

Democracy is falling down all around us - we are capturing it, but not holding on. An alarming amount of New Zealand youth doesn't confidently understand the system that creates and protects their privileged way of life. We should work to foster appreciation which fosters willingness to protect. We've held elections consistently since 1853 and we are considered as, and guiding others to becoming, a true democratic country. We're constantly working towards a more fair society for us all, where we defend each other's rights and everyone can be heard. This can happen through a democratic system only if we can continue to protect it over generations. These days democracy is being abused and is at risk internationally. Because of our privilege, our responsibility is to not only ensure NZ has a good standard of democracy but that there is a global standard being upheld which we can support.

Learning how to protect Democracy is equally as important as participation, because one can not function well and truly exist without the other. By embedding this critical knowledge into the education that is mandated for all children in NZ to undergo, we ensure that we are reaching everyone. Democracy's history should be studied in depth, as well as what the threats (past, present & future) are and how to protect it. We propose imposing a national NCEA standard of neutral mandatory political teachings, focusing on practical teachings. Currently not all schools provide even the basic teachings of democracy, if they do they are unlikely to be mandatory. Living in a democratic society where these concepts control our daily life can only work successfully for everyone if we learn about and understand these principles in order to protect them. If the people who are interested are the only ones who understand democracy, our political autonomy as a country is severely decreased. Lack of representation is a big issue within our government, which still hosts much less diversity than a true democracy would have. Increasing the presence of politics in secondary school education will normalise it and increase interest from students as the barriers that make it feel so separate will crumble. This will lead to an increase in diversity of those who pursue this career and lead to a more cohesive, representative & strengthened democracy. The teachings will be peer reviewed to ensure sufficient, relevant & fair education by both governmental organisations and NGOs that encompass Aotearoa's core values of human rights, education & upholding Te Tiriti. These decisions will influence everyone's daily lives, not only those working within parliament, so why should they be the only ones to truly understand or talk about it?

In our proposal, every child gets a copy of a specially written handbook which they work through in class. It'll be updated after each parliamentary term by a panel of young voters aged 18-25 who have left high school and who have experienced the school system and understand. This covers how voting, government and democracy work as well as risks and how to protect this system. This information on how our parliament and democracy works should be free and easy to access for the public, especially for the youth, if we pride ourselves on being a liberal democracy. Caregivers should have this access, as all adults, in order to support their children's education and not limit them to talking with their child about their own views. Particularly teachers should also be provided with education on the subject so they feel comfortable and confident in successfully and neutrally teaching the important matters of how our society & NZ government works. There should not be barriers, in any form from physical, social or economic.

Students should be given increased access to programs both through school and externally, which are good practical education programs on democracy that should be encouraged. Physically learning and creating a product such as this to explain democracy would be key to introduce into the NZ curriculum. Therefore, included in the mandatory education should be practical aspects such as student leaders voted for by students in a similar manner to how an NZ democratic system may occur. Model parliamentary education and cultural exchanges should be encouraged. Mandatory teaching through the handbook must be a minimum and more practical teachings should be heavily encouraged and government funded. To ensure its understanding, democracy needs to be more involved at a school level. Leadership roles voted for by students, is a feasible and successful way to do this. Funds through grants or sponsorships for schools to achieve this should be governmentally funded and prioritised

equitably for those schools that can't afford the mandatory minimums, or do not have access to governmental institutions.

This must be governmentally funded as it needs to be accessible fairly and its results would directly affect the government and all of NZ. This education is necessary to keep our government functioning at the level it is now, and improving, within our future generations; essentially investing directly into the future of this country by imposing measures to facilitate the strengthening of our democracy to ensure that everyone's voices will be heard and the system works for New Zealanders rather than against us, as is often feared for by many minorities. We've all heard "for the people, by the people," however it's really important that we also focus on the fact we aren't just doing this for the people of today but largely for the generations to come. It's important that young people are involved in the decisions that ultimately affect them and they must all be educated on these subjects before they're already participating or it's too late to sustain our democracy. There's no better way for our government to spend money than ensuring our rangatahi are well educated on protecting society as we know it and wanting to improve it; this is the best way to invest in a healthier & stronger democracy for future generations.

Currently, democracy feels separate to many young people but this is something that we need to destigmatize. We need to encourage our rangatahi to engage with democracy in projects such as this and within their school life, as this proposal will incentivise them/make them comfortable to continue to do so. It is essential they have *all* been taught about democracy so they can understand their participation at a national & community level. By removing the stigma we'd encourage more civil/civic engagement and create passionate, normalised discussions and actions to ensure NZ is well representative of everyone, leading to an increase in young voters. NZ stands to benefit immensely from the implementation of a mandatory standard of democratic education, we would see positive results both in short and long term that support our liberal democratic system. Encouraging NZ's values into our democratic and education system would mean more connection across sectors and an increase in accessible knowledge, education and especially for younger generations who we need to trust will uphold successful societies.

The post school age population should still be involved, for their own knowledge and because they would have the most contact/connections with the younger population. Once they've been through the education system that we propose, they will be educated to continue raising awareness about its importance. In the future if this becomes an effective tool, we should look into this becoming an NZ citizen responsibility. In order to reach lots of young people we should have a say in education, run social media campaigns and host workshops. If young people heard it from themselves and not exclusively from family or the government about the importance of voting, then we will see more engagement. As students in the NZ government sector we are privileged with access to a range of resources and tools that give us an upper hand in participating in our democracy through our governmental institutions. Our location and social class standings allow us access to these institutions and we have a duty to use these opportunities for the benefit of everyone. Those of us students who understand democracy at a higher level should continue our participation by supporting & facilitating others' learning.

Students should not only know how to cast a vote but also how to meet their responsibility as an NZ citizen by meaningfully participating in their society and how to have their voice heard, listened to and represented in governmental decisions that affect our communities. It is essential that all our rangatahi learn the basics equally through the education system and can continue to participate throughout their post school age life.