to the sixties and seventies when youth were visible and vocal participants in election campaigns, the major political parties today give little importance to mobilising young voters (Miller, 2005).

Robert Putnam's account of mobilization looks toward eroding social networks to explain falling voter participation in America. Putnam's theory of social capital,[25] as explicated in 'Bowling Alone' (2000), posits that membership in social organizations such as churches, unions, and community groups promotes values of tolerance, trust and reciprocity. In turn, he argues, these virtues facilitate co-operative action towards achieving political purposes – including voting (Putnam, 1993: 89-90).[26] Putnam argues that declining social capital in America explains why electoral turnout has fallen. Vowles (2004a) has drawn from Putnam's theory to suggest that decreased turnout in New Zealand may be in part due to the deterioration of social networks through which political parties previously mobilised voters, as New Zealanders' membership levels in unions, churches and voluntary organisations have fallen over the past thirty years in tandem with voter turnout (Vowles, 2004a: 8-9).

However, Putnam's theory of eroding social capital does not particularly help us explain youth non-voting in New Zealand. First, as Norris has pointed out, Putnam's argument that social capital should motivate citizens to vote remains unsubstantiated (Norris, 2002: 160). Second, Putnam surprisingly neglects to consider youth as a distinct sub-group in 'Bowling Alone', which seems a significant oversight given the scope and scale of the study. While Putnam's work on social capital remains of use and interest to political scientists, the connection between social capital and youth voter turnout seems speculative at best.

[25] Defined specifically as 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 2000: 19).

[26] Rosenstone and Hansen also argue that changes in social organization have impacted on turnout. They argue that prior to the 1980's, political parties motivated citizens to vote by tapping into existing social networks, targeting people who were centrally located and influential within such networks. They explain (with respect to the US) that as fewer people in the 1980's and 90's were integrated into the community through membership in unions, churches, clubs or interest groups, fewer people had ties to others who could expect them to pledge their vote if asked.

Theorists within the post-materialist school of thought, to which this typology turns to next, criticise mobilization theories for focusing on traditional modes of political participation, and on membership in traditional mobilizing agencies such as unions, churches and community organizations. As Norris has suggested:

> [I]f membership in traditional mobilizing agencies has been replaced by involvement in more ad hoc types of single-issue interest groups, transnational policy networks, and new social movements, then this process could simply represent a transformation of the channels linking citizens and the state, rather than a corrosion of civic life. (Norris, 2002: 187)

This is explored in the following section.

Post-materialist Theories

"Political energies have diversified and flowed through alternative tributaries"
(Norris, 2002:4-5)

Post-materialist[27] theories begin by accepting the essential argument of mobilization theorists – that electoral turnout has declined as membership in traditional mobilizing agencies has fallen. However, theorists like Inglehart (1977, 1984, 1990), Dalton (1984) and Norris (2002) go beyond mobilization theories to argue that what this represents is not declining social capital or poor efforts by political parties to mobilize voters, but rather a fundamental value shift in the political cognition of Western publics.[28]

[27] 'Post-materialist' theory is also sometimes referred to as 'modernization' theory in the literature (Norris, 2002); this thesis uses the former term.

[28] Dalton (1984) offers a succinct account of the value shift in western democracies. As he explains, citizens of societies in the industrial phase of development were largely concerned with securing higher standards of living and a sense of economic security, and liberal and conservative political parties reflected different choices of how best to achieve these goals. Dalton refers to this as a 'materialist' political value structure. A 'post-materialist' shift has occurred gradually since the 1960's, he argues, as materialist goals have been fulfilled and political concerns have shifted to a new agenda. Instead of being concerned with economic conditions and security, post-materialist values are rather concerned with new societal goals such as social equality, environmental protection, gender equality and human rights (Dalton; 1984: 3-4).

According to post-materialist theory, turnout decline is therefore a function of changing values, as opposed to institutional structures, class differences, political socialization or the role of mobilizing agencies.

Post-materialists argue that electoral politics and the traditional lines of partisan alignment do not offer adequate means for citizens to voice their concerns on issues like social equality, environmental protection and human rights, and that as a result, the nature of political participation has necessarily evolved to accommodate new political energies (Inglehart in Dalton et. al. 1984: 57; Norris, 2002: 4-5). Inglehart has in fact argued that the inertia and inability of established political parties to adapt to post-materialist political values has 'retarded' the usefulness of traditional means of participation, including voting (Inglehart in Dalton et. al. 1984: 57). According to post-materialist theorists, this may explain why turnout in established democracies is decreasing at the same time the preconditions for participation – such as education – are improving.

Post-materialist theories argue that new avenues for political participation have emerged to accommodate post-material political values, particularly for younger generations. New Social Movements, trans-national policy networks, public demonstrations, consumer boycotts and internet activism all offer alternative ways to participate politically (Norris, 2002: 4), and post-materialist theories point to the increase in political activism and protest politics since the 1960's and 70's to support this argument.[29] Some post-materialist theorists have also argued that alternative means of participation are more sophisticated than traditional measures (such as voting) because they enable individual citizens to express their political views and preferences with greater precision (Inglehart, 1977: 139; Norris, 2002: 4-5).

In New Zealand, changing political values may indeed have led to a shift in the way many people, and particularly youth, choose to participate in politics. Instead of voting,

[29] For example, in 'Democratic Phoenix', Norris draws attention to the demonstrations, protests and blockades in the U.K. and France in recent years on a wide range of issues – such as animal rights, genetically modified food, globalization, and the rights of Muslim citizens – to highlight the diversity and popularity of protest politics as a means of participation (Norris, 2002: 8)

as Gustafson (2003) has highlighted, some young New Zealanders may be motivated to express their political views and preferences though alternative means (Gustafson, 2003: 32-34). In support of this argument, while voter turnout in New Zealand is in decline, involvement in non-traditional modes of engagement is increasing. For example, 32% of the adult population reported participating in a consumer boycott in 2002, compared to just 5% in 1985, and a 20% reported taking part in a demonstration or protest, compared to 13% in 1985 (Vowles, 2004a: 10).

A perceptive critique of post-materialist theory in a New Zealand context is discussed in Vowles' 2004 article 'Civic Engagement in New Zealand: Decline or Demise?' Here, Vowles questions whether alternative means of participation are equal to the act of voting or other traditional means of participation, arguing that Norris' argument 'tacitly assumes that all forms of participation are equal'. Vowles persuasively argues that the most instrumentally effective means of participation are still party membership and voting, and suggests that the evolution of Green parties out of the environmental movement is an obvious example of the effectiveness of electoral political participation (Vowles, 2004a: 10-11). While not denying the value and meaning of non-traditional means of participation, Vowles posits that elections remain the primary vehicle by which citizens can make authoritative political decisions and hold political decision-makers to account, regardless of post-materialist value shifts. The next section of this chapter now turns finally to consider psychological explanations of voter participation.

Psychological Theories

"Turnout… can be conceived as the end variable of a causal funnel extending backward in time and outward from the individual's orientation to the world of politics"
(Campbell, 1960: 90)

A sixth group of theories has sought to explain electoral engagement as the result of an individual's psychological disposition. Since as early as the mid-fifties psychological theorists have argued that propensity to vote is directly dependent on the attitudes and

perceptions of each individual (Campbell, 1960: 90). Psychological theories therefore look to factors such as political interest, partisan dealignment, apathy, alienation and efficacy to explain voter turnout and changes in political participation (Campbell, et al., 1954; Campbell, 1960; Verba et al., 1995; Miller and Rahn, 2002; Kenski and Jomini, 2002; Wattenburg, 2002). It should be noted that the psychological school of thought is particularly diverse, with a wide range of factors having been considered as precursors to voting and participation. The most commonly addressed factors will be summarized here: political interest, partisan dealignment, apathy, alienation and efficacy.

Studies have consistently shown that high levels of political interest are key to voter turnout. This argument seems to make good sense. A citizen is indeed more likely to vote if they are interested in politics, discuss it with their family and friends, and follow political news in newspapers, television, or other forms of media (Verba et al., 1995; Miller and Rahn, 2002; Russell et al., 2002; Wattenburg, 2002). In New Zealand, long-term turnout decline has coincided with steadily falling levels of public interest in politics since the 1960's. For instance, in 1963, 38% of the adult population stated they were 'very interested' in politics, compared to 31% in 1981, and 15% in 1991 (Vowles, 1994: 105). [30]

In early studies based in the psychological school, party identification was also identified as a key determinant of voting behaviour, influencing both the decision to vote and which party or candidate to vote for. Party loyalty – long term, affective psychological identification with a political party – was understood to guide the participatory activities of citizens throughout their adult life (Campbell, 1960; Verba and Nie, 1972). Psychological theorists have argued that the process of partisan dealignment, which has occurred in many post-industrial democracies since the 1970's, has had profound effects on voting behaviour, as deteriorating party loyalties have given rise to swing voting, split-ticket voting, and increased non-voting. This may in part explain turnout decline in New Zealand, as suggested by falling levels of party membership (Vowles, 2004a).

[30] It is significant to note that political interest is integrated into most studies of political efficacy.

More recent literature within the psychological school of thought has also drawn attention to the impact of political apathy and alienation on turnout. Political apathy is understood as ambivalence toward politics, with neither strong feelings for or against politicians or issues. People who simply do not care about politics, it is argued by psychological theorists, are less likely to vote than those who do care (Russell et al., 2002; 21). 'Alienation', which refers to a citizen's negative feelings toward politics, such as dislike or distrust of politicians has also been found to affect turnout, with alienated citizens less likely to vote (Russell, et al., 2002: 85-86).[31] In New Zealand, the steep decline in turnout from 1984 to 1993 can likely be attributed to intense public cynicism toward politicians and government during that period – which could be described as political alienation – following years of broken electoral promises and unchecked, fast-paced economic and social reforms (Miller, 2005; Gustafson, 2003; Vowles, 1994; Miller and Catt, 1993).

Political Efficacy

One of the most significant contributions from the psychological school of thought has been the theory of political efficacy. Efficacy was first identified as an influence on voting behaviour by Campbell, Gurin and Miller (1954) in 'The Voter Decides'. Political efficacy, as they defined it, was the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954: 187). Modern definitions of efficacy remain remarkably close to Campbell et al.'s, including the definition which this thesis adopts – a person's self-belief in their own ability to understand politics, be heard, and make a difference politically (Catt, 2005: 1).

Empirical research has consistently linked political efficacy with propensity to vote, and a large number of studies since the 1950's provide evidence of this: Campbell et al. (1954), Campbell (1960), Almond and Verba (1963), Craig (1979), Craig and Maggiotto (1982), Abramson and Aldrich (1982), Niemi, Craig and Mattei (1991), Verba et al.

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[31] Aspects of apathy and alienation are closely related to political efficacy. For example, a common measure of external efficacy is trust in politicians.

(1995), Southwell and Everest (1998), Miller and Rahn, (2002), Russell et al. (2002), Kenski and Jomini (2004), Print, Saha and Edwards (2004, 2005), UK Electoral Commission (2006), ICR (2006). Indeed, as Ho et al. have described, 'of all the attitudinal conditioners of political participation, efficacious belief of individual voters is probably the most salient and most studied variable of political actions' (Ho et al., 2001: 1). As noted in Chapter 1, political efficacy is currently experiencing renewed popularity as an explanation for voter participation both internationally and within New Zealand, evidenced by the marked increase in studies considering efficacy over the past few years (Ho et al., 2001; Miller and Rahn, 2002; Russell et al., 2002; Kenski and Jomini, 2004; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004, 2005; Catt, 2005; UK Electoral Commission, 2006; ICR, 2006).

As outlined in Chapter 1, efficacy comprises two different components – internal efficacy and external efficacy. The distinction between internal and external efficacy has been maintained in the theoretical literature, although political efficacy has nevertheless often been treated as a one-dimensional explanation for political participation in practical research. Some studies have gauged[32] internal and external efficacy separately, and then combined the two dimensions to gain a single measure for the purpose of analysis (Campbell et al., 1954; Almond and Verba, 1963; Craig, 1979; Craig and Maggiotto, 1982; UK Electoral Commission, 2006). As I will argue in Chapter 3, this has consequences for the usefulness of political efficacy as a conceptual tool for distinguishing between young voters and non-voters, and needs to be brought into clearer relief.

Conclusion

The summaries provided in this chapters' typology have covered six major schools of thought on voting and political participation. Rational choice, socioeconomic, socialization, mobilization, post-materialist and psychological theories represent the dominant theoretical trends in the literature, and encompass the most influential theorists

[32] The way efficacy is been measured is discussed in Chapter 4.

within the field of political participation. Although these groupings are by no means exhaustive, and while each school of thought contains many inner tensions and debates, this typology provides a firm conceptual grounding for the study of youth voter participation in New Zealand.

Political efficacy – a sub-field of the psychological school of thought – has recently re-emerged as a popular explanation for youth voter participation both in New Zealand and abroad, and, as argued in Chapter 1, warrants further study. The following chapter therefore begins with an evaluation of existing research on youth political efficacy in New Zealand, revealing significant limitations, before turning to consider the international literature on youth political efficacy and voter participation.

Chapter 3

Youth Political Efficacy: Findings from the International Literature

Beginning with a brief evaluation of existing New Zealand research on youth political efficacy, in this chapter I discuss and assess the major findings of international research on youth political efficacy and non-voting. There is strong evidence that young non-voters in established democracies have lower levels of both internal and external political efficacy compared to their voting peers, although the international literature also reveals a sub-group of non-voters with high internal efficacy who may be engaged in alternative ways. I argue that the dominant concept of political efficacy fails to account for young non-voters who may be politically engaged in alternative ways, and that as a simplistic theory it may mask the complexities and nuances of young people's political efficacy. I propose that by viewing efficacy as a matrix we may be able to gain a richer understanding of the relationship between internal efficacy, external efficacy, and political engagement.

There are four sections in this chapter. The first section summarises existing New Zealand research on youth political efficacy and voter participation, revealing significant gaps and limitations. In light of these limitations, the second section discusses the main findings of international research on youth political efficacy and electoral engagement. Four key findings emerge from the literature: (1) young people, particularly young non-voters, have low levels of *internal* political efficacy, (2) young people, particularly young non-voters, have low levels of *external* political efficacy, (3) young people, including young non-voters, are often interested in and enthusiastic about political issues, and (4) many young people, including young non-voters, are politically engaged in alternative ways. The third section of the chapter then considers the possible motivations of 'engaged' non-voters, asking why some young people might not vote, yet be politically

active in alternative ways. I argue that this group of non-voters present a challenge to efficacy theory, which supposes that people with high internal efficacy will vote.

In the fourth section, I then propose the ‘efficacy matrix’ as an improved framework for studying youth political efficacy and political participation. The efficacy matrix may be particularly useful because it reveals the complex and nuanced nature of young people’s political efficacy. Based on the findings of this chapter, I conclude by proposing key research questions for investigating youth political efficacy and non-voting in New Zealand.

Research on Youth Political Efficacy in New Zealand

As discussed in Chapter 1, political efficacy has recently been identified as a key area of concern by the New Zealand Electoral Commission, and has been singled out for further investigation. However, interest in young people and political efficacy as a research field is relatively new, and existing New Zealand research is limited in both breadth and depth – indeed, no major study to date has focussed specifically on youth. In this section of the chapter I summarise the findings of the existing domestic research on young people and political efficacy. There are two main sources of information on political efficacy and its relationship to voting discussed here: the New Zealand Election Study (the NZES) and Electoral Commission research.[33]

The New Zealand Election Study

The NZES survey includes three established agree/disagree statements to gauge political efficacy that are based on the original efficacy questions designed by Campbell et al (1954): ‘people like me have no say in what government does’, ‘politicians don’t care what people like me think’, and ‘my vote really counts in elections’, and also two

[33] The NZES, conducted after every general election since 1990, provides information collected from over 5000 randomly selected New Zealanders on a range of issues, including some measures of political efficacy. The New Zealand Electoral Commission (EC) conducts research on voters and non-voters before and after each election, gauging a variety of opinions, also covering some aspects of efficacy.

additional questions that measure external efficacy: 'MP's are out of touch', and 'I trust the government to do what is right'. In 2002, 46% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'people like me have no say in what the government does', and 50% agreed that 'politicians don't care much what people like me think'. Just 44% of respondents agreed that the government was trustworthy in 2002, and 49% believed that MP's were out of touch, while a significant 31% also said they thought their vote did not count in an election. These findings indicate potentially concerning levels of external political efficacy in New Zealand.

However, the NZES does not report on voter/non-voter differences in efficacy measures.[34] More importantly from the perspective of this thesis, the NZES does not report on age-based differences in political efficacy. For example, we do not know if 18-24 year-olds are more or less likely to agree with the statement 'politicians don't care what people like me think' compared to the total age-eligible population, or whether young people trust the government more or less than older people. Based on NZES research, this makes it difficult to comment on the level of political efficacy in young people in New Zealand.

Electoral Commission Research

The Electoral Commission has likewise incorporated some measures of political efficacy into its research, and is increasingly looking at youth non-voting as a specific concern. In particular, the Electoral Commission's 2005 Voter/Non-Voter Satisfaction Survey contains some valuable findings about young non-voters and political efficacy (New Zealand Electoral Commission, 2005b).[35]

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[34] Or, more specifically, reporting on voter/non-voter differences has been sporadic. The Electoral Commission's Summary Report 'Understanding of MMP and Attitudes towards MMP and Democracy', released July 2006, is one example of where NZES data has been used to highlight differences in efficacy between voters and non-voters (as commented above). Hopefully this is an indication of how the data may continue to be used in the future.

[35] The study was undertaken following the 2005 election to review the electoral experience of the eligible voting population and to ascertain why non-voters did not vote. Analysis of the responses includes a breakdown of factors most likely to influence young non-voters.

The survey found that the three efficacy factors rated as having the greatest influence on non-voters overall were: ‘it makes no difference to my life who wins the elections’ (35% of surveyed non-voters rated this as having ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ influence on their decision not to vote), ‘I don’t trust politicians’ (34%), and I’m just not interested in politics’ (33%). A breakdown of factors most likely to influence young non-voters revealed that different aspects of political efficacy had more influence on 18-24 year-olds. In particular, based on the findings of the survey, it seems that *external* efficacy may have a greater impact on the behaviour of young non-voters compared to no-voters overall. Young non-voters rated ‘I’m just not interested in politics’ the most influential factor (a significant 40% rated this as having ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ influence), followed by ‘I don’t trust politicians’ (33%), and ‘it was obvious who would win so why bother’ (32%). These findings are summarised in table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Factors Influencing Non-Voters and Young Non-Voters in 2005

	Non-Voters Overall	**Youth Non-Voters (aged 18-24)**
Factors that most influence non-voting **(% rated as having ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ influence on the decision to vote)**	- ‘It makes no difference to my life who wins the elections’ (35%) *internal efficacy* - ‘I don’t trust politicians’ (34%) *external efficacy* - ‘I’m just not interested in politics’ (33%) *internal efficacy*	- ‘I’m just not interested in politics’ (40%) *internal efficacy* - ‘I don’t trust politicians’ (33%) *external efficacy* - ‘It was obvious who would win so why bother’ (32%) *external efficacy*

Like the NZES findings, much of the Electoral Commission research on political efficacy is limited insofar as it does not compare voters to non-voters (obviously the same goes for comparing levels of efficacy in young non-voters to young voters). Electoral Commission research on young non-voters is also too recent to afford comparisons over time. As I argue in Chapter 4, we additionally lack any qualitative data about youth

political efficacy in New Zealand, which could potentially produce valuable and unpredicted insights. Despite the lack of domestic research, however, international studies may shed light on some of the important issues relating to youth political efficacy and electoral engagement, and are therefore the focus of the following section.

Key Findings from the International Literature on Youth Political Efficacy

Four key findings emerge from the international literature on youth voter participation and political efficacy, drawn from research conducted by Kahne and Westheimer (2006), ICR (2006), Clark (2006), Print, Saha and Edwards (2004, 2005), Vromen (2003), Moffet and Albowicz (2003), Russel et al. (2002), White et al. (2000), IDEA (1999), and Branngart and Branngart (1998).[36] These key findings are discussed here, and serve as the basis for the research questions I identify for investigating youth political efficacy and non-voting in New Zealand.

Low Internal Efficacy:

Young people have low internal political efficacy, and this seems to be more pronounced amongst young non-voters.

"I don't really care about politics."

- high school student, Australia (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004: 10)

"The government doesn't affect my day to day life… I don't care who gets elected."

- high school student, Australia (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004: 10)

Internal political efficacy is measured by level of interest in politics, the view that politics is easy to understand, and the perception that politics is relevant. A range of international studies investigating youth political attitudes and electoral engagement have found that

[36] A summary of the research methods employed by most of these studies can be found in Chapter 4.

young people, and particularly young non-voters, tend to have low levels of internal political efficacy, and that they often find politics boring, complicated, and irrelevant (ICR, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004; Moffet and Albowciz, 2003; Russell et al., 2002; White et al, 2000; Branngart and Branngart, 1998).

For example, research in the UK sponsored by the Electoral Commission found that youth interest in politics was significantly lower than that for those over 25.[37] Political interest was also found to be a major factor distinguishing young voters from non-voters, with young non-voters much more likely to express disinterest (i.e. a lack of interest) in politics compared to their voting peers (Russell et al, 2002: 18-19). Research by the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) in Ireland has produced similar findings, revealing that that most Irish youth – particularly non-voters – view politics as boring and complicated (ICR, 2006: 34-35).

These findings have been confirmed by other studies in the US and Australia. (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004; Moffet and Albowciz, 2003; Branngart and Branngart, 1998). Moffet and Albowciz conclude in their 2003 study that 18-24 year olds in America are dropping out of the electoral process because they lack interest in US politics, and in Australia the Youth Electoral Study (YES) has found lack of interest in politics to be a key factor influencing potential young non-voters (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004: 8-10). Research also shows that many young people – again, especially young non-voters – see politics as irrelevant to their lives (Russell et al., 2002: 19; ICR, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004).

[37] 54% of surveyed 18-24 year olds stated that they were interested in politics, compared to 70% of those over 25 (Russell et. al, 2002: 18).

Low External Efficacy:

Young people have low external political efficacy, and this seems to be more pronounced amongst young non-voters.

"If you're young and don't have any money, the politicians don't care about you."

- 20 year-old, Sweden (IDEA, 1999: 34)

"There's not really much you can change. You choose the party but they pretty much do what they want."

- 19 year-old, Australia (Clark, 2006: 18)

External political efficacy is measured by the extent to which a person views politicians as trustworthy, responsive and representative, and by whether they believe that voting can make a difference. International research has revealed that many young people have poor opinions of politicians and that they believe their vote can't make a difference in an election. Young non-voters especially are unlikely to trust politicians, and are less likely to feel that voting can make a difference compared to their voting peers (Kahne and Westheimer, 2006; ICR, 2006; Clark, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004; Russell et al., 2002; White et al., 2000; NCSR, 2000; Branngart and Branngart, 1998).

For instance, a study conducted by the UK National Centre for Social Research in 2000 concluded that most young people perceived politicians as 'remote' (NCSR, 2000), and Russell et. al. have found that young people view politicians as unrepresentative in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and social class (Russell et al., 2002: 34). Print, Saha and Edwards have found that young Australians regard politicians as unconcerned about youth issues, and the YES report reveals low levels of youth trust and confidence in politicians (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004: 21). In Ireland, research has found that politicians are generally perceived as 'old', 'boring', and 'male', by young people, and the ICR report highlights that many youth would like to see more younger and/or female politicians (ICR, 2006: 38). A significant 38% of surveyed young non-voters in the ICR

study said that they would be encouraged to vote if politicians focused on areas of youth interest, and many young non-voters also described that they felt voting did not make a difference (ICR, 2006: 35).[38]

Interest in Political Issues:

Young people – including non-voters – are often interested in and enthusiastic about political issues.

"The decisions that are made today about the state of our natural planet and how we live with each other on it will ultimately affect each and every one of us."

"Food is a right, not a privilege, and instead of spending so much money on weapons and bombs for war, it should be spent on feeding hungry people."

- high school students, New Zealand (Tearaway magazine, 2005)

A third key finding that emerges from much of the literature on youth voter participation and political efficacy is that young people, including non-voters, are often interested in and enthusiastic about political issues. This is somewhat surprising given the stated lack of interest of many young people in politics. A number of studies in a range of countries have reported that while young people may be cynical about politicians and bored with politics, they do not necessarily feel the same way about political issues. Rather, young people have been found to be interested in a diverse range of political issues (ICR, 2006; Clark, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004, 2005; Vromen, 2003, Russel et al., 2002; IDEA, 1999; Branngart and Branngart, 1998; Strama, 1998).

A comment from a facilitator working as part of the ICR study illustrates this finding well:

[38] American studies have produced similar results. A survey by the National Association of Secretaries of State found that two-thirds of young people agreed that 'our generation has an important voice, but no one seems to hear', affirming concerns that politicians are not perceived to care about youth. (Kahne and Westheimer 2006: 289). Focus groups conducted by Branngart and Branngart have also revealed that young Americans associate politics with 'endless rancorous political campaigns, self-seeking politicians, and an ineffective bureaucracy' (Branngart and Branngart, 1998: 116).

> Young people are not apathetic about issues and indeed can even be angry about issues. However it is the linkage between politics and the issues which causes the problem, as young people do not think it [politics] will make any difference. (ICR, 2006: 25)

Indeed, 80% of survey respondents in the ICR study, including non-voters, said they felt strongly about one or more political issues – most commonly sectarianism, unemployment and education (ICR, 2006: 52). In the US, Branngart and Branngart (1998) have similarly challenged assumptions of youth political apathy, arguing that young Americans (again, including non-voters) are increasingly concerned with a wide range of political issues, including gun control, consumer protection, healthcare and the environment (Branngart and Branngart, 1998). Likewise, research in Australia has revealed that young people are interested in a wide range of political issues, leading researchers to conclude that young Australians are not politically apathetic, but rather disinterested (i.e. not interested) in politicians and traditional party politics (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2005: 21; Vromen, 2003: 80-86; Clark, 2006: 4).

Non-Traditional Participation:
Many young people – including non-voters – are politically active in non-traditional ways.

"I want something new, something that can rock the boat for all those overweight men in their fifties that have all the power"

- 24 year-old, Sweden (IDEA, 1999)

"As I became more informed about the injustice that goes on every day in the world I couldn't stand on the sidelines and spectate anymore. Whenever there was a protest about an issue I felt strongly about, I would attend"

- high school student, New Zealand (Tearaway magazine, 2005)

A fourth key finding that emerges from the international literature on young people and political efficacy – related to youth interest in political issues – is that while many young people have low levels of political efficacy as traditionally understood, and may not vote in elections, they may actually be politically active in alternative ways (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2005; Vromen, 2003; Gauthier, 2003; ICR, 2006). For example, Print, Saha and Edwards found that a large number of young people in their study had either already participated in an alternative political act, such as signing a petition, attending a demonstration, or supporting an New Social Movement, or believed they were very likely to do so in the future (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2005: 6).[39] Support for social movements was also found to be strong, with a large number of students prepared to participate in an anti-war demonstration, a rally for the environmental movement, or a demonstration in support of asylum seekers (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2005: 11).[40]

Research conducted in Ireland has also found that large numbers of young people – including non-voters – have signed petitions or attended protests in support of issues they care about (ICR, 2006: 12), and Canadian researchers have found that despite high levels of youth non-voting, many young people are motivated to express their political views through means such as protest activism, volunteer work, and targeted purchasing (Gauthier, 2003). As I will discuss presently, the sub-group of non-voters who are politically active in alternative ways present a challenge to efficacy theory, which posits that people with high internal efficacy will vote.

To summarise, there are four major findings from the international literature on youth political efficacy and electoral engagement:

(1) Young people have low *internal* political efficacy, and this seems to be more pronounced amongst young non-voters.

[39] 95% of surveyed students said they had or would sign a petition, and 61% stated they had or would take part in a rally or demonstration for an issue they cared about (Print, Saha and Edwards, 2005: 6).
[40] Ariadne Vromen has found similar evidence of young Australians' high level of political engagement. In her 2003 article, Vromen argues that young Australians participate in a diverse range of political acts, and her study revealed that as many as 77% of young people had been involved in a product boycott, with high numbers also participating in rallies or marches (Vromen, 2003: 86-89).

(2) Young people have low *external* political efficacy, and this seems to be more pronounced amongst young non-voters.
(3) Young people – including non-voters – are often interested in and enthusiastic about political issues.
(4) Many young people – including non-voters – are politically active in non-traditional ways.

Though drawn from the international literature, these key findings suggest avenues for research on youth non-voting and political efficacy in New Zealand. None, however, hints at *why* some young people might be politically engaged in alternative ways but not vote – an interesting though little understood phenomenon. While the efficacy literature does not explore this question, it has been considered in other fields of the participation literature, notably by Norris (2002), Woodly (2005), Hocschild (1996), and Bohman (1996). 'Engaged' non-voters pose a particular challenge to efficacy theory, and possible explanations for their behaviour are therefore considered in the following section.

'Engaged' Non-voters?

One of the most interesting findings to emerge from research on young people and political efficacy is that young people – including some non-voters – have a surprisingly high level of involvement in alternative political acts. The motivations of this sub-group of non-voters who are politically active are curious, and raise questions for my research on political efficacy and non-voting. Why join a protest, boycott or sign a petition, but not vote? There are two likely explanations discussed in the literature that pursue this idea, although neither of these has been tested empirically.

Post-materialism

Post-materialist theory offers one useful interpretation of the behaviour of 'engaged' non-voters. As discussed in Chapter 2, the crucial tenet of post-materialist theory is that long-term social and economic changes have led to an evolution of political values, which

state governments have not kept pace with. Over the last twenty to thirty years, privatisation and downsizing of the state also mean that much decision-making power has flowed away from publicly accountable, elected institutions and to private actors instead: the targets of participation today extend way beyond the nation-state, including major corporations like Nike or Shell, international agencies like the UN or the WTO, and regional organisations such as the EU or APEC. (Dalton, 1988; Dalton and Wattenburg, 2000; Norris, 2002).

As Norris has explicated, elections and political parties may therefore no longer necessarily be the most relevant or effective means for challenging or influencing those in power. As such, she argues, many people are looking to alternative ways – such as protests, boycotts or internet activism – to be politically effective (Norris, 2002: 192). Norris argues that younger generations in particular are more likely to express themselves 'through a variety of ad hoc, contextual and specific activities of choice, increasingly via NSM's, internet activism and trans-national policy networks' (Norris, 2002: 222). This argument may help explain why some young people don't vote but are politically active in alternative ways.

Political Impoverishment

The works of Jennifer Hochschild and Devra Woodly, which focus on efficacy and participation amongst African Americans, offer a second, slightly different possible explanation for the behaviour of 'engaged' non-voters. Hochschild (1996) and Woodly (2005) argue that for African Americans, and especially for black youth, electoral disengagement is an accurate reflection of their political reality and disadvantaged position. Their ideas are closely related to James Bohman's theory of 'political impoverishment', which argues that citizens and groups who lack the capacities for full and effective use of political rights and liberties will be left out of decision-making processes (Bohman, 1996: 124-125). Perceptions (and realities) of social and institutional inequality may therefore be another reason that some young people don't vote but engage in alternative political acts.

Woodly (2005) argues that young black Americans may have low external efficacy because they accurately evaluate that institutional and social inequalities limit their personal control over producing desired outcomes (Woodly, 2005: 11). Hochschild (1996) makes a similar argument in 'Facing up to the American Dream', where she argues that poor African Americans are voting less and less because they do not perceive that politicians care about black communities (Hochschild, 1995: 209-210). Because electoral politics seem such a remote route to effecting political change, Hochschild argues that many poor African Americans are more likely to engage in protest politics (Hochschild, 1995: 209).[41]

Whether due to 'political impoverishment', or to the evolution of political values and the diffusion of power, we might expect young non-voters who are politically active in alternative ways to have high internal efficacy but low external efficacy. This presents something of a dilemma for efficacy theory, which posits that people with high internal efficacy will be voters. The next section of this chapter discusses this challenge to efficacy theory, and considers how it might be resolved.

The Political Efficacy Matrix

It seems clear from the reviewed research that young people – and young non-voters in particular – have low levels of both internal and external political efficacy. However, the evidence concerning young people's interest in political issues and their involvement in alternative means of political participation also suggests that an efficacy-based analysis of voting might not so be so simple or straightforward. Efficacy theory in fact loses its persuasiveness as an explanation for youth non-voting if some young non-voters actually have high levels of internal efficacy and are politically active in non-traditional ways.

[41] Other theorists have also discussed the participatory consequences of low external efficacy but high internal efficacy for African Americans (Singles, 1981; Ennis and Schrener, 1987; Harris, 1999; Kahne and Westheimer, 2006).

I propose that this dilemma may be resolved – at least in part – if efficacy is viewed as a matrix rather than a one-dimensional explanation. Although it has often been overlooked in the literature on efficacy theory, the differing natures of external and internal efficacy mean that there may not necessarily be a strong relationship between them: a person may have low external efficacy but high internal efficacy, or high external efficacy but low internal efficacy. As Kenski and Jomini have perceptively argued, different efficacy combinations may in fact be associated with different types of participation activities (Kenski and Jomini, 2004: 5). This seems clear, but few other authors have drawn attention to the distinction to date. Indeed, by viewing efficacy as a matrix, we can better understand the relationship between internal efficacy, external efficacy, and types of political engagement.

Figure 3.1 (see page 42) shows different efficacy combinations and the kind of political activity associated with each. There are four efficacy combinations depicted in the model, each associated with different types of participation activities:

(1) Low Internal-Low External: We might expect people who have both low internal and external efficacy to be less likely to vote or be politically active in alternative ways, because they are not interested in politics, find it complicated and irrelevant, distrust politicians, and feel that voting won't make a difference.

(2) Low Internal- High External: We anticipate expect people with this efficacy combination to be more likely to vote. However, low internal efficacy means that they are unlikely to participate beyond the act of voting.

(3) High Internal-Low External: We expect people who fall into this category to be less likely to vote, due to distrust of politicians and the view that voting can't make a difference. However, because they are interested in politics and perceive it as relevant, they may look to alternative ways to be politically active that they perceive to be more effective or expressive.

(4) High Internal-High External: We anticipate people with both high internal and external efficacy to be likely to vote and also to engage in alternative modes of political expression.

Figure 3.1

The Efficacy Matrix: Efficacy Combinations and Political Participation

Efficacy types and attitudes associated with them	**Low Internal Efficacy** - "politics is complicated" - "politics is boring" - "politics is irrelevant"	**High Internal Efficacy** - " politics is easy to understand" - "politics interesting" - "politics is relevant"
Low External Efficacy - "politicians are untrustworthy" - "politicians don't listen to people like me" - "voting can't make a difference"	Unlikely to vote or participate in other political acts.	Less likely to vote, due to distrust of politicians, but more likely to participate in ways outside traditional channels (e.g. attending a protest or rally)
High External Efficacy - "politicians are trustworthy" - "politicians listen to people like me" - "voting can make a difference"	Unlikely to engage in protest activity or other alternative means of participation, but more likely to vote due to high levels of political trust.	Very likely to vote and also to participate in alternative ways.

If different efficacy combinations are indeed related to different types of participation, I argue that it is extremely important to maintain the distinction between external and internal efficacy. Without a multi-dimensional perspective, political efficacy overlooks many of the nuances and complexities of political engagement, but by viewing political efficacy as a matrix we can achieve a richer understanding of the relationship between

internal efficacy, external efficacy, and types of political engagement. I will return to this discussion in Chapter 6 to assess the efficacy matrix in light of my own research findings on youth political efficacy and non-voting in New Zealand.

Conclusion and Key Research Questions

As discussed in this chapter, international research strongly suggests that young non-voters have lower levels of political efficacy than their voting peers, and indicates that there may be a sub-group of non-voters who are politically engaged in alternative ways. However, we do not yet know if these findings apply to New Zealand, and the motivations of 'engaged' young non-voters remain relatively unexplored. These are issues I will address in my practical research.

Based on the findings of existing research, I have identified six key research questions that are critical to our understanding of youth non-voting in New Zealand and to the development of political efficacy as a theory:

1. Does *internal* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
2. Does *external* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
3. How do young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement? Are these explanations related to efficacy?
4. Are some young non-voters politically engaged in alternative ways? If so, what motivates this engagement?
5. How useful is political efficacy as a theoretical construct for studying youth electoral engagement?
6. How useful are qualitative methods for conducting research on young people and politics?

Based on international research, it seems likely that young non-voters in New Zealand will have lower levels of internal and external political efficacy than their voting peers, although it remains to be seen which aspects of political efficacy reveal the most significant differences. Questions (1) and (2) above seek to investigate this. Question (3) seeks to identify some of the reasons many young New Zealanders don't vote, asking whether these explanations are indeed related to low efficacy, while question (4) addresses the political efficacy of young non-voters who are politically engaged in alternative ways.

I am also interested to assess the usefulness of efficacy theory as a conceptual tool for studying youth non-voting, and question (5) aims to investigate this – drawing from the results of my original research. Question (6) then tests the usefulness of qualitative methods for conducting research on young people in politics – which, as I argue in the following chapter, seem to have been under-utilised in the study of youth political efficacy. The next chapter of this thesis turns to debate how best to answer these research questions, and outlines my practical research design. The findings of my original research are then presented and assessed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

In this chapter I justify and outline my practical research methodology. At the end of the previous chapter, six key research questions were identified for the study of youth non-voting and political efficacy in New Zealand (see page 43). The remainder of this thesis will be concerned with answering these questions, using qualitative methods to investigate political efficacy and electoral engagement amongst 18-24 year-old New Zealanders

The objective of this chapter is to outline and justify my research methodology. First, I consider the methodologies previously employed in studies of youth political efficacy, and identify the strengths and weaknesses inherent in such approaches. Second, I justify the suitability of a qualitative approach for my research. Here I will briefly outline the key features of qualitative research, and explain why qualitative methods are well suited to address my research questions. The third section will then identify the specific methods to be used in my study: depth interviews and focus groups, and section four details my sampling strategy. Following, the fifth section discusses the ethical issues involved in researching youth political efficacy in New Zealand, and in the sixth section I consider the issue of research validity.

How has youth political efficacy been studied?

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, while political efficacy has a fifty-year research history, until recently relatively few studies had focussed specifically on efficacy and youth electoral engagement. Table 4.1 (see page 46) provides an overview of some of the most significant studies of youth participation and political efficacy since 2002, describing the focus of each study and the method(s) used by the researcher(s). As indicated by the table, it is clear that quantitative methods have dominated the study of

youth political efficacy. Of the 11 studies summarized, seven rely on quantitative methods, two on a mixed-method approach, and just two on qualitative methods alone.

Table 4.1

How has youth political efficacy been studied?

Methodology	Authors	Year	Focus of study	Description of Methods
Quantitative	Frisco, Muller, and Dodson	2004	The effect of youth voluntary participation on adult voting behaviour in the USA.	Statistical analysis of selected data from the National Educational Longitudinal study of 1988-1994 (survey).
Quantitative	Menzes	2003	The relationship between adult political engagement and participatory experiences at school.	Secondary analysis of data from the 1999 IEA Civic Education Study (large-scale survey of high school students in a range of countries).
Quantitative	Norris	2003	Questions whether young people are politically alienated and apathetic.	Secondary analysis of selected data from the 2002 European Social Survey.
Quantitative	Russell, Fieldhouse, Purdham, and Kaira	2002	An exploration of key issues concerning electoral engagement and young people.	Secondary analysis of data from the 2001 British Election Survey and survey research from the UK Electoral Commission.
Quantitative	Torney-Purta, Barber, and Richardson	2004	The relationship of trust to children's political socialisation.	Secondary analysis of data from the 1999 IEA Civic Education Study
Quantitative	Jarvis, Montoya, and Mulvoy	2005	A comparison of the political attitudes of working youth to those attending college.	Phone survey of 1000 young people.
Quantitative	Vromen	2003	The participatory experiences of young people.	Phone survey of 300 young people.

Methodology	Authors	Year	Focus of study	Description of Methods
Qualitative	Kirshner, Strobel, and Fernandez	2003	The relationship between young people's civic attitudes and way they reason about their communities.	Depth-interviews with youth, interpretation of group projects, and observational fieldwork.
Qualitative	Mattson	2003	The political apathy of American youth.	Depth-interviews with college students.
Mixed	Print, Saha, and Edwards	2004	An investigation of what motivates young Australians to vote, and why youth are less likely to enrol to vote.	Quantitative survey of high school students, combined with qualitative case-studies drawn from focus groups.
Mixed	Institute for Conflict Research	2006	Young Irish people's opinions of elections, politics, and politicians.	Qualitative workshops and focus groups, and a quantitative face-to-face survey of 1100 youth.

The methods used to investigate youth participation and political efficacy can be grouped into four broad categories: secondary analyses of existing major quantitative surveys, smaller-scale quantitative surveys, mixed-method approaches that use both quantitative and qualitative techniques, and qualitative studies based on depth interviews, focus groups or observational fieldwork. As indicated, the most common type of methodological approach relies on secondary analyses of existing major quantitative surveys. For example, Menzes' investigation of the relationship between adult political engagement and participatory experiences at school and Torney-Purta's report on trust and political socialization in adolescents draw on findings from the IEA Civic Education Study, which surveyed high school students in a range of countries about their participation activities, citizenship concepts, and political trust (Menzes, 2003; Torney-Purta, Barber and Richardson, 2004).[42]

[42] Other examples of researchers in the field of youth participation who have conducted secondary analyses of existing quantitative data include: Frisco, Muller and Dodson (2004); Norris (2003), and Russell, Fieldhouse, Purdham and Kaira (2002).

A second group of studies has employed smaller-scale quantitative surveys as the major research method. Statistical analysis is also a feature of such research, but the results are based on primary research conducted by the authors themselves rather than on existing data generated by larger studies. For instance, Jarvis, Montoya and Mulvoy (2005) based their comparative study of the political attitudes of working youth and college students on a phone survey of 1000 young people aged 19-23.[43]

Several studies have made effective use of a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The ICR study (2006) and Print, Saha and Edwards (2004) are both good examples of the mixed-method approach. Print, Saha and Edwards used a quantitative written survey combined with qualitative case studies drawn from focus groups in their YES reports on young Australian's electoral engagement, while the ICR report on youth political engagement in Northern Ireland based its analysis on a combination of qualitative workshops, focus groups, and a quantitative face-to-face survey which tested the frequency of the findings from the workshops and focus groups.

In contrast to the large number of studies on youth participation and political efficacy that have used quantitative methods, few have adopted a primarily qualitative methodology. Mattson (2003) and Kirshner, Strobel and Fernandez (2003) are notable exceptions. It is both surprising and disappointing that more researchers investigating youth participation and political efficacy have not taken advantage of qualitative methods, given that efficacy and participation are closely concerned with opinions, value and attitudes. While quantitative methods undoubtedly have value, and are excellent for testing the frequency of variables or measuring the relationship between different variables, it is concerning that they dominate research methodologies in a field primarily concerned with the study of attitudes, opinions and values – especially when the nature of such is poorly understood.

[43] Vromen's 2003 study is another example of this type of research methodology.

The Standard Operationalisation of Efficacy

Bound up with the dominance of quantitative research methodologies in the field of youth political efficacy are the specific questions that have been used to measure efficacy. Campbell's original four measures of political efficacy have continued to be used in survey based research without major revision. Termed the 'standard operationalisation' of political efficacy (Madsen, 1987: 572), this involves participants giving an agree/disagree response to the following statements: (1) "People like me don't have any say about what the government does", (2) "Sometimes politics seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what is going on", (3) "I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think", and (4) "Voting is the only way people like me can have any say about what the government does". Studies since 'The Voter Decides' have used these measures of political efficacy quite consistently (Kenski and Jomini, 2002: 3).

From the perspective of this thesis, three major criticisms can be made of the standard operationalisation of political efficacy, which will be taken into account in my research design. First, the simplistic agree/disagree nature of the questions has significant limitations for the depth of our understanding of political efficacy. Political efficacy is more complex than just agreeing or disagreeing with a statement like "Politics is interesting" – in the case of this question, it is also important to gain an idea of what the respondent understands by the term 'politics' and how strong their agreement or disagreement is. Likewise, what do respondents really agree with if they 'agree' with the statement "Voting can make a difference"? Agreement in this case could mean that they believe their vote can influence who wins the election, or that they believe their vote sends a worthwhile message to the government, politicians or other citizens regardless of who wins. Survey research of political efficacy has been, and continues to be, incapable of taking such depth and variation into account.

Second, Campbell's fourth measure of political efficacy has the potential to be misleading. For example, politically efficacious respondents might disagree with the

statement, and argue that voting is not the only way they can be politically effective, while at the same time inefficacious respondents may also disagree, and argue that even the act of voting is politically ineffective. While this may seem obvious, it has continually been overlooked in political efficacy research – Mattson (1987) and Mokken (1969) are notable exceptions.

Third, studies of political efficacy based on survey research have been limited by asking respondents such a small number of questions. Four questions are surely insufficient to determine whether someone is politically efficacious or inefficacious. Because political efficacy is about complex and varied attitudes and opinions, this is a significant shortcoming. In the following section of this chapter, I argue that a better understanding of youth political efficacy may be achieved through qualitative investigation.

Qualitative Research Approaches

The key strength of qualitative research approaches is that they allow researchers access to people's perceptions and understandings. As Jones has persuasively argued:

> In order to understand other person's constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them… and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their own terms (rather than those imposed rigidly and a priori by ourselves) and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings. (Jones, 1985: 46, cited in Punch, 2005: 168-9)

The use of qualitative techniques therefore allows differing world views and traditions to be accommodated, rather than simplifying or misrepresenting views and opinions to fit into predetermined categories – as Campbell et al.'s standard operationalisation of efficacy may do. By limiting the choice of possible answers, surveys do not allow for the full range of opinions to be expressed, and quantitative research has in fact been criticised by others studying political attitudes for oversimplifying such complex attitudes (Devere, 1993: 12-13).

Qualitative research is particularly suitable when we lack deep understanding of a phenomenon, or when we wish to improve an existing theory – both of which apply to efficacy theory and the problem of youth non-voting in New Zealand (George and Bennet, 2005: 275; King et al., 1994: 19). Instead of aiming for generalisability, qualitative research techniques intend to contribute insight. This means examining cases of *instrumental* interest rather than random and generalisable cases, as would be desired in quantitative research (Maxwell, 2003: 88-89).

The research questions I have identified for investigating youth political efficacy in New Zealand are concerned with young people's attitudes and opinions, and with improving the theory of political efficacy. I am not concerned with testing the *incidence* of internal and external political efficacy amongst young voters and non-voters, rather with the meanings and reasoning behind young peoples' attitudes towards politics, politicians and voting. A qualitative approach is therefore well suited to my research. The next section of this chapter outlines the specific methods I intend to use: depth interviews and focus groups.

Depth Interviews and Focus Groups

The techniques of qualitative research are as diverse as the range of topics they may be used to investigate. Data can be gathered verbally (through interviews, narratives, discourse analysis and focus group discussions), visually (using ethnography, participant observation, or document analysis), and increasingly from Internet sources (like blogs and online discussion forums) (Flick, 2006). The nature of the research questions and the objectives of each study determine which techniques should be used. I identified depth interviews and focus groups as valuable techniques for researching youth political efficacy in New Zealand, and use a combination of these in my study. This section of the chapter therefore defines and justifies these techniques.

Depth Interviews

Depth interviews[44] fundamentally differ from surveys in that they allow respondents to be open and spontaneous in their answers, and to speak about the issue concerned using language and ideas of their own (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 6-7). Participants are not confined to a limited range of answers – which is particularly important if researchers are not asking the right questions to begin with – and depth interviews offer a good way of accessing people's perceptions and understanding (Punch, 2005: 168). Depth interviews also provide an opportunity to assess the strength of opinions, as opposed to survey research, and respondents are able to address what is valid to them personally, allowing for rich, detailed data (Devere, 1993: 13-14).

The merits of using depth interviews as a data collection method in postgraduate political science research in New Zealand have been recognised by students at the Honours, Masters and PhD levels (Wilson-Kelly, 2006; Shamy, 2006; Cathro, 2001; Singleton, 2002; Devere, 1993). This thesis draws particularly on the precedent set by Devere in her 1993 thesis on New Zealand women's political attitudes. Devere's study used depth interviewing in the form of focus groups (discussed presently), and a snowball sampling technique, both methods that I incorporate in my research. Devere also provides some relevant insights on conducting research with young people, commenting in her analysis that the young women in her study gave shorter answers compared to the older participants – and that her own input was consequently greater in interviews with young women (Devere, 1993: 210). Because my research concerns the 18-24 age group, I have elected to follow a semi-structured interview format with many questions, rather than a more unstructured format organised simply around discussion topics.[45]

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[44] Also called focused interviews or unstructured/ semi-structured interviews.
[45] See Appendix 1 for the interview questions.

Focus Groups

When the technique of depth interviewing is extended to include two or more participants in the same session it becomes a focus group.[46] While originally used for market research, focus groups have become an increasingly popular research tool in the social sciences (Morgan, 1988; Bloor et al., 2001; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Punch, 2005). Devere notes their particular merits for political science research, arguing that they are an apt way to research complex and intricate phenomena like political attitudes (Devere, 1993: 198).

As Morgan has argued, 'the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without those found in a group' (Morgan, 1988: 12). The process of group discussion allows for unexpected points to emerge, as participants may be stimulated to reveal more of their views, perceptions and reasoning in responding to each other (Punch, 2005: 171; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:172). Devere found this aspect of focus groups particularly valuable to her research, stating:

> Focus groups, if conducted in an environment which produces trust, ease and stimulation, generate spontaneous self-disclosure on the part of the interviewees. The data obtained via this method is valuable for its candid revelations, for its relevance to real life social interaction, and for its breadth and depth in scope. (Devere, 1993: 198)

A useful point of reference for group size in my research is again Devere, as her topic similarly concerned political attitudes and was conducted as a political science research project. Devere's focus groups ranged in size from 3-5 participants, with three being the most common.[47] Participants in her focus groups were also drawn from pre-existing

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[46] Also sometimes called group interviews or focussed discussions.

[47] Focus groups can range in size from as few as two participants to as many as 14 or 15. Most focus groups typically involve 6-8 participants, although there is a strong case to be made for working with smaller groups (Bloor, 2001: 26-28). Large groups are more difficult to moderate, particularly for inexperienced researchers, and they are more susceptible to some individuals dominating the discussion than smaller groups.

friendship networks using snowball sampling,[48] which she argues had the important effect of making participants more comfortable and candid during the discussion. As Bloor has argued, problems of disclosure are lessened if participants are already known to each other, and it is also easier to recruit participants if they are friends. For these reasons, my research will draw focus group participants from existing friendship networks rather than attempt to bring strangers together.

My research technique is therefore twofold, employing individual depth interviews and focus groups to investigate political efficacy in young voters and non-voters. The next section of this chapter now turns to discuss my sampling strategy.

Sampling Strategy

Theoretical sampling[49] is often used in qualitative research that involves the testing or development of a theory (in this case, the theory of political efficacy). Participants are deliberately chosen because their experiences are critical to the theory under consideration, and because they may be able to illuminate complexities or details that could not be achieved using representative, systematic sampling (Maxwell, 2003; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). As such, theoretical sampling is not intended to be representative or generalisable. Non-voters were deliberately oversampled in my study due to the centrality of their views and experiences to my research questions.

I aimed to recruit 20 participants between the ages of 18 and 24, comprising ten voters and ten non-voters. Participants were recruited through a combination of peer referrals and an advertisement in the student magazine at the University of Canterbury. An additional two non-voters were also recruited via a listing with Student Job Search (SJS). In contrast to many other small-scale studies, I used a large number of contact persons for peer referrals, meaning participants recruited in that way were not simply drawn from one or two peer groups. A total of seven contacts (drawn from my own friends, family and

[48] Also called the ‘peer referral’ technique.
[49] Also called purposive or criterion sampling.

colleagues) referred me to one or two participants each, resulting in 12 participants being recruited in this way. A further 6 participants responded to the advertisement in the student magazine, and two to the SJS listing. Table 4.2 summarises the methods used to recruit participants, and in the following chapter I provide a profile of participants in terms of age, gender and ethnicity.

Table 4.2
Recruitment Methods

	Voters	Non-voters
Peer Referral	5	7
Canta Advertisement	5	1
SJS Listing	0	2

Research Ethics

Social research always involves ethical issues, because it is concerned with collecting data from people, about people (Punch, 2005: 276). Most of the literature agrees that researchers should take four major points into consideration when designing their research: (1) Are participants acting on informed consent? (2) Does the research involve an invasion of privacy? (3) Does the research involve deception? and (4) Is there any potential of harm to the participants? (Bryman, 2004; Punch, 2005; Davidson and Tollich, 1999; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). These issues are all outlined in the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee's policy guidelines for researchers, which my research closely followed.[50]

[50] My research was also approved by the University Ethics Committee.

While all social research has the potential to harm participants, the risk of harm in this study was low. I did, however, need to consider the issues of informed consent and privacy more deeply. Participants in my study were presented with an information sheet that detailed the purpose of the research and what was required of them (as well as noting that their involvement was voluntary and they could withdraw at any stage if they wished). After reading this and giving them the option to ask any questions, they were asked to sign a written consent form acknowledging that they had read the information sheet and understood its content.[51] In accordance with the University's ethics guidelines, I have also used pseudonyms and disguised potentially identifying material in the following chapters to protect the identity of participants.

In addition to the points outlined above, a fifth ethical guideline could be added: (5) Will the research contribute in a significant way beyond the personal gain of the researcher? Although this is not built into the University's ethics guidelines and is less established than the other four considerations, it is nonetheless important, because for social research to be justifiable it should generate worthwhile knowledge that can be used to benefit people (Davidson and Tollich, 1999). In this respect, I hope my research will contribute to the wider academic community and ultimately benefit young New Zealanders.

Validity in Qualitative Research

Validity is a crucial issue in qualitative research design and needs to be addressed explicitly (Maxwell, 2003: 105). Qualitative methods of validation are vastly different and less established than those used in quantitative research, and qualitative researchers therefore need to be clear about how they can ensure their research is 'good' research (Arksey and Knight, 1999' Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Maxwell, 2003; King, Keohane and Verba, 1994).[52] King, Keohane and Verba (1994), in one of the few books on qualitative

[51] See Appendix 3 for a copy of the information sheet, and Appendix 4 for a copy of the consent form.
[52] Qualitative methods of validation and are quite different to those used in quantitative research, where validation can be achieved through correctly applying techniques like randomised sampling, the use of control groups, or tests for statistical significance.

research written by and for political scientists, outline three important ways in which qualitative validity can be achieved, which I have endeavoured to follow:

(1) *Transparency of research procedures:* Recording and reporting the processes through which data is obtained offers one way for readers to determine for themselves whether the conclusions drawn from the research are valid and justified. In a practical sense, this means giving details about how participants were selected, the ethical procedures followed, and how interviews or focus groups were conducted. I have attempted to achieve transparency of research procedures in as much detail as possible, through candid discussion of sampling strategy, recruitment procedures, interview practicalities and ethics guidelines.[53]

(2) *Collect data from as many contexts as possible:* Data should be gathered from a range of sources, using a range of methods. This is sometimes referred to as data and method triangulation, and should be incorporated because it 'reduces the risk that conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues' (Maxwell, 2003: 93-94). I have therefore collected data using two methods – depth interviews and a focus group – to ensure that a broader, deeper understanding of youth political efficacy is achieved.

(3) *Allow for replicable analysis:* While replication of data is unlikely in qualitative research, by showing the raw material we base our analysis on readers can make their own evaluations of the inferences claimed from the data. This can be achieved through the extensive use of quotes when reporting the research findings, which the following chapters of this thesis provide.

[53] The information provided in the appendices provides further detail about my research procedures.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that qualitative methods have been under-utilised in the study of political efficacy. Due to the limitations inherent in quantitative approaches, the standard operationalisation of political efficacy is unlikely to provide a comprehensive and revealing picture of youth political efficacy in New Zealand. In contrast, depth interviews and focus groups offer an apt means of researching young peoples' attitudes towards politics, politicians and voting. My research approach therefore combines these methods with a theoretical sampling strategy to investigate youth political efficacy and non-voting in New Zealand, seeking to fill a significant gap in the literature on efficacy and to positively contribute to discussion on research methodologies in the area of youth and politics.

The following chapter, 'Research Findings', presents the findings from the interviews and focus group. These are organised into three major sections: similarities and differences between voters' and non-voters' internal efficacy, similarities and differences between voters' and non-voters' external efficacy, and the experiences of young non-voters. In Chapter 6, I then discuss the implications of my findings for efficacy theory and research methodologies, before drawing some conclusions and offering suggestions for electoral administrators, policy-makers and educators in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the depth interviews and focus group with young voters and non-voters, which were conducted over a three month period in 2006. The first section of this chapter profiles the participants – discussing age, gender and ethnicity – and sections 2, 3 and 4 then address research questions 1-4 (questions 5 and 6 will be the focus of Chapter 6). To review, the research questions I have identified are:

1. Does *internal* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
2. Does *external* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
3. How do young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement? Are these explanations related to efficacy?
4. Are some young non-voters politically engaged in alternative ways? If so, what motivates this engagement?
5. How useful is political efficacy as a theoretical construct for studying youth electoral engagement?
6. How useful are qualitative methods for conducting research on young people and politics?

As a precursor to discussion of my research findings, background information on participants is provided in the first section of this chapter. Following, the second section reports on research question 1 and compares self-reported differences and similarities between young voters' and non-voters' internal political efficacy. My key finding here is that there are significant differences between the young voters and non-voters interviewed in this study in terms of interest in politics and the perception that politics is relevant, but not in terms of perceived ability to understand politics. I also found that

young voters and non-voters alike believe there should be more education about politics and voting at high school.

The third section reports on research question 2, and considers self-reported differences and similarities between young voters and non-voters in terms of external political efficacy. My findings here stand in contrast to many international studies, as I found little difference between the voters and non-voters I interviewed regarding trust in politicians, perceptions of whether politicians listen to young people, whether they think it matters who wins an election, and whether they think an individual vote can make a difference. The findings of this pilot research therefore suggest that these measures of external efficacy may not be as reliable a yardstick for measuring youth electoral engagement as assumed by previous studies.

The final section of the chapter reports on research questions 3 and 4, and discusses how young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement and whether these explanations are related to political efficacy. Here I argue that non-voters are affected by a range of factors in their decision not to vote, not all of which can be ascribed to low political efficacy. In particular, issues of inconvenience and perceived effort play a larger role, especially for young people unable to vote from within New Zealand on Election Day. As predicated by the literature, a number of non-voters I spoke to were indeed active in non-traditional ways, and this section discusses their motivations with reference to the arguments of Norris (2002), Bohman (1996), Woodly (2005) and Hocshschild (1995).

Participant Profile

A total of 20 young people participated in the study: ten voters and ten non-voters. 16 depth interviews took place, supplemented by a focus group discussion. Although I had originally planned to conduct two focus groups, one each with voters and non-voters, I found depth interviews better suited to researching young non-voters[54] and consequently decided to hold more depth interviews. This resulted in ten depth interviews with non-

[54] Reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 6.

voters, six depth interviews with voters, and the voter focus group consisting of four participants. As recommended by Devere (1993), the focus group participants were snowballed from the same friendship network, meaning each participant already knew one or two other members of the group. This information is summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Voter and Non-Voter Participants in Interviews and Focus Group

	Voters	**Non-voters**
Number of Depth Interview Participants	6	10
Number of Focus Group Participants	4	0

The depth interviews were held at two locations: either a small discussion room at the University Central Library or my own living room,[55] and the voter focus group was held in the meeting room at the Department of Political Science and Communication at the University. All interviews and the focus group were tape recorded, and later transcribed by myself for analysis. The focus group ran for about an hour and a half, while the depth interviews ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how talkative the participant was. The atmosphere at the interviews and focus group was relaxed, I think in large part due to my own role as a young researcher, and participants spoke freely and candidly about their attitudes and experiences.

As Ritchie and Lewis have argues, a sample should be as diverse as possible within the boundaries of the defined population. As such, participants in my study ranged in age from 19 to 23, an equal number of male and female participants were involved, and participants came from a range of ethnic groups: Maori, Chinese, Sri Lankan and New

[55] Only for participants who I already knew.

Zealand European (although the majority identified as New Zealand European). Because this study does not investigate the impact of ethnicity and multiculturalism on voter turnout, I elected not to oversample from minority ethnic groups – although this could be an interesting focus for future research. Tables 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 show the breakdown of participants by age, ethnicity and gender.

Table 5.2
Age of Participants

Age	Voter	Non-voter
19	2	5
20	1	0
21	4	1
22	3	3
23	0	1

Table 5.3
Ethnicity of Participants

Ethnicity	Voter	Non-voter
NZ European	9	8
Maori	1	0
Chinese	0	1
Sri Lankan	0	1

Table 5.4
Gender of Participants

Gender	Voter	Non-voter
Male	2	7
Female	8	3

Having outlined who participated in my study, this chapter now turns to discuss the findings from the interview and focus group.

Internal Efficacy: Findings

Research question 1 asks 'Does *internal* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?' The first section of my interview schedule[56] therefore asked participants a number of open-ended questions relating to internal efficacy. Participants were asked: 'what does 'politics' mean to you?', followed by 'do you think politics is interesting?', 'is politics relevant to your life?', and 'do you find politics easy to understand?' Due to the qualitative nature of the research, participants could answer with as much information as they chose, with some giving quite lengthy and detailed answers. I frequently probed participants for more information or to clarify points, resulting rich and detailed data.

Table 5.5 (see page 64) summarises the data about internal efficacy gathered from the interviews and focus group. For each question asked, I compare the responses of young voters and non-voters. The table details both the range of answers given and the frequency with which like answers were repeated – represented by the number in brackets at the end of each point. In this way, it is possible to highlight the diverse range

[56] See Appendix 1.

of responses given by participants and also the similarities and differences which emerged between voters and non-voters.

Table 5.5

A Comparison of Young Voters' and Young Non-voters' Internal Political Efficacy

	VOTERS	**NON-VOTERS**
What does 'politics' mean to you?	• Many voters offered a wide definition of politics (4) (e.g. 'relationships between people', 'decision-making', 'use of power') • Just one offered a narrow definition of politics (1)	• Several non-voters offered a wide definition of politics (4) • Others offered a narrow definition of politics (4) (e.g. 'the Beehive', 'politicians', 'Parliament', 'bickering')
Do you think politics is interesting?	• Yes, politics is *very* interesting (8) • Yes, politics is *slightly* interesting (2)	• Yes, politics is *very* interesting (1) • Yes, politics is *slightly* interesting (2) • Politics is sometimes interesting, but not politicians (3) • No, politics isn't interesting at all (4)
Is politics relevant to your life?	• Yes, politics is *very* relevant (10)	• Yes, politics is *very* relevant (2) • Yes, politics is *quite* relevant (3) • No, politics is not very relevant to me(4)

	VOTERS	NON-VOTERS
Do you find politics easy to understand?	• Yes, politics is easy to understand (5) • Politics is sometimes hard to understand, but I feel I know enough (5) • Several voters believe media coverage of politics is confusing and misleading (2) • Many voters think there is a lack of education about politics at school (7):[57] - about political issues (2) - about MMP (2) - about the political parties (3) - about the importance of voting (3) - about the relevance of politics (5) - about political processes (2) - about the Treaty of Waitangi (1)	• Yes, politics is easy to understand (6) • Politics is sometimes hard to understand, but I feel I know enough (1) • It's not that politics is difficult to understand, it's just that I'm not interested in trying to understand it (3) • Many non-voters think there's a lack of education about politics at high school (6): - about political issues (3) - about MMP (3) - about the political parties (3) - about the importance of voting (2) - about how to vote (1) - about alternative ways to vote (1)

'What does 'politics' mean to you?'

As indicated in the table, I found that young voters quite consistently gave broader definitions of politics compared to young non-voters – only one voter I spoke to gave a narrow definition of politics. Voters tended to identify 'politics' with 'decision-making', 'relationships between people', and 'the use of power'. For example, Shelly gave the following answer:

> Shelly: I guess everything is political… I think 'beehive', and 'United Nations', and 'George Bush' and things like that, but then I also think that its just things like human relations, and it doesn't matter if it's on a big scale or it's on a small scale. It's just to do

[57] Many participants gave more than one example of what they thought should be taught more at school.

> with how humans relate to each other, and the ideologies that people have, and the conflicts between them.

In contrast, non-voters were more likely to give a narrow definition – identifying politics as 'politicians', 'laws', 'the Beehive', or something even more vague.[58] Liang's response illustrates this perspective clearly:

> Liang: Um, I'm not really sure… just all of the governmental stuff… I don't really think too much about it actually.

'Do you think politics is interesting?'

As predicted by the international efficacy literature, I found major differences between voters' and non-voters' expressed level of interest in politics. All ten of the young voters I spoke to said they were interested in politics (eight said they were very interested, and two said they were somewhat interested). However, only one non-voter said he was very interested in politics and five that they were somewhat interested. Four non-voters, including Neil and Carley, said that they were not interested in politics at all:

> Neil: No, I'm not really interested. I just don't pay any attention to it – it just sort of happens without me.

> Carley: Not really. I just don't know enough about politics and the law and stuff to be able to understand anything, so I don't really care.

'Is politics relevant to your life?'

Also as predicted by the international literature on internal efficacy, I found major differences regarding young voters' and non-voters' perceptions of whether politics is relevant. The young voters I spoke to saw politics as very relevant to their lives, while in contrast, young non-voters were less sure or unconvinced. As shown in table 5.1, just two non-voters said politics was very relevant to their lives, compared to all ten non-voters.

[58] Although several non-voters also gave wide definitions of politics.

Three non-voters said politics was 'kind of' relevant, and four felt it was not relevant to them at all.

This excerpt from the focus group discussion illustrates voters' responses clearly:

> Celia: Let's have a look at question number two – is politics relevant to your life?
>
> *Everyone says 'yes' enthusiastically*
>
> Celia: In what ways?
>
> Heather: For me it's like, ever since I was about eight it's just really interested me… politics is absolutely relevant to my life.
>
> Celia: Angus?
>
> Angus: It's definitely relevant, because everyone's got an attitude to everything. It's real bread and butter stuff, I think. It's kind of ubiquitous, if you will.
>
> Celia: How about you Elise?
>
> Elise: Yeah, it is relevant… because I'm just interested in it really.
>
> Aroha: I've always found Maori politics interesting. Like going through kura kaupapa and stuff, it was always quite relevant seeing what the Government was going to do about Maori language and stuff like that. And then as I got older, Treaty settlements and anything to do with the Treaty has interested me and been relevant.

Rachel, Jen and Mark, who also voted in 2005, expressed similar opinions in the depth interviews:

> Celia: Is politics is relevant to your life?
>
> Rachel: Oh, definitely. Everybody should have some political interest, because it's running the country where you live –you should care.
>
> Jen: I wouldn't say I think about politics on a daily basis, but yeah, it's relevant. Every time I think about university and having a student loan, I guess all of those kind of things… yeah, politics is relevant for sure.
>
> Mark: Yeah, it's definitely relevant. A lot of people just see politics as going to vote every three years, and think that it doesn't really effect them. Well, it does, it affects them every day, but they just don't realise it.

In contrast, non-voters like James and Liang explained that they did not see politics as relevant to them at all (these non-voters also gave narrow definitions of politics):

> James: Yeah, of course it affects me, but I don't think it is all that relevant to me. No, not really.
>
> Liang: It hasn't really affected me too much, that I'm aware of. I guess that indirectly it would affect everyone, but I don't really see it as directly doing anything to me at the moment.

'Do you find politics easy to understand?'

While I found important differences between voters and non-voters in terms of interest in politics and their perception of politics as relevant (or not), I did not find any differences in their responses to the question 'do you find politics easy to understand'. This is surprising given that perceived understanding of politics is considered an important measure of an individual's internal political efficacy, and that international studies have suggested that young non-voters are more likely to find politics difficult to understand compared to their voting peers.

Of the voters I spoke to, five said they felt politics was easy to understand, including Angus:

> Angus: I'm going to say yes… I try really hard to talk to a lot of people with a lot of different views over political things. Like I try really hard to understand all the arguments for all the issues. So yeah, I feel like I've got a good understanding.

Another five said politics was sometimes confusing and hard to understand – citing confusion about law-making processes or concerns about the media's role in reporting politics – but explained that they felt they knew 'enough', such as Rachel, Elise and Aroha:

> Celia: Do you find politics easy to understand?
>
> Rachel: Yes and no.
>
> Celia: In what ways?

> Rachel: Um, it is hard sometimes when they say they're blocking a law or something, and you're like 'well, what are the reasons behind it?' So it is hard to understand why they make some decisions. And I don't fully understand all the processes, like what it takes to make a law.
>
> Elise: I don't understand heaps of it, actually. But I reckon the media has heaps to do with that, like they don't really explain any issues properly. They just sort of go 'Oh, this is happening, blah, blah, blah', and they don't really explain what the actual issue is, or what the policy is, or what the conversations around the policy are about… I understand on the surface, but you know, anything more complicated I probably wouldn't know that much about.
>
> Aroha: I understand enough to be able to know what I'm doing when I'm voting.

Six young non-voters said they found politics easy to understand, including Tobias, James and Paige:

> Celia: Do you generally find it easy to understand politics?
>
> Tobias: Um, yeah. If you actually take the time to see what's going on then you can pick it up pretty easily.
>
> Paige: It's normally pretty easy. I mean, most of the politicians aren't that smart, so it can't be that complicated.
>
> James: Well, I don't take much of an interest in politics these days, but yeah, it is easy enough to understand.

One non-voter, Ryan, said that politics was sometimes difficult to understand but that he also knew 'enough', and three said that they had no interest in trying to understand politics – but thought that they could understand it if they did decide to make the effort. As Carley explained:

> Carley: It's not that I find anything difficult to understand, it's that I just don't have the knowledge. I just haven't gone through and tried to understand it. I'm sure if I had the information I would be able to understand it, but I don't have the information, nor do I have any desire to go out and find any information about it. If I did, I'm sure I'd be interested, but it's like trying to understand Japanese when you don't speak Japanese – it's kind of like a totally different language.

An unexpected finding related to internal efficacy to emerge from the interviews and focus group was that both voters and non-voters alike believe there is a lack of education about politics at high school.[59] Voters most often thought there was a lack of education about the relevance of politics and the importance of voting, while non-voters emphasised that there should be more education about political issues, how MMP works, and about the differences between the political parties. Other suggestions included more education about alternative ways to vote (e.g. postal voting, voting from overseas), the Treaty of Waitangi, and about political processes (e.g. how a law is made).

This excerpt from the focus group of young voters reveals some of these ideas:

> Heather: I think it's important that we probably all get the basic Treaty stuff, and the Bill stuff and everything, but to actually make kids aware that it matters is important too. Like how politics affects their daily lives, cause I think that's totally lacking. And so you leave school, and you're suddenly eighteen and you can vote, and you don't even know…
>
> Celia: What do you think the best way to do that would be?
>
> Heather: I'd get more people into schools. Like more visits from politicians – and not just necessarily politicians, but people who are involved in the political world, get them into schools and talking to people. And um, make it more part of the curriculum, rather than just a term or a week, or whatever.
>
> Aroha: I think that's a good idea, to get some politicians in there – but as long as they're just not doing it for brownie points or whatever… And explaining how important it is to vote, and that it matters, would be probably helpful as well.
>
> Elise: If it's later in school – like in sixth and seventh form when they're sort of nearing the voting age – just so they know it's relevant, and know it's important. Cause there's just a lot of people don't even know at all. You know, in seventh form they send around the enrolment people for everyone who turns eighteen that year, but that's it, it's not really anything great.
>
> Aroha: Yeah, it's just like 'enrol'. Just 'enrol', that's all they say.
>
> Angus: I reckon schools could do with some real good in depth issue examination. Like maybe take something in the education sector that makes it seem relevant to students, so they get an idea about the extent that politics affects things. I think that would be a good way to make it seem relevant.

[59] This was a recurring comment in my first few interviews, despite the fact that I did not initially ask any questions about it. As a result, I included a question about education in later interviews, and received similar responses.

Non-voters like Carley, Neil and Tobias also argued there should be more education about politics at high school:

> Carley: I think the ideas about politics – not necessarily about politics in our country – but about different kinds of democratic states, and dictatorships and stuff, people seem to get educated about that… you know, we learn about examples like Nazi Germany and all that kind of stuff. But I don't think there's enough education about our politics within our country. Because if there was enough, I'd be able to tell you who was in power – Helen Clark?
>
> Celia: Yeah.
>
> Carley: Well that's pretty much all I know! Yeah, I don't understand the left-wing, right-wing thing, other than saying 'left-wing and right-wing', I have no idea what's behind that.
>
> Celia: Do you feel that you understand the MMP system?
>
> Carley: No, it would be good to teach more about that.
>
> Neil: I think on the basis of just the education I got in school, it wouldn't be enough to make an informed decision on voting. Like I just didn't know enough [about the parties] to make a decision that I feel actually represents what I feel on the issues.
>
> Tobias: Yeah, we definitely didn't get a current understanding of politics… just more historical stuff that had happened in politics, but that wasn't really relevant to current sort of things. Which I suppose, now that I think about it is a bit disappointing… It would be good to have something at school that was a little more geared towards current stuff, because it is such an important part of life, for us to have a democracy and participate in it.

Text Box 5.1 summarises the main findings from the depth interviews and focus group regarding internal political efficacy in young voters and non-voters. Two of these findings concur with the existing literature on internal political efficacy – that voters are more likely than non-voters to be interested in politics and see it as relevant to their lives – although the other findings reveal unexpected similarities between young voters and non-voters.

Text Box 5.1

Summary of Question 1 Findings: Does *internal* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?

1. The young non-voters interviewed in this study were more likely to give a narrow definition of 'politics' compared to young voters (4 non-voters offered a narrow definition, compared to 1 voter).
2. More young voters say they are interested in politics compared to young non-voters (all 10 voters said they were very or slightly interested in politics, compared to 6 non-voters).
3. More young voters think politics is 'very' relevant compared to young non-voters – who are more likely to say it is 'quite' relevant or not relevant at all (all 10 voters said politics was very relevant, compared to just 2 non-voters).
4. The voters and non-voters who participated in this study equally say that politics is easy to understand.
5. However, some young non-voters say they don't understand politics because they haven't tried to (and that they don't want to make the effort). These non-voters also link their lack of interest and knowledge to their decision not to vote.
6. Both the voters and non-voters I spoke to thought there should be more education about politics at school, on a range of issues (7 voters and 6 non-voters mentioned the need for more education about politics).

External Efficacy: Findings

Research question 2 asks 'Does *external* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?' As such, the third and fourth sections of my interview schedule asked participants a range of questions relating to external efficacy. Participants were initially asked three questions about politicians: 'do you think politicians are trustworthy?', 'do you think that politicians listen to young people?', and 'do you think our politicians are representative of the New Zealand population?' Again, participants could answer with as much information as they chose,

and I frequently probed participants for clarification or for more detail. Table 5.6 compares the responses of voters and non-voters concerning attitudes to politicians.

Table 5.6

A Comparison of Young Voters' and Young Non-voters' External Political Efficacy: Attitudes toward Politicians

	VOTERS	NON-VOTERS
Do you think politicians are trustworthy?	• Yes, politicians are trustworthy (1) • It depends on the person (3) • No, you can't trust them (4) • It depends on the party (1)	• Yes, politicians are trustworthy (1) • It depends on the person (2) • No, you can't trust them (4) • No, but that's okay because it's the nature of their job (2) • Don't know, because I don't know anything about politics (1)
Do you think that politicians listen to young people?	• Yes, they do listen (1) • They sometimes listen (3): - if the party has a youth wing (1) - if it's a youth-related issue (1) - it depends on the politician (1) • No, and that's fine, because 18-24 year-olds don't have much to say (3) • No, because there's a big generation gap and a lack of communication (3)	• Yes, they do listen (1) • They sometimes listen (5): - it depends on the party (1) - if it's a youth-related issue (2) - it depends on the politician (2) • No, because we don't vote much and don't have any money (1) • No, there's a big generation gap and a lack of communication (1) • Don't know, because I don't know enough about politics (2)

	VOTERS	NON-VOTERS
Do you think our politicians are representative of the New Zealand population?	• Yes, it's about right (6) • No, but it's improving (1) • No, definitely not (3): should be more: - younger politicians (3) - Asian MP's (2) - Pacific Island MP's (2) - Maori MP's (2) - women MP's (2)	• Yes, it's about right (2) • No, but it's improving (2) • No, definitely not (3): there should be more: - younger politicians (3) - Asian MP's (3) - Pacific Island MP's (2) - Maori MP's (1) - women MP's (1) - Muslim MP's (1) - diversity in Cabinet (1) • Don't know, because I don't know enough about politics (3)

As discussed in previous chapters, political efficacy theory and international research suggests that young voters will have higher external efficacy than young non-voters. However, my research yielded results contrary to the predictions of international research here, suggesting that there are in fact few differences between young voters and non-voters in terms of trust in politicians and perceptions of whether politicians listen to youth.

'Do you think politicians are trustworthy?'

As table 5.6 shows, both young voters and young non-voters were more likely to say they distrust than trust politicians. Only one voter and one non-voter each said they trusted politicians, while four voters and four non-voters stated that they did not trust politicians.[60] Others offered less certain answers, arguing that it depends on the person or

[60] It should be noted here that many of the interviews were held shortly after a string of three high-profile political scandals in New Zealand that attracted a lot of media attention, involving Mangere MP Taito

the party, while one non-voter said she did not know because she didn't know enough about any politicians to answer.

The following comments from young voters illustrate a range of viewpoints from those who said they did not trust politicians:

> Samantha: They spend so much time slagging off at each other that is seems that they don't actually get anything done. And I'm doing law, so I see that all these bills do come through Parliament, but I just kind of think 'You'd' get twice as much through if you just stopped worrying about going off at each other and got the work done… and it kind of seems to all come down to their agenda, rather than actually what's good for the country. No, I would say I don't trust them at all.

> Jen: No, definitely not. I think it's because what they say and what you get are not the same thing. Everybody knows that the promises they make, they can't always follow through on… and then there seems to be a real culture of scandal at the moment – the way you watch them on TV and they all yell at each other, you just think 'grow up!' And just some of the things they say to each other, I mean why don't you have a go at someone based on their political views, or what they're trying to achieve, not on how their hair was done that morning, or whether their partner's gay?

> Romy: I think politicians generally aren't very good people. I don't know, I think maybe the smarter, more laid-back people who would actually get something done wouldn't go into politics maybe. The people that do go in – I don't know how to explain it – have big egos, and maybe aren't necessarily out for everyone's best interests.

Many young non-voters made similar comments, such as Paige, Laxmi and Liang:

> Paige: I generally don't trust them, because they just say what they think people want to hear to get their own political support at that time. Most of the time they have no intention of following through.

> Laxmi: It's kind of their job to try and appeal to the people whether they genuinely believe in something or not. And that means they wouldn't probably stick to what they say, like if anything falls out of favour with the public.

> Liang: Everyone's got an agenda within an agenda, and that kind of thing, so what they say you can't really take at face value most of the time.

Philip Field, National Party Leader Don Brash and Prime Minister Helen Clark's husband Peter Davis. These scandals (and purported scandals!) may have affected participants' views of politicians.

Participants in the focus group revealed that their trust in politicians depended on the individual in question or the party they belonged to, and remained cautious about extending this trust to politicians in general:

> Angus: My trust in politicians is directly related to how centre or extreme their policies are. I don't fully trust the ones in the middle, but the ones on the edges I do trust because they've got smaller parties that are ideologically motivated for specific goals. Whereas Labour and National kind of have these catch-all flexible policies, with lots of backtracking and u-turns.
>
> Celia: How about others?
>
> Elise: I do to a point, but a lot of it's on personal grounds about them as a person, and what I see them as doing as a politician. You know, are they doing their job properly or not…
>
> Heather: I pretty much agree with what Angus said, but then there are some politicians in the bigger parties that do have their own individual things that they're working towards, and that's kind of the equivalent of what the smaller parties ideals are. But it sort of just depends on who people are, and I know people can change as well.
>
> Aroha: I'm the same as Elise. I just think it depends on what sort of person they are, rather than whether they're a politician or not.

Two young non-voters I spoke to also felt that trust depended on the person, and two others argued that although you couldn't trust politicians, that was okay because it was the nature of their job to be untrustworthy:

> Tobias: I mean, sure, there are things like 'paintergate', but they do what they can. It's like advertising, it's a bit underhand, and it is a fight out there, but you can appreciate that as long as at the end of the day you can let that fly because they are in government, and they are actually doing things.
>
> Ryan: I think sometimes politicians just are the way they are because it's their job – it's what you have to do as a politician, if you know what I mean. Like you have to be sometimes untrustworthy, because you might have to change your policies, or make a deal with your coalition partner, or whatever. There's just heaps of back-scratching, and deal-making, and compromises – it's inevitable for the job.

These responses are interesting because they do not concur with the predictions of efficacy theory – voters and non-voters are in fact equally likely to distrust politicians.

'Do you think that politicians listen to young people?'

My findings on whether young people think politicians listen to them are likewise at odds with the conventional wisdom. As shown in Table 5.6, I found few differences between young voters and non-voters over this issue. Surprisingly, the young voters and non-voters I spoke to were equally ambivalent about whether politicians listened to them –few were passionate about this issue. Voters and non-voters were equally unlikely to say that politicians do listen to youth, while three voters and five non-voters said that they sometimes listen, depending on the person, party or issue. Elise and Heather, focus group participants who both voted in 2005, made this kind of argument:

> Elise: I think some [politicians] do listen, because some are looking at us thinking 'these are my next round of voters, let's pay attention to them', but others don't.
>
> Heather: I'd say yes if it's a youth related issue and they think they need their support, but if it was just a general issue that didn't specifically target us, then no. Cause we are likely to know less, you know, and we're not their target audience.

Non-voters Stephen and Tobias made similar points:

> Celia: Do you think that politicians tend to listen to the younger generation?
>
> Stephen: Hmm… to an extent, yeah. I think not hugely, but definitely to an extent.
>
> Celia: What kind of areas do you see that happening?
>
> Stephen: Oh, definitely with things like student loans and student debt.
>
> Tobias: Well, most parties do have a key demographic, so you're not going to see, say Act, branching out to people at school. But then you've got the Green Party, which is obviously trying to take in a bit more what young people think, and to try and get that vote.

Several young voters and non-voters also felt that politicians did not listen to youth at all. For some, like Romy and Martin, this was understandable because they thought that young people don't seem to have much to say:

> Celia: Do you think that politicians listen to young people?

> Romy: Well, I don't see why they would really, so probably not. I don't think that 18-24 year olds generally have much to say. A few of course would, but most of them don't really know anything about it, don't vote anyway, so what would be the point. I think probably the people that they aim to get on their side are the older people who have more of an effect really.
>
> Martin: I don't know how much younger people talk to politicians to be listened to! I think there should be more communication between politicians and young people… but I don't think it's the politicians' fault that it's not happening. And even then, I think it's important to remember that young people are only part of their constituency, so they have to be listened to in a balanced way.

However, for some others like Shelly (who voted), and Paige and Ryan (who did not vote), this was seen as a problem and something that needed redress:

> Celia: Do you think that politicians listen to younger people?
>
> Shelly: No, I don't think that the majority of them do. Probably because it's not in their interests to, and they probably can't even remember what its like to be a young person. I don't' feel although they really celebrate young people. They see them as a problem, or just causing problems all the time.
>
> Paige: I think they definitely listen to us less. I mean, they only really care about the powerful generation – the baby boomers. Because they're the ones who give their support, and they're the ones that vote.
>
> Ryan: I think young people aren't really listened to as much as other age groups, especially say, compared to people over forty who have lots of money and stuff. Like we don't have any money to donate to parties at election time or anything. And look at things like the Business Roundtable – they donate lots of money in exchange for policies that they like, and you know… well, we just can't compete with that.

'Do you think our politicians are representative of the New Zealand population?'

While I found little to no difference between young voters and non-voters in terms of trust in politicians and whether politicians listen to youth, I did however find some differences between young voters and non-voters regarding whether they think politicians are representative. While this is not a traditional measure of external efficacy, it has been used in some more recent studies, with young non-voters found to consider politicians less representative than young voters do (ICR, 2006). My findings were consistent with this: six of the voters I spoke to considered representation to be 'about right', compared

to just two non-voters. One voter and two non-voters said representation was not great, but that it was improving, while three voters and non-voters each said politicians were definitely not representative. Interestingly, non-voters also gave a broader range of criticisms of representation (see table 5.6), while three young non-voters also said they couldn't answer this question because they didn't know enough about politics.

Paige, Ryan and James were three young non-voters who felt politicians were not representative, arguing that there is a lack of younger people, women, Asians and Muslims in Parliament.

> Celia: Do you think that our politicians are representative of the New Zealand population?
>
> Paige: Not at all. I mean, how many people in our age group do you see in there? Percentage wise, we're not represented at all. I do think that's a problem, because we just don't really have our say.
>
> Celia: And how about in terms of gender or ethnicity?
>
> Paige: I think ethnicity is a problem. It filters down when you hear politicians say stuff - you know, them saying that all these Muslim people are really bad. I mean, there is a significant Muslim population, so I think they should have at least one person in. Because the others are more likely to demonise them if there's not one of them actually around, I think.
>
> Ryan: There should probably be more women, I think. But I reckon it's most important to have a more diverse Cabinet, because that's where all the main policies come from, really.
>
> James: Well, it's dominantly white, isn't it? Maybe if there were a few more Asian MP's – cause there doesn't seem to be many. Yeah, no it's not really representative.

Some of the voters who participated in the focus group revealed similar attitudes, although Angus' comment here reflects the ideas of many voters I spoke to who didn't feel that representation was a problem:

> Celia: Do you think that our politicians are representative of the New Zealand population?
>
> Heather: Um, every minority group in New Zealand. Well, if you're basing it on the population then there's a whole lot of middle aged people and a whole lot of white men. And that's not what society looks like, so…
>
> Celia: What do you guys think?

> Angus: Well, it's tough to know how much the physical representation affects the real representation – the issue representation. Like it's pretty easy to say we don't have enough women in Parliament cause we don't have fifty percent, but I don't know enough about it to know if it would make a tangible difference. Like as a twenty-one year-old, I don't think I suffer by not having a twenty-one year-old in Parliament to represent my twenty-one year-old interests.
>
> Heather: Although I think you can see the difference if there's younger people in there. Like I know in the past when there have been younger politicians – and they don't necessarily have to be young, just say around thirty – it kind of draws the media's attention and youth issues get notice a bit more.

> Aroha: Um, I don't think it's representative, and I think that having everybody represented would make a big difference. Like I'd definitely rather Tariana Turia represent me than say, Don Brash. I mean, I think there's only so much that somebody who's not in one ethnic group, or one age group, or one gender can assume about the other and represent it.

It is significant to note here however, that although more young non-voters than young voters felt politicians were not representative, they *did not* identify this as related to their decision not to vote in 2005. While this may have been a background influence, they did not see it as an important reason behind their not voting.

In order to gain a broad understanding of young people's external political efficacy, I also asked participants two questions relating to elections and voting – 'does it matter who wins an election?' and 'do you think your vote can make a difference in an election?' Both these questions have been used in survey-based studies since the fifties to gauge external political efficacy, and the responses of voters and non-voters are shown in Table 5.7 (see page 81).

Table 5.7

A Comparison of Young Voters' and Young Non-voters' External Political Efficacy: Attitudes towards Voting

	VOTERS	NON-VOTERS
Does it matter who wins an election?	• Yes, it does matter (8), because:[61] - the parties have different policies (7) - small parties have greater scope for influence under MMP due to the role of coalition partners (1) - it sets a political 'vibe' for the country (3) - it has long-term consequences for the shape of the country (1) - it sends a message to the rest of the world (1) • No, it doesn't matter (2), because: - the parties are so similar (1) - politicians won't follow through on their promises anyway (1)	• Yes, it does matter (8), because: - the parties have different policies (7) - small parties have greater scope for influence under MMP due to the role of coalition partners (1) - it sets a different direction for the country (1) • No, it doesn't matter (2), because: - it won't significantly change the country (2) • I don't know the differences between the parties anyway (1)
Can your vote make a difference in an election?	• Yes, because every vote adds up (3) • Yes, because a small number of votes can make a big difference under MMP (e.g. spread of seats, thresholds for getting into parliament, scope for coalition-building) (3) • Yes, if it's a close election (2) • No, one vote can't make a difference (4) • Some voters pointed that voting was not the most important way of being politically active (2)	• Yes, because every vote adds up (6) • Yes, because it will affect the distribution of seats under MMP (1) • No, one vote can't make a difference (3) • One non-voter also pointed out that voting was not the most important or effective way of being politically active (1)

[61] Again, many participants listed multiple reasons for why it matters (or not).

‘Does it matter who wins an election?’

Young voters and young non-voters were equally likely to say they thought it mattered who won an election. Eight voters and eight non-voters said that it mattered, compared to just two voters and two non-voters who said that it made no difference to them who won. Those few who said it did not matter either described that the parties were too similar, or that they did not know the differences between the parties anyway. Shelly, for example, felt that her vote was simply choosing the lesser of two evils, while Carley explained that it made no difference to her because she didn’t know about politics anyway:

> Celia: Does it matter to you who wins an election?
>
> Shelly: Well, I don’t think so, not really. For me it was choosing the lesser of two evils – National and Labour. I don’t really see a hell of a lot of difference between them. I mean, Labour is supposed to be representing socialist values, but I don’t think they really do that. I just thought it was a bit of a joke really.
>
> Carley: It doesn’t really matter to me, because I don’t know what their policies are. Labour and National, I don’t know the difference. Even Act, and the others, I don’t know the difference.

However, voters who said that election outcomes did matter were able to articulate a greater range of reasons for why compared to non-voters, with many participants giving more than one explanation. Mark, Angus and Elise (voters) all gave different explanations for why they thought election outcomes were important:

> Mark: It matters who wins, because whoever wins, it’s going to shape how the country is going to be for the next three years… perhaps even longer.
>
> Angus: I think it matters on two levels. I think there’s the tangible level, which is like, if a party got in that had universal student allowance, that would be like winning lotto – you know, that sort of thing. So it’s completely tangible and completely related to everything. And there’s also the more intangible thing of kind of like a vibe that it sets for the nation. It’s harder to explain, but yeah, I definitely would feel less happy if the party, or the side of Parliament I didn’t vote for wins the next one.
>
> Elise: And it also matters because the two main parties need smaller parties as well to actually get a majority… because National and Labour, they’re both sort of reasonably middle, so with MMP there’s all the other really right wing, or really left wing people that would make a difference too.

Young non-voters like Tobias, Stephen and Ryan also felt election outcomes were important, explaining:

> Tobias: Yes, of course it matters. Because they [whoever wins] have a majority in Parliament, and can form a Government, and they get the most say in things.
>
> Stephen: Well at the end of the day, they're coming from different perspectives; they're wanting to take the country in a different direction.
>
> Ryan: Yes, it does matter. Because the policies will differ if the government changes. And, especially with MMP, the small parties are more influential, and that means that some more extreme policies get on the agenda. So even if Labour and National are quite similar, it matters who they can side with to make a government and stuff.

'Can your vote make a difference in an election?'

There was also little difference between the voters and non-voters I spoke to regarding whether they thought an individual vote can make a difference. Both young voters and young non-voters were more likely to say their vote could make a difference – although voters again gave a greater range of explanations as to why. This focus group exchange between Heather and Angus (voters) reveals several of these explanations:

> Celia: And how about your vote – do you think that that can make a difference in an election?
>
> Angus: Yeah.
>
> Heather: I think so. I get infuriated when people say 'oh, it's just one vote, it doesn't matter', because if you actually look at how close it comes after an election, and particularly like the difference between a party gaining an extra seat or not, it's just infuriating. I'm just thinking like, 'oh my god, if only you knew that 200 votes could totally change who was governing the country!'
>
> Angus: The whole Florida debacle really laid that out for me. So if it's that close in America, then in little old New Zealand…
>
> Heather: Yeah, exactly. Sometimes here it's so much more then just if they [a party] get an extra seat, but with MMP whether they can cross that threshold, and then that means that that side of the spectrum has more votes, and then suddenly they're in government rather than the other side.
>
> Angus: Yeah, it always comes down to the special votes and stuff.

In contrast to these more technical explanations, non-voters like Stephen and Paige often argued that an individual vote made a difference because every vote adds up:

> Celia: Do you think that your vote can make a difference in an election?
>
> Stephen: Um… one vote… yeah, I guess it can.
>
> Celia: In what kind of way?
>
> Stephen: I was just thinking… if everyone thought that one vote didn't matter, well then that would add up to quite a few people!
>
> Paige: I'd say it can. It's not like a party's going to lose by just one vote, but it matters how many people think that. So I suppose everyone should vote, because if everyone thought that it couldn't make a difference, then no-one would vote.

Four voters said they did not think their vote could make a difference, but argued that it was still important to vote, including Rachel:

> Celia: Do you think that your vote can make a difference?
>
> Rachel: Not really. But if you don't vote, you can't complain… and I just think it is important to have your say, even if you don't think it's going to be heard.

Three non-voters explained that they didn't think their vote could have an effect in an election, similar to the number of voters who said it could not make a difference. What was noteworthy here, however, was that these non-voters connected this belief to their decision not to vote in 2005:

> Celia: Do you think that if you did vote, that your vote would make a difference?
>
> Liang: No, probably not. Yeah, that's probably why I didn't vote.
>
> Neil: I guess I don't really think that one vote makes much of a difference. And it just seems that you have to put a lot of work into understanding the issues to vote reasonably – before you make a decision. So it's like a lot of work for very, very little difference, with just one vote. If I were voting, I'd want to know what the issues were, and it sounds like an awful lot of work, and then I don't think that my one vote would then make any difference. And so I just can't be bothered putting the effort in.

This finding stands in contrast to the previous observation that no non-voters I spoke to connected their decision not to vote to their attitudes about politicians. Attitudes about elections and voting may therefore be more closely tied to non-voting behaviour than attitudes about politicians. Text Box 5.2 summarises my main findings about similarities and differences between young voters' and non-voters' external political efficacy.

Text Box 5.2

Summary of Question 2 Findings: Does *external* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?

1. There was very little difference between the voters and non-voters interviewed regarding trust in politicians. Both are more likely to say they distrust than trust politicians (just 1 voter and 1 non-voter said they trusted politicians, 4 voters and 6 non-voters said they didn't trust them, while 4 voters and 2 non-voters said it depended on the person or the party).

2. There is also little difference between the young voters and non-voters I spoke to regarding whether politicians listen to youth – there is an even spread between 'yes', 'sometimes', and 'no' responses (1 voter and 1 non-voter said they do listen, 3 voters and 5 non-voters said they sometimes listen, and 6 voters and 2 non-voters said they don't listen. An additional 2 non-voters said they didn't know).

3. Young voters tend to say politicians are representative compared to young non-voters (6 voters said politicians were representative, compared to just 2 non-voters):

   • Several of the young voters and non-voters who participated in this study believe there are too many white, middle aged, male politicians, and think that more diverse representation is desirable (there are especially calls for more younger politicians).

   • However, perceptions about politicians and representation do not seem to be linked to non-voting. While many of the young non-voters interviewed distrusted politicians and had criticisms about representation, they *did not* link these factors to their decision not to vote.

4. Both the voters and non-voters interviewed in this study tend to think it matters who wins an election (8 voters and 8 non-voters agreed that it mattered). However, voters give a greater range of reasons for why this is.

5. Both young voters and young non-voters tend to think an individual vote can make a difference in an election (6 voters and 7 non-voters agreed that an individual vote was important). However, voters offer a greater range of reasons as to why.

6. Young non-voters who say an individual vote can't make a difference often identify this as an important reason for not voting (5 non-voters identified this as an influence on their decision not to vote).

Non-Voters

This section of the chapter answers research questions 3 and 4:

3. How do young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement? Are these explanations related to efficacy?
4. Are some young non-voters politically engaged in alternative ways? If so, what motivates this engagement?

I found that many young non-voters identified factors unrelated to efficacy as being the main influences on their decision not to vote in 2005, which suggests that the link between non-voting and low political efficacy may not be as strong as some have suggested. I also found that although many of the young non-voters whom I spoke to were politically active in alternative ways, this was because such means of engagement were simply more convenient than voting (i.e. not because they felt they were more effective ways of being heard).

During the depth interviews with non-voters, I asked participants what they thought the main reason was that they did not vote in 2005, and if there were any other factors that might have affected their decision. Unlike quantitative studies, this approach adopts the strategy suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1998), allowing participants to answer for themselves, rather than simplifying and potentially misrepresenting their views to fit into predetermined categories. This was done in a non-confrontational manner, allowing participants to be open and honest about their reasons for not voting.

As table 5.8 (see page 87) indicates, the young non-voters I spoke to fell into three basic categories: 'disinterested' non-voters – those who didn't vote primarily because they simply weren't interested in politics (Liang, Neil and Carley), 'inconvenienced' non-voters' – those who were interested in politics but faced barriers to voting (James, Tobias, Laxmi, Stephen, Martin and Paige), and one 'principled' non-voter – who was interested in politics but didn't vote on principle (Ryan). However, within these

categories there is a lot of variation, and many non-voters felt multiple influences affected their decision.

Table 5.8

Young Non-voters' primary and secondary explanations for not voting in 2005

Name	Primary explanations for not voting	Secondary explanations for not voting
Liang (19)	• Didn't think that his vote would make a difference • Isn't really interested in politics	• Didn't identify with any party (thought they were all pretty similar) • Doesn't think politics is relevant to his day to day life
Neil (22)	• Feels it would take a lot of effort to understand politics and to be able to make an informed decision about who to vote for • Doesn't think that one vote can make a difference	• Not interested in politics and feels he doesn't know anything about it
Carley (19)	• Didn't know how to vote • Didn't know where to vote • Didn't know who to vote for (Doesn't know the differences between the parties)	• Not interested in politics and feels she doesn't know anything about it • Didn't feel that voting was important enough to make the effort to find out how to vote, where to vote, and who to vote for • Would rather leave voting to people who know and care about politics

Name	Primary explanations for not voting	Secondary explanations for not voting
James (21)	• Was overseas (in Thailand) • Didn't consider voting from overseas (too much effort while on holiday)	• Didn't think his vote would make much of a difference, because everyone he knew was voting Labour anyway • Not very interested in politics • Feels voting is a pretty low priority
Tobias (19)	• Had problems getting an enrolment pack (they were repeatedly sent to the wrong address)	
Laxmi (22)	• Was overseas (in Sri Lanka), and felt voting would have been a big effort • No access to a fax machine • NZ consulate rumoured to be unhelpful with voting	• Was busy around election time
Stephen (19)	• Was overseas (in Sweden) • No nearby access to a fax machine, embassy or consulate	
Martin (19)	• Was overseas (in the UK) • Did not know how to vote from overseas, and found the elections website confusing rather than helpful about postal voting	• Did not want to travel to London just to vote (approx 1.5 hrs away) • Doesn't think that one vote can make a difference, even in a close election like 2005
Paige (23)	• Was overseas (in Spain) • Was sick around election time • Thought voting would be too much effort – heard it was difficult to vote from where she was	• Needed to travel 14 hours on a bus to get to a consulate, and couldn't be bothered given the potential for bureaucratic hassles once she arrived • No fax access nearby

Name	Primary explanations for not voting	Secondary explanations for not voting
Ryan (22)	• Didn't think his vote would make a difference, because he thought Labour would win anyway • Thinks young people are more influential in politics through other means of participation (e.g. protests) than through voting.	• Had work on the day of the election so it was inconvenient to vote

'Disinterested' Non-voters

'Disinterested'[62] young non-voters like Liang, Neil and Carley, ascribed their decision not to vote to a range of factors, including: lack of interest in politics, lack of knowledge about how to vote or who to vote for, a belief that politics isn't really relevant, a firm belief that one vote can't make a difference, and a perception that it would take a lot of effort to decide who to vote for. Their explanations for not voting reveal these multiple influences:

> Carley: I didn't know how to vote. I had no idea. I didn't know where to go, and I didn't know who to vote for… like I think the voting was in primary schools or something, but I just didn't know where to go. But then again, if I don't know anything about it, I'd almost prefer to leave the voting to people who actually know and care, rather than go around making votes when I don't understand what I'm doing. I could have researched, and asked people who would be good to vote for, but it was just a combination of not caring enough to want to go out and find out, and just not having the knowledge of how to actually do it.

> Neil: I guess I don't really think that one vote makes much of a difference. And it just seems that you have to put a lot of work into understanding the issues to vote reasonably – before you make a decision. So it's like a lot of work for very, very little difference, with just one vote. If I were voting, I'd want to know what the issues were, and it sounds like an awful lot of work, and then I don't think that my one vote would then make any difference. And so I just can't be bothered putting the effort in.

[62] To reiterate, as noted on page 9, the term 'disinterested' here refers to a lack of interest in politics (as opposed to a holding a neutral stance towards politics).

Some of the explanations given here by Carley and Neil are clearly linked to low political efficacy. Low interest in politics and a belief that one vote can't make a difference are established indicators of low efficacy. However, other influences on their decision not to vote appear unrelated to efficacy, such as not knowing where to vote and thinking it's too much effort.

It is also interesting that no-one from this group of non-voters raised issues about politicians or representation as influences on their decision not to vote.[63] Drawing from the material gathered from these young non-voters, it seems that some indicators of low political efficacy – such as low interest in politics and a belief that one vote can't make a difference – are much more closely tied to non-voting behaviour than other indicators – like lack of trust in politicians and negative attitudes about representation. As I discuss in Chapter 6, this has interesting implications for the application of efficacy theory in research.

'Inconvenienced' Non-voters

Most of the young non-voters I spoke to, unlike Neil, Carley and Liang, were somewhat interested in politics, but did not vote due perceived barriers to voting or issues of inconvenience. Tobias, for instance, explained that he did not vote because he was not enrolled in time for the election and that although he did want to vote, he could not be bothered making a greater effort to enrol:

> Celia: What would you say the main reason you didn't vote last year was?
>
> Tobias: I couldn't get a hold of a f****** enrolment pack!
>
> Celia: What was the problem?
>
> Tobias: It was because you ask them to send you an apply to enrol pack, and it seemed like the only way to enrol was if you had this pack. But because I had a change of address, and was living at the flat away from home, it got sent to the wrong address. And

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[63] Indeed, both Neil and Carley did not answer many of the questions about politicians because they said they did not know enough about politics even to have an opinion about those issues.

> I was quite passionate about voting at the time, because me and my flat were all getting behind Labour, and having these big debates about whether they were just using the students for votes and all this. Really, I should have just asked them to send it to a different address, but I just couldn't be bothered after all that.

Those who were overseas for the election often explained that it was too much effort and hassle to try to vote from abroad. For Laxmi and Paige, mobility was a crucial issue, as voting would have required lengthy bus trips to other cities to access fax machines or New Zealand consulates. As they explained, in addition to this, there were added worries about bureaucratic hassles and red tape:

> Celia: What would you say the main reason you didn't vote last year was?
>
> Paige: I was lazy and it was too much effort. At the time I got kind of sick – I wasn't that sick, just sick enough to feel sorry for myself and I didn't want to do anything, let alone fight with bureaucrats and read lots of paperwork, and then be told I didn't have the necessary information or something like that… I would have had to go to either Barcelona or Madrid, and I couldn't be assed… it would have been about 14 hours on a bus. I was going to vote, but so many people just told me that it was so hard to do it.
>
> Laxmi: I was overseas, and I think when it came time to voting I was quite busy and I couldn't find a fax machine [in the place I was staying]… I had to take a bus to get to a fax machine, and I couldn't be bothered doing that. And the New Zealand consulate [in that area] wasn't the best, so it wasn't like I could just call them up and ask them for advice or anything.
>
> Celia: Do you mean they were quite unorganised?
>
> Laxmi: Well, I think it was just one person. I spoke to someone at the Australian Embassy, and he said the New Zealand consulate there was a bit of a joke… so that wasn't going to happen.

Martin, who was also overseas for the election, revealed that they he did know how to vote from the UK and was unable to figure out how to from the elections website:

> Martin: Well, the elections website was not very helpful in telling me what I was allowed to do – when I was allowed to post my vote and how late they would be accepted… I would have voted, but I wasn't sure whether I had to have my vote in on polling day, or whether I just had to have it posted by polling day. I think in retrospect it worked out that I could have posted it on polling day and it would have got in, but I was really unsure at the time…

Others, like James, were not even aware that you could vote from overseas. However, he said that he still probably would not vote from abroad unless it could be done online, because it seemed like too much effort:

> James: If I'm on holiday, I don't really want to have to deal with that, it's just too much effort, you know… it's just not that much of a priority.

For young non-voters like Tobias, Paige, Laxmi, Martin and James, these issues of effort, mobility and inconvenience seemed to play a greater role in their decision not to vote than any efficacy factors. The young non-voters I spoke to in this category all had relatively high internal political efficacy, insofar as they were interested in politics and perceived it as relevant, and while low external efficacy may have had a background influence on their decision not to vote, they did not identify concerns about politicians, representation or the effectiveness of an individual vote as important factors.

Related to perceptions about effort, lack of organisation may also have been an influence on these young non-voters. Non-voters in this group were frequently late for interviews, or missed the first meeting we arranged. It was my impression that many in this group, while well-meaning in their intentions to vote, may have also been hampered by disorganisation – which was probably exacerbated by being abroad in many cases.

The 'Principled' Non-voter

Ryan was the single young non-voter I spoke to who identified his decision not to vote as a matter of principle (rather than primarily due to inconvenience or lack of interest and knowledge about politics). While Ryan was interested in politics, and thought it was relevant, he also thought voting was pointless as Labour would win anyway, and he argued that young people can have a greater influence on politics through alternative means of engagement than through voting at general elections. He also noted that non-voting can be a political statement in itself:

> Ryan: Well, I was pretty sure Labour would win anyway. Because they were guaranteed the student vote from their interest-free loans promise – I don't know any students who didn't vote for them… and I reckon young people are more influential in politics through things like protests and stuff, rather than through supporting political parties, or even voting. That's really where we can make a difference. Yeah, I think a lot of non-votes make a statement, because it shows everyone else that young people maybe aren't happy with politics.

For Ryan, low internal political efficacy did not seem to influence his decision not to vote. He said he was very interested in politics and certainly felt it was relevant and easy to understand. However, he was sceptical of whether politicians listen to youth, and he had criticisms about politicians being dominantly white, male and old. While not explicitly identified by Ryan as reasons for not voting, these indicators of low external efficacy may have influenced Ryan's views about alternative means of participation and non-voting being a statement.

The experiences of young non-voters, exposed through qualitative interviews, reveal myriad reasons behind the decision not to vote. While some of these reasons are related to low political efficacy, many are not. Issues of inconvenience, effort, organisation and knowledge were some of the other reasons that frequently emerged in the interviews. I also found that some efficacy factors appeared to be more closely linked to the decision not to vote than others. Lack of interest in politics, perceptions of politics as irrelevant, and a belief that an individual vote can't make a difference were repeatedly mentioned by the young non-voters I spoke to as influences underlying their behaviour, while other factors – such as finding politics too complicated, distrusting politicians, or thinking election outcomes don't matter – were not identified as important at all. As I explain in Chapter 6, this may mean that we need to rethink efficacy theory and open ourselves to more diverse explanations for non-voting. Text Box 5.3 (see page 94) summarises my main findings about how young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement.

Text Box 5.3

Summary of Question 3 Findings: How do young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement? Are these explanations related to efficacy?

1. The young non-voters interviewed gave a wide range of explanations for not voting in 2005. Some of these explanations are related to efficacy, but many are not.
2. My research identified three groups of young non-voters:

   • 'Disinterested' non-voters, who describe their disengagement as the result of a lack of interest in, and knowledge about, politics, and also to a belief that voting required a lot of effort and was unlikely to make a difference.

   • 'Inconvenienced' non-voters, who describe their disengagement as the consequence of barriers they faced to voting – and particularly to significant difficulties faced when potentially voting from overseas.

   • A 'principled' non-voter, who identified his decision not to vote as a principled choice. This non-voter argued that young people can be more politically effective through alternative means of participation, and emphasised that non-voting could be a political statement.
3. Many factors identified as important influences on young non-voters by efficacy theory were *not* identified as significant by the young non-voters in my study (for example, no one discussed finding politics too complicated or distrusting politicians as reasons for not voting). This suggests that efficacy theory cannot necessarily account for the motivations and experiences of young non-voters in New Zealand.

'Engaged' Non-voters?

As predicated by the international literature, the young non-voters I spoke to were often passionate about political issues, even if they did not identify them as 'political'. Like their voting peers, I found the young non-voters in my study were interested in a diverse range of issues, including global warming, animal rights, poverty, privatisation, Iraq, genetic engineering, tertiary education and decriminalising marijuana, to name just a few of the many issues that arose in the depth interviews. Most had quite developed and deeply considered views on the issues they cared about, even when they did not see them as 'political' issues.

Not surprisingly, most of these non-voters had taken some form of action on the issues they cared about, and were politically active in alternative ways. Some were only slightly active (e.g. sometimes signed petitions), while others were highly engaged (e.g. attended lots of protests and volunteered with multiple organisations). In Chapter 3 I discussed the idea of 'engaged non-voters' with reference to the ideas of Norris (2002), Woodly (2005), Hocshcild (1995) and Bohman (1996), who have hypothesised that young people may be increasingly engaged in non-traditional means of participation because they perceive that elections and political parties are no longer the most relevant means for influencing those in power, or because they face systemic biases in government responsiveness. One objective of my research was to establish whether these theories can help explain why young non-voters in New Zealand often attend protests, sign petitions or engage in product boycotts.

Ryan, who had been involved in a wide range of activities such as protests, boycotts and petition-signing, argued that alternative means of participation were more effective than voting, especially for young people – an explanation that sits closely with Pippa Norris' interpretation of declining voter turnout. In a similar vein, several young non-voters also pointed out that alternative means of participation are more issue-oriented and specific than voting, given them greater control over the issues they choose to take a stand on.

However, other young non-voters who were politically active in alternative ways gave explanations that were not linked to the theories I discussed in Chapter 3. No-one I spoke to echoed Bohman, Woodly or Hocshchild's concerns about political impoverishment or social and institutional inequalities limiting their voice in traditional politics. For many non-voters, attending a protest or buying things like fair trade coffee were simply *more convenient* means of participating than voting, particularly if they were outside of New Zealand during election time. While these non-voters did identify such things as 'political', they did not relate their involvement in them to ideas about elections being irrelevant means of influencing those in power (Norris, 2002) or to systemic biases in government responsiveness (Hochschild, 1995; Bohman, 1996; Woodly, 2005). Paige

and James, for example, had attended protests against the Iraq war and fox hunting while travelling in the UK, because they were convenient for them to go to while in London, while Liang said he frequently signed petitions for things like human rights and animal welfare if someone approached him on the street about it and he had the time.

For other young non-voters, personal involvement in boycotts, petitions or volunteer work was simply not something they connected with politics – they did not see those actions or issues as political at all. For example, while Stephen had donated and volunteered for the Red Cross, Amnesty International and Greenpeace, he did not see this involvement as 'political' in the least. Likewise, Carley did not see 'buycotting' free range eggs or sponsoring a child through World Vision as political, and neither did Neil view signing a petition against commercial whaling or boycotting supermarket-sold meat as political acts. This is likely related to the earlier finding that many young non-voters have narrow definitions of politics. Text Box 5.4 summarises my key findings about young non-voters' involvement in alternative political activities.

Text Box 5.4

Summary of Question 4 Findings: Are some young non-voters politically engaged in alternative ways? If so, what motivates this engagement?

1. The young non-voters I spoke to were often passionate about political issues (e.g. global warming, animal rights, the Iraq war, poverty). However, they did not always identify these issues as 'political'.

2. Most of the young non-voters in my study had been involved in some form of alternative political participation. These commonly included signing petitions, attending protests, volunteering and boycotting.

3. The depth interviews revealed the participatory activities of young non-voters to be primarily motivated by *convenience* rather than principle. Norris (2002), Bohman (1996), Hochschild (1996) and Woodly's (2005) explanations for the participation of non-voters therefore seen to have limited capacity to account for the motivations of the politically engaged non-voters in my study.

Conclusion

Given the small scale and the qualitative nature of my study, many of my findings may not be generalisable to the wider population of young voters and non-voters in New Zealand. However, my findings have probed the nature of young New Zealanders' political efficacy, and they have significant implications for the usefulness of political efficacy as a theoretical construct. I found the political efficacy of the young non-voters I spoke to to be inherently complex and nuanced – precisely unsuited to more traditional means of quantitative measurement – and not at all in concurrence with the existing literature on political efficacy.

In particular, through extended qualitative interviewing, I found the differences between young voters' and non-voters' political efficacy to be less marked than anticipated by much of the academic literature on voter turnout. While there were significant differences between voters and non-voters in terms of interest in politics, perceptions of politics as relevant, and views about the representativeness of politicians, other measures of efficacy revealed surprising similarities between voters and non-voters. Furthermore, young non-voters tended to identify factors unrelated to efficacy as being the main influences on their decision not to vote in 2005. Indeed, in light of these findings, the value of efficacy theory itself seems in need of reconsideration, and this will therefore be the focus of Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Analysis of Findings: Implications for Efficacy Theory and Research Methods

This chapter will answer research questions 5 and 6:

5. How useful is political efficacy as a theoretical construct for studying youth electoral engagement?
6. How useful are qualitative methods for conducting research on young people and politics?

The first part of the chapter will deal with question five above. Here I will draw on the work of scholars like Renshon (1974) to critique efficacy theory. I argue that the idea of political efficacy needs rethinking, as my research suggests it is a less powerful explanation for youth non-voting than predicted. I found that the 'standard operationalisation' of efficacy in particular did not reflect the reality of the political attitudes of the young people I spoke to. Moreover, while the efficacy matrix I proposed in Chapter 3 may *better* accommodate the varied and nuanced nature of young people's political efficacy, I argue that the idea of efficacy itself is perhaps of limited use as a predictor of young people's electoral engagement.

The second half of this chapter will deal with question six above. One of the major aims of this thesis is to offer insight into the kinds of methods useful for conducting research on young people and politics, with particular emphasis on the merits of using depth interviews and focus groups. By enabling participants to speak for themselves, in their own language, these methods allowed new issues to emerge (that the literature did not predict) – resulting in information-rich data. While not without complications, I found the

qualitative approach an apt way to access the deep and complex meanings behind young people's political attitudes.

Implications for Efficacy Theory

As noted at the beginning of this thesis, political efficacy has been viewed as a likely explanation for political participation since the 1950's. While a large number of theories seek to explain falling voter turnout in Western democracies, efficacy theory has recently enjoyed renewed popularity, both in New Zealand and internationally. Although many studies have used political efficacy as a yardstick for evaluating political participation, few have interrogated the value of efficacy theory itself, or asked if it is really a useful construct for studying electoral engagement. As such, the fifth research question I identified asks: 'how useful is political efficacy as a theoretical construct for studying youth electoral engagement?' Drawing from the ideas of Renshon (1974) and the results of my study, I address this question directly here.

'Conceptual Confusion'

Efficacy may be a less powerful explanation for youth non-voting than predicted due to what has been termed a sense of 'conceptual confusion' (Renshon, 1974) around the model. As a small number of scholars have indicated, since its inception in 1954 the theoretical underpinnings of efficacy have never really been interrogated (Renshon, 1974; Balch, 1971; Wilson-Kelly, 2006). Writing in 1974, Renshon insightfully explained that there has been much emphasis on the predictive aspects of efficacy, but not on its theoretical grounding:

> When the concept was introduced into political science nearly two decades ago by Campbell, surprisingly little attention was given to its conceptual development. Campbell simply supplied a definition and then devoted only one other paragraph to a theoretical discussion of the concept (Renshon, 1974: 33).

Balch (1971) shared this concern, arguing:

> For the most part, political scientists have accepted the concept and its measurement wholeheartedly… To be sure, one occasionally hears discontented mutterings from colleagues [but] such mutterings have yet to find their way into published print (Balch, 1971; cited in Renshon, 1974: 33).

Renshon argues that given this sense of conceptual confusion, there has been a lack of continuity and development in efficacy research. Because the definition of efficacy has never been challenged, and the ways of measuring such have remained largely unchanged, unlike other theories of political participation, efficacy theory has not really moved beyond 1954 (Renshon, 1974: 33-34). Renshon was in fact amongst the first of a small minority to suggest that it was perfectly likely that some people may have high efficacy but choose not to participate (Renshon, 1974: 41) – an overlooked problem in the theory that I indeed found true for some of the non-voters I spoke to.

Although Renshon and Balch were writing over thirty years ago, their criticisms remain relevant. As noted elsewhere in this thesis, the idea of political efficacy has remained surprisingly unmodified since Campbell et al. first suggested it as theory of political participation. I would in fact go beyond Renshon to argue that in 2007, as well as suffering from 'conceptual confusion', political efficacy has been overrun by the times. More bluntly, what is relevant in New Zealand in 2007 is not the same as what was relevant in Michigan in 1954 – enormous social and political differences exist! To give a few significant examples: we have a totally different electoral system, perceptions about the role of the state have changed, and New Zealand's current generation of 18-24 year-olds have been politically socialised in an era of market individualism and 'small government', different to any generation preceding them (Hayward et. al, 2006). The concept of political efficacy has not been modernised to account for such changes, in New Zealand, the US, or in other democracies. As the following section explains, Campbell's standard operationalisation of political efficacy is therefore unlikely to provide an accurate account of 18-24 year-olds political efficacy in New Zealand today.

A Critique of the Standard Operationalisation of Political Efficacy (and the Efficacy Matrix)

I found that the standard operationalisation of political efficacy (i.e. that developed by Campbell et al. in 1954) does not seem to reflect the reality of young New Zealanders' political attitudes. This reflects both flaws in the methodology previously used to research efficacy and inherent problems with the theoretical underpinnings of political efficacy as explicated by Renshon.

At the beginning of each interview (and the focus group), participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire which included Campbell's original agree/disagree measures of efficacy.[64] I was then able to compare the results from the questionnaires to what participants said in the interviews and focus group, to evaluate whether the standard operationalisation of efficacy produced an accurate picture. In most cases, it clearly did not, and I found that the agree/disagree questions in fact missed the complexity and depth of young peoples' political efficacy.

For example, Rachel circled 'agree' on her questionnaire for the statement 'I don't think politicians care much what people like me think', but revealed during the interview that she thought politicians did listen to students – citing the example of Labour's interest-free student loan policy. In contrast, Ryan chose 'disagree' for this statement, but later argued that politicians seldom listened to youth compared to older voters and powerful business interests. In both these cases (and many others), the participants questionnaire responses contradicted what they actually felt.

In other cases, questionnaire responses masked the deeper meanings behind participant's responses. For instance, both Shelly (who voted) and Liang (who did not) circled 'disagree' on their questionnaires for the statement 'voting is the only way that people

[64] See Appendix 2.

like me have any say about how government runs things', but during the interviews revealed vastly different reasons for saying they disagreed. Liang told me that he thought his one vote simply couldn't make a difference in an election, while Shelly said that there were many things aside from voting that she could do to affect the government – such as attending a protest or writing a letter to a politician. Similar hidden complexities underlay the responses of many other participants, further suggesting that the standard operationalisation of efficacy may be of limited use in gauging the reality of young people's political efficacy.

In Chapter 3 I proposed that the efficacy matrix may offer a better picture of youth political efficacy, particularly for young non-voters who have high internal efficacy but low external efficacy. By providing a multi-dimensional perspective, the efficacy matrix can indeed accommodate some of the nuances and complexities young people's political efficacy – such as for non-voters like Paige and Ryan who are quite interested in politics, think its relevant and easy to understand, but who don't trust politicians or think they listen to their generation. My research confirmed the speculation of Kenski and Jomini (2004) that a person may have low external efficacy but high internal efficacy (or vice versa), a position that is much better represented using the efficacy matrix rather than the standard operationalisation.

However, the matrix still has limitations for analysing youth political efficacy. First, while it can show a person's comparative levels of internal and external efficacy, it cannot reveal any tensions within the 'internal' and 'external' categories. The efficacy matrix therefore still suffers from Devere's criticism of survey research in that the clusters of opinions that individuals hold are masked (Devere, 1993: 12). For example, the matrix cannot tell us if a person thinks an individual vote can make a difference, but distrusts politicians (as Samantha and Romy do), or if they perceive politics as relevant but don't think it's interesting (like James).

Second, the efficacy matrix cannot show which measures of efficacy are the most relevant to an individual. During my research I found that many young people did not see

some measures of efficacy as important to them at all. This is significant because – as with the standard operationalisation of efficacy – it means that the meanings behind an individual's efficacy answers may be misrepresented if they are simply plotted onto the matrix. Jen, for instance, thought that an individual vote could potentially make a difference, but explained that that didn't really matter to her when thinking about elections. Likewise, Angus and Martin agreed that politicians probably don't listen to youth, but argued that this didn't matter to them at all – a position that is obscured and indeed misrepresented if we use either the standard operationalisation of efficacy or the efficacy matrix.

While the matrix I proposed in Chapter 3 may therefore provide a *better* way of representing youth political efficacy and for studying youth non-voting, it still suffers significant limitations. With this in mind, I now turn to assess the basic idea of efficacy itself as a useful predictor of electoral engagement.

The Idea of Political Efficacy

Combined with Renshon's critique of efficacy, my research suggests that efficacy may be a less powerful explanation for youth non-voting than predicted. While international studies and the conventional wisdom of the past half-century concur that people with high political efficacy are more likely to vote than those with low political efficacy, using qualitative methods I found that efficacy could not necessarily distinguish between young voters and non-voters in New Zealand. Although the young voters I spoke to were still likely have higher political efficacy than the non-voters I interviewed, I found the differences were fewer than predicted by efficacy theory and the existing literature. I also found that efficacy factors seemed to have less of an influence on the decision of the young non-voters interviewed not to vote than expected. Indeed, other explanations for non-voting may better account for the experiences of many young non-voters in New Zealand.

One of the key findings to emerge from my research was that the young voters and non-voters I spoke to were remarkably similar on most measures of political efficacy. As explained in Chapter 5, I found little difference between voters and non-voters regarding whether they think politics is easy to understand – an important measure of internal efficacy – and also in terms of most measures of external efficacy. The most significant efficacy measures on which voters and non-voters differed were interest in politics and a belief that politics is relevant.[65]

Moreover, I also found that the link between low efficacy and non-voting may not be as strong as some have suggested. Many of the young non-voters interviewed did not identify efficacy-related factors as influencing their decision not to vote. For instance, distrust of politicians was regarded by non-voters as irrelevant to their decision not to vote.[66] Instead, other factors seemingly unrelated to efficacy were often identified. 'Disinterested' non-voters (like Neil and Carley) said that lack of knowledge about politics was the main reason they did not vote in 2005, while 'inconvenienced' non-voters (like Paige, Tobias and Laxmi) explained that they did not vote due to inconvenience and a belief that voting required a great deal of effort. For 'principled' non-voters like Ryan, the main influence on the decision not to vote was a belief that young people can have a greater influence on politics though alternative means of engagement as opposed to voting.

For each of these groups of non-voters, other theories of voter participation – aside from political efficacy – exist that can better explain their attitudes. For 'disinterested' non-voters, simple explanations about political knowledge or interest in politics (divorced from other indicators of efficacy) can account for the main influences behind their decision not to vote. Likewise, rational choice theories seem well equipped to explain the influences on 'inconvenienced' non-voters, who perceived practical barriers to voting (however small) from preventing them casting a ballot. These non-voters all said they would surely vote if it was simply made easier – such as by internet voting, longer voting

[65] Related to these findings is that voters tended to give wider definitions of politics than non-voters.
[66] This may have exercised a background influence, but non-voters certainly did not think this was an important factor.

hours or easier enrolment procedures. Meanwhile, post-materialist theory offers an apt account of some the influences of 'principled' non-voters, explaining that globalisation and changes in the role of the state have broadened the range of the targets of participation – necessitating a diversification of political energies into non-traditional means of participation.

Drawing from Renshons' critique and the findings of my study, it seems that the idea of political efficacy is a less powerful explanation for youth non-voting than predicted. If just one or two measures of efficacy reveal major and important differences between young voters and non-voters (as I found with interest in politics and a perception that politics is relevant), then why not treat them as independent indicators of electoral engagement, rather than bundling them together with a range of less useful indicators under the label 'political efficacy'? And why focus so closely on efficacy if other theories of electoral engagement can perhaps better explain youth non-voting?

Political efficacy may therefore be more a problematic construct than a useful theory for analysing youth voter participation. When one non-voter I spoke to asked what my thesis was about in more detail, I explained efficacy theory in perhaps its most simple form: a person's self-belief in their own ability to understand politics, be heard, and make a difference politically (Catt, 2005: 1). Tobias responded with the following, which in many ways I think describes efficacy theory succinctly:

> Tobias: It sounds on one level pretty basic. Like obviously people who are interested in politics are going to vote more… it just seems like one of those dumb generalisations that just sort of gets thrown out there, and hasn't been challenged.

That is not to say we should totally dismiss the idea of political efficacy, or ignore the conclusions of so many respected political scientists. This is just one study, and it is not one that is designed to be generalisable. But it does however mean that we should be more careful about what we mean when we use the term 'political efficacy' and that we should make an effort to clarify its theoretical underpinnings.

More drastically, we should also consider breaking efficacy down into its more simple elements – like interest in politics – which may be more useful as independent indicators of participation. As noted by Tobias, why overcomplicate something simple like interest in politics by calling it 'efficacy'? But perhaps most importantly, my findings suggest that we should be less hasty to link efficacy so closely to youth voter participation, and that we should remain open to a range of other explanations for youth electoral engagement.

Implications for Research Methods

As well as interrogating the usefulness of political efficacy as a concept for assessing youth electoral engagement, one of the major aims of this thesis is to offer insight into the kinds of methods useful for conducting research on young people and politics. As such, research question 6 asks: 'How useful are qualitative methods for conducting research on young people and politics?' Based on my experiences, this chapter now turns to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative methods to research youth political efficacy in New Zealand.

The Qualitative Approach

I found qualitative methods to be an extremely useful way of conducting my research. As noted in Chapter 4, political science employs qualitative methods less frequently than other social sciences, which is disappointing given the scope of qualitative methods for providing new insights and producing rich data. It is particularly surprising that few studies of political attitudes have adopted a qualitative approach, as qualitative methods offer an apt way to access people's perceptions, opinions and understandings. This has been highlighted by some political scientists, but has only been taken into account in a small number of other studies in New Zealand (Devere, 1993; Wilson-Kelly, 2006; Hayward et al., 2006).

In particular, I found that the use of depth interviews and focus groups produced information-rich data, and allowed participants to speak for themselves using language and ideas of their own. This was valuable for two reasons. First, it afforded me insight into the reasoning behind their attitudes towards politics, politicians and voting – which would have been obscured had I followed a quantitative approach. As discussed earlier in this chapter, when I compared the participants' questionnaire responses to the data from the interviews and focus group, I found the survey responses often misrepresented participants attitudes, and hid important information about their political efficacy.

Second, qualitative methods allowed new issues to emerge which neither the literature nor I as researcher had predicted. For instance, concerns about lack of education about politics at school were frequently raised by participants, even when not prompted, and young non-voters who had been outside New Zealand for the election highlighted that there were significant barriers to voting from overseas. The use of these methods also revealed that young voters and non-voters often did not assign much importance to efficacy factors, emphasising that other influences were more important in their decision to vote or not to vote. All these important details would have been obscured by quantitative means of investigation.

While quantitative approaches view the researcher as a detached observer, and emphasise minimising researcher bias in collecting data, qualitative methods encourage researchers to reflect on their own role, recognising that research is always a two-way process and that researchers inevitably affect and are affected by the research context (May, 2001: 21; Punch, 2005: 172-3). During the research process, I found my own role as a young researcher a particularly unique and valuable aid in conducting the interviews and focus group. Research on young people can quickly become misguided if young participants are intimidated by researchers or fall into the trap of wanting to please researchers by giving the 'right' answers to questions, limitations which my age advantaged me to avoid. Being from the same age group, I easily established good rapport with participants, and the interviews and focus group were very relaxed and candid – a major asset in terms of accessing participants' attitudes, perceptions and understanding.

Indeed, other studies in the field of young people and politics have noted the benefits of including young researchers in the research process (Hayward et al. 2006; Kirshner, Strobel and Ferndandez, 2003), and based on my experience this is something I would strongly recommend. I felt participants were more comfortable speaking with someone close to their own age about their political attitudes than they may have been with an older researcher – particularly given many participants' concerns about inter-generational miscommunication. Participants were also refreshingly honest in their answers, often saying things which did not conform to social expectations and sometimes even challenging the questions I asked.

Comparing Depth Interviews and Focus Groups

Early in the research process I decided to use two methods within the qualitative approach to study youth political efficacy in New Zealand – depth interviews and focus groups. While I originally made this choice in the interests of research validity, it also allows me to compare the advantages and disadvantages of the two methods.

The main advantage of the focus group, compared to the depth interviews, was that the group interaction gave rise to new ideas and gave participants the opportunity to question each other, clarify responses, and build on each others' ideas. As Morgan has described, 'the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (Morgan, 1988: 12), and I found this to be particularly true of the focus group discussion I facilitated. The following excerpt from the voter focus group provides one example of this kind, with Heather, Angus and Elise discussing politicians:

> Celia: How would you characterise most politicians?
>
> Heather: I think it really depends, but I think motivated. Because you've either got to be motivated for a cause, or at least motivated enough to get off your bum and get support and actually get there.
>
> Angus: Yeah, definitely.

> Elise: I think motivated is a good one. I mean the stereotypical politician isn't necessarily what most politicians are.
>
> Heather: Right. And I think they've either got to be passionate or stupid. Like to be honest, Parliament is awful, and to put yourself in that position you've either really got to believe in your cause and be passionate about it and believe you can make a difference or whatever, or just be stupid and power-hungry.
>
> Elise: Yeah, yeah, definitely.
>
> Angus: They probably all start as the former.
>
> Heather: Yeah. Well, most. You can probably find some in there who have got no clue, who are just there for money, power and fame – well, not real fame but New Zealand fame!
>
> Angus: You can get on 'Dancing with the Stars'![67]
>
> *(Everyone laughs)*
>
> Heather: Exactly, I mean you've made it then.

Here, the process of group interaction shows Elise and Angus building on Heather's ideas, and Heather further clarifying her opinion in response to their comments.

In comparison, the depth interviews allowed deeper understanding of an individuals' political attitudes, and afforded me a greater appreciation of their unique perspective. Because I had up to an hour to spend with each participant in the depth interviews, I had a lot of freedom to probe responses, ask extra questions, and pursue new lines of inquiry based on the flow of the interviews. While the focus group proved a great way to collect information from four participants at the same time, it was simply not possible to collect as much in depth information from them compared to what was possible in the depth interviews.

The use of depth interviews was also particularly useful for conducting research with young non-voters. First, a better sense of privacy and comfort for non-voters may have been achieved using depth interviews. I found non-voters were more willing to participate in depth interviews than in a focus group discussion, likely in part because

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[67] ACT leader Rodney Hide had been a contestant in the NZ television show 'Dancing with the Stars' earlier in 2006.

they were wary about discussing their reasons for not voting within a potentially critical or confrontational situation. Second, as noted in Chapter 5, the young non-voters I spoke to tended to be more disorganised than voters, and were more capable of attending an individual interview than a focus group. As well as due to participants' concerns about privacy, early efforts to arrange a non-voter focus group floundered in large part due to potential participants simply not being organised enough to attend an arranged meeting. Many non-voters were either late for interviews, totally forgot about them, or called on the day to reschedule because they had other commitments they had forgotten about – complications which I could accommodate given they were individual interviews, but which would have hamstrung a focus group. In a practical sense, using depth interviews as well as the focus group therefore allowed me a degree of flexibility to adapt to the circumstances of non-voter participants.

While focus groups and depth interviews have different advantages and disadvantages, I found they worked well as complementary techniques. Many of the issues raised in the focus group discussion were 'fleshed out' in the individual depth interviews, while both techniques generated the information-rich data typical of qualitative methodologies. Eder and Fingerson (2005) have also noted the benefits of using both focus groups and depth interviews in research with young people, arguing that individual interviews allow researchers to examine the individual attitudes, opinions and contexts of participants, and to use this information to understand more fully the discussion occurring in focus groups (Eder and Fingerson in Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005: 207). Moreover, as many researchers have noted, using two complementary methods enables enhanced understanding of a phenomenon because a single method cannot fully 'capture the richness of human experience' (Eder and Fingerson in Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005: 207). On a personal note, using two complementary techniques was also useful to me in terms of developing more diverse research skills, and I found that my experience in conducting the depth interviews informed the facilitation of the focus group and vice versa.

Sampling Strategy: Accessing Disengaged Populations

As outlined in Chapter 4, my sampling strategy was essentially twofold: participants were recruited through a combination of peer referrals and advertisements in the student magazine at the University of Canterbury (Canta).[68] As expected, I found young voters much more likely to be self-selecting than non-voters, indicated by the number of voters compared to non-voters who responded to the advertisement in Canta. In contrast, young non-voters were more successfully recruited using peer referrals, when they knew of the project through someone they knew personally. Seven non-voters were successfully referred to me by as many contacts drawn from my own friends, family and colleagues. Some of the most disinterested and disengaged non-voters I spoke to, like Neil, were recruited in this way, indicating that snowball sampling is a valuable way of accessing disengaged populations.

This confirms the experiences of other qualitative researchers who have experienced difficulties accessing 'hidden' or disengaged populations not easily recruited by other means (Wilson-Kelly, 2006; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Booth, 1999; Bloor et al., 2001; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; Renzetti and Lee, 1993). I found that snowball sampling provided a useful way of accessing friendship networks, and the non-voters in my study recruited via peer referral were happy to be involved because they were recommended to me by someone they knew and trusted. Other studies involving hard-to-reach populations also recommend snowball sampling as a successful means to recruit participants who might otherwise be distrustful, wary or simply unaware of the research (Vance, 1995; Martin and Dean, 1993; Devere, 1993; Rosenthal, 1991; Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981).

While the snowball method can be criticised for limiting the diversity of participants (because they may be all linked in the same friendship network), this can be ameliorated if participants are snowballed from a range of different contact people or 'gatekeepers' (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). I found this to be useful advice, and recruited non-voter participants via peer referrals from as many as seven contact people, resulting in a diverse

[68] Table 5.5 in Chapter 5 shows the number of voters and non-voters recruited using each method.

range of perspectives and views. I would strongly recommend this approach to other researchers interested in studying disengaged populations.

Conclusion

The implications of my research are significant for both efficacy theory and qualitative research methodologies. As one of the few studies to have used qualitative methods to research youth political efficacy, my findings are revealing because they suggest efficacy theory may be of less use in studying youth non-voting than quantitative studies have claimed. In particular, I found that the standard operationalisation of efficacy obscures the complexity and depth of young peoples' political efficacy and masks the deeper meanings behind participant's responses. Importantly, I also found that efficacy could not necessarily distinguish between young voters and non-voters in New Zealand, and that efficacy factors may have less of an influence on young non-voters' decision not to vote than has been assumed. Other explanations of non-voting – such as psychological theories, rational choice theory and post-materialist theory – may in fact better account for the experiences of many young non-voters. As Renshon has argued, political efficacy seems to suffer from a sense of 'conceptual confusion' that limits its usefulness as a theory of electoral engagement, and needs reconsideration.

My research also reveals the benefits of using qualitative methods to conduct research on young people and politics. A combination of depth interviews and a focus group proved to be a useful and insightful way to research 18-24 year-old New Zealanders' attitudes towards politics and voting, and I found a snowball sampling technique to be particularly effective in accessing young non-voters. These methods offered me a rare glimpse into the complexity and diversity of young people's thoughts about politics, which could not be gained using more conventional quantitative methods.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Summary of Key Findings and Implications for Public Policy Practice

This thesis has investigated the similarities and differences between young voters' and non-voters' political efficacy in New Zealand, and has interrogated the concept of efficacy. While a number of theories have sought to explain the problem of falling voter turnout in established democracies, a review of the theoretical literature revealed efficacy to be a popular concept for studying the particular problem of youth non-voting. In Chapter 3, I summarised the major findings from international research on youth political efficacy. This research strongly suggests young non-voters in Western democracies have lower levels of both internal and external efficacy compared to their voting peers, and also that such young non-voters may be in fact enthusiastic about political issues and engaged in non-traditional ways. These findings prompted six key research questions for investigating youth political efficacy and non-voting in New Zealand, which formed the basis for my practical research:

1. Does *internal* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
2. Does *external* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?
3. How do young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement? Are these explanations related to efficacy?
4. Are some young non-voters politically engaged in alternative ways? If so, what motivates this engagement?
5. How useful is political efficacy as a theoretical construct for studying youth electoral engagement?

6. How useful are qualitative methods for conducting research on young people and politics?

In this concluding chapter, I review my key findings for each research question. Following, I discuss the implications of my research findings for public policy practice, and propose suggestions to address the problem of youth non-voting in New Zealand. I conclude by discussing the limitations of the thesis and possibilities for future research in the fields of political efficacy and youth non-voting.

Key Findings

Using information gathered from 16 depth interviews and a focus group with young New Zealanders, surprising findings emerged about the relationship between political efficacy and youth non-voting. These are summarised here.

(1) Does *internal* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?

Although I found the young voters I interviewed to have higher levels of internal political efficacy than young non-voters, the differences were more limited than suggested by previous studies. As expected, I found that the young people who voted were indeed more likely to be interested in politics and perceive it as relevant compared to the young non-voters. The non-voters I interviewed were also more likely to have a narrow understanding of 'politics' compared to their voting peers.

However, I also found unexpected similarities between voters' and non-voters' internal efficacy. The voters and non-voters in my study equally said that politics was easy to understand, and surprisingly, both believed there should be more education about politics at school. These findings suggest that efficacy theory may be a less powerful explanation for youth non-voting than predicted by the international literature.

(2) Does *external* political efficacy differ between young voters and non-voters? If so, in what ways and to what extent?

I also found surprising similarities in many measures of young voters' and non-voters' external efficacy. In particular, I found very little difference between young voters and non-voters regarding trust in politicians and whether politicians are perceived to listen to young people. The voters and non-voters I interviewed both tended to distrust politicians, and I found that both had mixed opinions about whether youth have a voice in politics. Young voters and non-voters were also equally likely to say it matters who wins an election, and both tend to believe that an individual vote can make a difference in an election. While young voters were more likely to consider politicians representative of the New Zealand population compared to non-voters, perceptions about representation (a measure of external efficacy) did not seem to be linked to non-voting for the young non-voters in my study. These findings further suggest that political efficacy is not necessarily an effective yardstick for evaluating youth electoral engagement in New Zealand.

(3) How do young non-voters explain their electoral disengagement? Are these explanations related to efficacy?

The young non-voters I spoke to gave a wide range of explanations for not voting in 2005. While some of these explanations were indeed related to low political efficacy, many young non-voters in fact identified factors unrelated to efficacy as being the main influences behind their decision not to vote, suggesting that the link between youth non-voting and low political efficacy may not be as strong as indicated by previous research. The non-voters in my study fell into three basic categories: 'disinterested' non-voters (i.e. people who were not much interested in politics), 'inconvenienced' non-voters, and one 'principled' non-voter.

'Disinterested' non-voters primarily described their electoral disengagement as the result of lack of interest in politics and a related lack of knowledge about who to vote for. Other important factors for this group of non-voters included a belief that politics isn't relevant,

a belief that one vote can't make a difference, and a perception that voting required a lot of effort. Although some of these explanations are linked to low political efficacy – such as low interest in politics and a belief that one vote can't make a difference – the other influences are unrelated to efficacy.

In contrast, 'inconvenienced' non-voters explain their non-voting as a result of (perceived or real) barriers to voting and to issues of inconvenience. Some young non-voters in this group felt it took a lot of effort to enrol to vote, and many who were overseas for the election described that it was a 'hassle' to try and vote from abroad. Barriers faced to voting from overseas include bureaucratic red-tape and unhelpful embassy staff, lack of access to fax machines, embassies or consulates, lack of an online voting option, and confusion about how to vote from overseas based on information given on the New Zealand elections website. The young non-voters in this group did not identify any efficacy-related factors as influencing their decision not to vote, and actually often reported high levels of internal and external political efficacy, instead emphasising issues of effort and mobility.

One young non-voter also identified his decision not to vote as a matter of principle, explaining that non-voting can be a political statement and that young people can have a greater influence on politics through alternative means of participation. Efficacy-related factors were not perceived as relevant by this 'principled' non-voter, who in fact had relatively high internal and external political efficacy.

The experiences of young non-voters expressed in depth interviews therefore reveal a plethora of reasons for youth non-voting. Some of these are related to efficacy, but many are not. These findings present a challenge to those who seek to reduce the causes of non-voting to a singular explanation, and indicate that diverse solutions are needed to address the problem of youth non-voting in New Zealand.

(4) Are some young non-voters politically engaged in alternative ways? If so, what motivates this engagement?

As studies in other established democracies have found, my research revealed the young non-voters in my study to be often passionate about political issues and politically active in non-traditional ways. I found the young non-voters I spoke to to be interested in a wide range of political issues, (even if they did not explicitly identify them as 'political'), ranging from tertiary education and genetic engineering to the Iraq war and global poverty. The non-voters I spoke to had been involved in petitions, protests, boycotts and buycotts, volunteer work, and supported a range of charities and advocacy groups, including the Red Cross, World Vision, Greenpeace and Amnesty International.

I found that young non-voters' engagement in non-traditional activities was usually motivated by convenience, rather than by convictions about political impoverishment as suggested by theorists like Hochschild (1995), Woodly (2005) and Bohman (1996). For many young non-voters, participating in non-traditional ways was simply more convenient than voting, particularly if they were overseas for the election. However, several non-voters highlighted that alternative means of participation may be more effective than voting, and noted that they were more issue-oriented, giving them greater control over the issues they choose to be heard on – arguments that sit closely with Norris' interpretation of falling voter turnout and youth political activism (Norris, 2002, 2003).

(5) How useful is political efficacy as a theoretical construct for studying youth electoral engagement?

My findings suggest that political efficacy may be a less powerful explanation for youth non-voting than predicted, and that we should remain open to a range of other explanations for electoral engagement and turnout decline. As Renshon (1974) and a small number of other scholars have highlighted, political efficacy has suffered from a

sense of ‘conceptual confusion’ since its inception, and has never been properly theoretically grounded. Moreover, the idea of political efficacy has remained remarkably unchanged since it was first introduced in 1954, and has not been modernised to account for the enormous social and political changes that have occurred since. Campbell et al.’s standard operationalisation of efficacy therefore gives an incomplete and misleading account of the political efficacy of 18-24 year-olds in New Zealand today, masking the rich detail of complexities and nuances that make up young people’s political attitudes.

Drawing from the depth interviews and focus groups, I found that efficacy could not necessarily distinguish between young voters and non-voters. While young voters were still likely to have higher internal and external political efficacy than young non-voters, the differences were less marked than predicted by efficacy theory and previous research. Voters and non-voters were surprisingly similar on most measures of efficacy, and I found efficacy factors to have less of an influence on the decision of young non-voters not to vote than anticipated. Other theories of voter participation – including rational choice theory and post-materialist theory – can perhaps better explain the attitudes of young non-voters in New Zealand, leading me to conclude that efficacy may be a limited concept rather than a useful theory for studying youth electoral engagement.

(6) How useful are qualitative methods for conducting research on young people and politics?

This thesis adopted a different approach to the study of youth political efficacy, using qualitative tools – depth interviews, a focus group and purposive sampling – to research the attitudes and experiences of young voters and non-voters in New Zealand. Quantitative methodologies have dominated in the field of political science generally and political efficacy specifically, and this study has yielded valuable insight into the potential for qualitative methods to be used in future studies. A combination of depth interviews and a focus group proved to be an exceptional way to generate information-rich data, expressed using the participants own language and ideas. Compared to quantitative approaches, this afforded me unique insight into the reasoning behind young

peoples' attitudes toward politics, politicians and voting, and allowed new issues to emerge that neither myself nor the literature had predicted.

The qualitative approach also allowed the flexibility to adapt to the circumstances of the research environment, and I found that the focus group and depth interviews worked well as complementary techniques. A purposive sampling strategy using the snowball technique was found to be particularly successful for recruiting non-voters who might otherwise have been distrustful, wary or unaware of the research, indicating an apt way for future researchers to access disengaged populations. I would strongly recommend these methods to other researchers interested in studying the political attitudes of young people, as they offer a unique view into the complexity and diversity of young peoples' thoughts about politics.

Implications for Public Policy Practice

It seems appropriate in this chapter to briefly consider how the problem of youth non-voting in New Zealand might be addressed. Many non-voters offered suggestions about how to encourage young people to vote in the depth interviews, and while the focus of this thesis has been on efficacy and non-voting – rather than on strategies to bolster turnout – this is valuable information that is highly relevant and should not go unmentioned. In this section, I therefore consider suggestions for policymakers, educators and electoral administrators to address youth non-voting in New Zealand.

The depth interviews revealed myriad reasons for youth non-voting in New Zealand, and myriad solutions are therefore required in response. Declining youth turnout will not be reversed by any single measure, just as it cannot be explained by any single cause. Rather, a range of educational and institutional changes over both the short and long term are needed to curb the rising trend of youth non-voting in New Zealand.

'Disinterested' non-voters, who explain their disengagement as a result of lack of interest and knowledge about politics, frequently commented that they would have benefited

from more education about politics at school, or from high-profile election-awareness advertising campaigns. The disinterested non-voters in my study strongly believed that there should be more education at high school about the different political parties in New Zealand and about important political issues, as well as more practical information about how to vote. Many young non-voters (and indeed also many voters) noted that they received very little education about contemporary New Zealand politics at school, and they connected this with having little idea about the differences between the political parties or about what the important political issues were. Although several recalled learning about some important political events in history or social studies, such as the Springbok Tour, the Vietnam War, or Nazi Germany, they commented that they did not learn much that was relevant to New Zealand today or that could inform their voting choices in an election.

'Disinterested' non-voters also explained that politics and elections needed to seem more relevant to be encouraged to vote, and this is another area where better high school education or public-awareness campaigns could contribute. In this vein, New Zealand could look to the UK's high-profile 2004 television advertising campaign which emphasised the idea that politics is relevant to everyday life and that participation is therefore worthwhile (Marshal and Lloyd, 2004, in Catt and Northcoate, 2006: 5). It was also my impression that disinterested young non-voters could be encouraged to vote by improving awareness about the easiness of voting, as there seemed to be a perception amongst this group that voting was difficult and took a lot of effort. Added to this could be better education about the effectiveness of an individual vote, which was under-rated by many of the young non-voters I spoke to.

'Inconvenienced' non-voters, who attribute their decision not to vote to issues of effort and mobility, could be encouraged to vote at future elections by introducing a range of institutional changes to make voting easier and more convenient. Several of these potential changes relate to improving the voting process from overseas, which thousands of young New Zealanders travelling and working abroad face every election year. It was particularly concerning to me that many young non-voters were discouraged from voting

from overseas by impressions of 'lazy' or unhelpful embassy staff, or by bureaucratic red-tape that was perceived to be time consuming and not worthwhile. This is certainly something that should be further investigated and redressed if necessary, possibly involving better educating embassy staff about providing for overseas voters, increasing personnel for the busy voting period, or even tightening discipline if non-voters' perceptions of embassy staff as 'lazy' in many countries are indeed true.

Other changes could also be made to make voting from overseas easier and more convenient. In particular, the use of fax machines as an option for voting from abroad seems outdated and impractical, and alternative options – such as internet voting – should be considered. Many young non-voters who were overseas for the 2005 election explained that there were no fax machines in the place they were staying and that they had no idea where to access one, often commenting that it seemed like a strange policy. While fax machines are indeed difficult to find today in many parts of the world, PC rooms and internet cafes abound globally – especially in popular travel destinations – and an internet voting option for overseas voters seems an obvious potential replacement. Almost all of the non-voters who were abroad in 2005 said that they would certainly have voted if there were an online option, because internet access was easy, cheap and fast compared to travelling to an embassy or searching for a fax machine.[69] Efforts should also be made to clarify information about how to vote from overseas on the New Zealand elections website, which a couple of young non-voters noted was confusing and difficult to decipher.

Some minor institutional changes to voting within New Zealand might also encourage higher youth turnout. Extended use of text prompts on Election Day for 18-24 year-olds at future elections – especially in low turnout areas – may be something for electoral administrators to consider.[70] Likewise, extending voting hours may encourage more young people to vote – particularly students or those in non-standard employment who

[69] One non-voter who was overseas was in a particularly remote location with no internet access.
[70] Analysis of a pilot study on using text messages to encourage newly enrolled voters to vote in 2005 found that a single text message on Election Day had a positive impact on youth turnout compared to no message, messages sent by post or to a series of three texts sent on and prior to Election Day (Catt and Northcoate, 2006: 11).

often work on the weekends and may be unable to reach a polling booth between 9am and 7pm. Many of the young people I spoke to mentioned that they had siblings or friends who were unable to vote for this reason, and extending polling hours even by an hour or an hour and a half at each end could make voting easier for a significant number of young New Zealanders.

Table 7.1 summarises these suggestions to address youth non-voting in New Zealand, listing both educational and institutional approaches.

Table 7.1

Summary of Suggestions to Address Youth Non-Voting in New Zealand

Educational **(for 'disinterested' young non-voters)**	**Institutional** **(for inconvenienced' young non-voters)**
• practical information about how to vote and where to vote • unbiased information about the different political parties in NZ • education about relevant political issues • increased awareness about the relevance of politics • increased awareness about the effectiveness of an individual vote • emphasise the easiness of voting	• clarification of, and increased information about, how to vote from overseas • investigation of an internet voting option for overseas voters • improved capability of embassies and consulates to provide for overseas voters • use of txt prompts to remind young people to vote • consideration of extending voting hours

It is in the interests of a healthy democracy to make voting as accessible and as easy as possible for all citizens, for reasons of democratic representation, legitimacy and stability. This should be the case whether citizens are at home or abroad on Election Day, and the particular needs of young people should be taken into account to ensure that non-voting does not become a lifetime habit detrimental to future long-term turnout decline (Franklin, 2004). While no single solution will reverse the trend of youth turnout decline,

a combined approach including both short and long-term educational and institutional changes may be successful.

As well as making voting easy and accessible, young people need to be equipped with the necessary education and skills at school to know how to vote and how to make an informed decision about who to vote for – factors which many young non-voters feel are lacking at present. Most importantly, young people need to know that voting is relevant, effective and easy, in order to establish a life-habit of voting. These messages should be incorporated into education about politics and voting at school, and then reinforced through public-awareness campaigns administered by the Electoral Commission.

Discussion of Limitations and Areas for Further Research

The focus of this thesis has been on the political efficacy and electoral engagement of 18-24 year-olds in New Zealand. Although research has indicated sub-groups of young people who are less likely to vote than others, due to constraints of time and resources typical of a Masters thesis, I have not investigated the differences in efficacy and participation amongst these sub-groups. There is certainly a deficit of such research in New Zealand, and future studies might compare the efficacy and participation of Maori, Pacific and Pakeha youth, or rural and urban youth, and may even consider differences in efficacy and engagement amongst young people on the basis of gender, education or socioeconomic status. In addition to contributing to knowledge about youth political participation and the conceptual value of efficacy theory, such research could yield valuable insights into how best to target specific groups of young non-voters.

This thesis has also been limited, in part, by the non-generalisable nature of qualitative research. While the qualitative approach has been extremely valuable in many ways (as discussed in Chapter 6), and has been crucial to my research findings, there are inherent limitations to the generalisability of my findings. Based on information provided by 20

theoretically sampled participants we simply do not know how widespread my findings are, and this is something that further research might investigate.

Some social researchers have highlighted the benefits of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to mollify this limitation, and suggest using quantitative surveys to test the generalisability of findings or hypotheses generated by qualitative studies (Bryman, 2004; Punch, 2005). The ICR study on youth participation in Ireland (discussed in Chapter 4) indicates how this strategy can succeed in research on young people and politics. Here, researchers drew on findings from focus group discussions with youth to design and conduct a large-scale survey (ICR, 2006). This kind of research would reveal if my findings about youth political efficacy and electoral participation indeed apply to the broader population of 18-24 year-olds in New Zealand, while retaining the valuable in-depth information revealed in the qualitative interviews and focus group. It would also be interesting to see if my findings hold for youth in other established democracies, and future research might use qualitative methods – or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods – to compare and contrast youth political efficacy and participation in other countries.

Work could also be done in the area of efficacy theory to clarify its theoretical underpinnings and to review the way efficacy is measured. While this thesis has drawn attention to some of the theoretical shortcomings of efficacy and to problems with Campbell et. al.'s original operationalisation, it has not sought to fully resolve these issues, and there is undoubtedly potential for future research to do so. Although this thesis has shown that efficacy is a less useful concept for explaining youth electoral engagement than suggested by the literature, if efforts are made to review the way efficacy is measured, it may have something to offer future researchers.

Constraints of time and space have likewise made it impossible to deeply consider which other theories of voter participation might better explain youth non-voting in New Zealand. The experiences of the young non-voters I spoke to suggest that rational choice theories and post-materialist theory may be valuable here, as they seem able – at least

partially – to account for the behaviour and beliefs of 'inconvenienced' and 'principled' non-voters respectively. Further study on the usefulness of these theories to explain youth non-voting could yield valuable insights and generate more ideas about how to adequately address the problem.

Finally, future research could investigate the feasibility of the suggestions to address youth non-voting in New Zealand summarised in Table 7.1. How to deliver unbiased information about political issues and political parties at high schools, and about how to increase awareness about the relevance of politics, the easiness of voting and the effectiveness of an individual vote are issues that need deep consideration, and should be seriously researched. Similarly, investigation of an internet voting option for overseas voters, and about extending voting hours and the use of text prompts at future elections, is needed before resources can be committed. Ultimately, the measures taken to increase youth voter turnout should be based on sound and thorough research to encourage the best possible results.

Conclusion

While New Zealand's turnout statistics remain higher than most other western democracies, the trend of long-term turnout decline is clear and presents cause for concern. Youth non-voting has been identified as a particular problem, with 38% of 18-24 year-olds choosing not to vote in the 2002 New Zealand General Election (www.elections.org.nz). As well as raising concern for the quality of New Zealand's democratic representation and legitimacy, high levels of youth non-voting may have serious implications for long-term turnout decline in the future, as more young people establish a life-habit of non-voting.

The causes of youth electoral disengagement therefore require serious consideration if we are to successfully curb the trend of turnout decline. This thesis has asked whether the theory of political efficacy can account for youth non-voting in New Zealand, using qualitative methods to compare and contrast the attitudes and experiences of young voters

and non-voters. Contrary to the predictions of efficacy theory and international research, I found that efficacy cannot necessarily distinguish between young voters and non-voters in New Zealand, and that it cannot explain the diverse motivations of young non-voters.

Rather, I found that young non-voters in New Zealand are influenced by a wide range of factors in their decision not to vote, and a diverse range of solutions are arguably needed to encourage higher youth voter turnout. Policymakers and academics therefore need to look to a wide range of theories of voter participation to explain youth electoral disengagement and to seek solutions. The idea of political efficacy alone is insufficient, and this thesis has highlighted the shortcomings of efficacy theory as an explanation for youth non-voting.

My findings reveal that the standard operationalisation of efficacy (based on quantitative methods) cannot account for the complexities and nuances of young peoples' thoughts and beliefs about politics, and emphasise the need to remain open to other explanations for youth non-voting. While this study indicates some of the reasons many young New Zealanders don't vote, and has briefly discussed possible solutions, further research is needed on the beliefs and motivations of specific sub-groups of young non-voters, and on the explanatory power of other theories of electoral engagement, to encourage higher youth voter turnout at future elections.

Appendix 1: Points for Discussion in the Interviews and Focus Group

A: Interest in Politics

1. What does ‘politics’ mean to you?
2. Do you think politics is interesting?
3. Is politics relevant to your life?
4. Do you find politics easy to understand?
5. Do you think that there is enough education about politics at school?[71]

B: Participation

6. What are some issues or current events that you care about or think are interesting?
7. Have you ever participated in a protest, product boycott, or signed a petition? If so, did you think the activity was effective?
8. Are you involved in any volunteer work, or do you belong to any groups like Red Cross or Greenpeace?

C: Attitudes toward Politicians

9. Do you think that politicians are trustworthy? Why or why not?
10. Do you think that politicians listen to young people (18-24 year-olds)?
11. Do you think our politicians are representative of the New Zealand population?

D. Attitudes towards Voting

12. Does it matter who wins an election? Why or why not?
13. Do you think your vote can make a difference in an election?

[71] This question was added after the first four interviews, as every participant had raised lack of education about politics at school as an important issue for them.

14. (for non-voters only) What would you say the main reason you didn't vote was? Were there any other reasons that affected your decision?
15. (for non-voters only) What would encourage you to vote in future elections?

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

1. What is your age?

18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25

2. Did you vote at the 2005 General Election? (please check one)
   Yes
   No

2 (a) If 'yes', which electorate did you vote in? …………………………. (If you do not know your electorate, at what address had you last lived for 4 weeks on September 17 2005? …………………………………………………………………………………….)

3. What is your gender?
   Male
   Female

4. Which ethnic group do you most identify with?
   NZ European
   Maori
   Pacific Island
   Other (please specify ………….………………)

5. Please read the following statements and circle agree or disagree:

(a) 'I don't think politicians care much about what people like me think'
   Agree/Disagree

(b) 'Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on'
   Agree/Disagree

(c) 'People like me don't have any say about what the government does'
   Agree/Disagree

(d) 'Voting is the only way that people like me have any say about how government runs things'
   Agree/Disagree

If you circled 'Disagree' for (d), please check the reason that best explains why:
   Voting has no effect on how government runs things.
   There are other things people like me can do that have an effect on how government runs things.

Appendix 3: Information Sheet for Participants

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

Information for Volunteers

You are invited to participate in the research project 'Young People, Political Efficacy and Electoral Engagement'. This project is part of a Master's thesis in Political Science that investigates differences in the attitudes of young voters and non-voters toward politics and elections.

Your participation in this project will involve participating in an interview or focus group discussion of 40-60 minutes in length and completing a short questionnaire, and you are guaranteed the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided. I am happy to give you the opportunity to read the transcript of the interview and to receive your comments on it if you wish. When the research is completed, I am also available to discuss the findings with you.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in the thesis and any publications.

The project is being carried out under the supervision of Dr Bronwyn Hayward, who can be contacted at 364 2987 ext. 8678, or by email at bronwyn.hayward@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in this project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix 4: Consent Form

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

Research student: Celia Sheerin

027 347 2408

cas87@student.canterbury.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr Bronwyn Hayward

364 2987 ext. 8678

bronwyn.hayward@canterbury.ac.nz

Consent Form

'Young People, Political Efficacy and Electoral Engagement'

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis, I agree to participate in the interview and complete a short questionnaire, with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I consent to the findings being used in Celia's Masters thesis, and understand that the results of the project may be published. I am aware that I am at liberty to discuss any concerns about the project with Celia or the research supervisor, Dr Bronwyn Hayward. I also understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Name: …………………………..

Signed: ………………………….

Date: …………………………....

Appendix 5: Advertisement for Participants[72]

Participants needed for Political Science research project. I am looking for people aged 19-25 who are willing to participate in an interview about their attitudes towards politics, politicians and voting (about 50-60 minutes long). I am especially interested to hear from people who did not vote at last year's election. Volunteers will be paid $10 for their time. For more information please contact Celia at cas87@student.canterbury.ac.nz.

[72] The advertisement appeared in Canta Magazine, the student magazine at Canterbury University. I ran the advertisement for two consecutive weeks.

Appendix 6: Age, Ethnicity and Gender of Participants

Age of Participants

Age	Voter	Non-voter
19	2	5
20	1	0
21	4	1
22	3	3
23	0	1

Ethnicity of Participants

Ethnicity	Voter	Non-voter
NZ European	9	8
Maori	1	0
Chinese	0	1
Sri Lankan	0	1

Gender of Participants

Gender	Voter	Non-voter
Male	2	7
Female	8	3

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