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Determinants of support and participation in a major sport event referendum

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Highlights

- We investigate the determinants of referenda support and participation in the context of a major sport event.
- Political cynicism, civic duty, and event status impacted voters' referendum support.
- Civic duty, satisfaction with democracy, and event status impacted voting intentions.
- This study benefits those considering referenda in major sport event

Determinants of support and participation in a major sport event referendum

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Determinants of support and participation in a major sport event referendum

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32 context of a major sport event.
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- 35 • This study benefits those considering referenda in major sport event contexts.

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Abstract

In recent years, referenda have been used to inform decisions to bid on major sport events. Recognising referenda as a means to engage a community in a major sport event, the purpose of this study was to investigate the determinants of referenda support and participation intention. A sample of 603 New Zealanders completed a questionnaire a) the intention to participate in such a referendum. Based on exploratory factor analysis assessing b) their support for a referendum on their city bidding to host the Commonwealth Games, and multinomial logistic regression, the key findings are that political cynicism, civic duty, event status and involvement affected voters' referendum support, while political cynicism, civic duty, political interest, event status and involvement impacted their voting intentions. The results have implications for prospective host cities, sport managers, policymakers, and ordinary citizens.

Keywords: referendum, Commonwealth Games, host community, political cynicism, civic duty, public policy

51 **1 Introduction**

52 Reflecting the contentious issue of whether host communities benefit from major
53 sport events (Kim & Petrick, 2005), referenda are increasingly used to inform bid decisions.
54 For example, the city of Sion (Switzerland) withdrew their bid for the 2026 Winter Olympics
55 after 54% of residents voted against the bid in a referendum (Morgan, 2018). In the 2022
56 Winter Olympic bidding process, four potential host cities held referenda: Krakow, Poland;
57 Oslo, Norway; St. Moritz, Switzerland; and Munich, Germany. In Krakow, St. Moritz, and
58 Munich, citizens indicated their lack of support for the bid through the referenda, and the bids
59 were removed as a result. Toward a similar end, while citizens living in Oslo voted to support
60 the bid, politicians later overturned the vote and withdrew their bid (Zaccaradi, 2014).
61 Despite the belief that major sport event success is associated with host community support
62 for the event (Kim, Jun, Walker, & Drane, 2015; Yong & Ap, 2008), local residents are
63 usually excluded from decisions, including whether to bid (Coates & Wicker, 2015). Bidding
64 decisions are often made by a small group of politicians, lack transparency and reflect global
65 trends rather than local community wishes (Gursoy, Nunkoo, & Milito, 2017).

66 Decision making related to major sport event bids is best understood in the context of the
67 wider political climate and citizen engagement. Representative democracy is changing, insofar as
68 citizens are increasingly demanding a greater role in decision making (Colombo, 2018; Schuck &
69 de Vreese, 2015). That role may take the form of a referendum, a process that enhances collective
70 citizen decision-making and reduces political power. Referenda may be initiated by citizens or the
71 government and be either binding or non-binding (i.e., indicative only). The extent to which
72 citizens support and ultimately participate in referenda is important for various community and
73 government stakeholders. Referenda support refers to a belief that the implementation of a voting
74 process used to express citizens' opinions is appropriate (Anderson & Goodyear-Grant, 2010;
75 Rose & Borz, 2013) and is closely associated with populism (Anderson & Goodyear-Grant, 2010).

76 Populism is defined as the premise “that ordinary citizens should come together to act politically
77 in order to transcend artificial decisions created by greed, corruption, and elite dominance”
78 (Anderson & Goodyear-Grant, 2010, p. 228). Referendum participation refers to the act of casting
79 a vote in the referendum.

80 Previous research on sport-related referenda has primarily focused on the use of
81 public funds to build sport stadia in North America (Brown & Paul, 1999; Coates &
82 Humphreys, 2006; Lenskyj, 2004). Data is often collected in conjunction with the referendum
83 itself rather than capturing related sentiments/attitudes explicitly (Coates & Wicker, 2015).
84 No academic research has yet investigated support for referenda use in the decision to host a
85 major sport event, nor has research explored residents’ intention to participate in such a major
86 sport event referendum. Furthermore, doing so hypothetically before a referendum allows for
87 residents to provide an unbiased view before any external groups - including the media and
88 local growth coalitions - exert influence.

89 The two outcome variables in this research are Referendum Support (i.e., the degree
90 to which one supports the use of a referenda in the process of a community deciding whether
91 to bid for a major event) and Participation Intention (i.e., the likelihood that one would
92 participate in such a referendum). Although sometimes correlated (Schuck & de Vreese,
93 2015), it is important to isolate the unique determinants of each. One may support the use of a
94 referendum in this context, but that may not intend to participate in it. A specific
95 understanding of the correlates of voting behaviour (Aldrich, 1993), as reflected in the
96 research design, has wide-reaching benefits to event organisers. Political Interest, Habitual
97 Voting, Political Ideology, Political Efficacy, Civic Duty, Political Cynicism, Satisfaction
98 with Democracy, Event Status and Psychological Involvement are included in this research as
99 potential determinants of referendum support and participation intention. Therefore, there are
100 two research questions that guide this study: a) What are the determinants of referenda

101 support the context of a major sport event? b) What are the determinants of referenda
102 participation intention in the context of a major sport event? The context of this research is a
103 potential future Commonwealth Games bid in New Zealand.

104 This study provides at least three important theoretical and practical contributions that are
105 most relevant in the context of western, democratic societies. First, it contributes to a better
106 understanding of local resident support for the use of referenda in the decision to bid for major
107 sport events. Second, it fosters a better understanding of intention to participate in referenda on
108 bidding for major sport events. Third, drawing on work in political science, this research tests
109 predictors of referenda support and participation intention, the utility of which have not been
110 examined within a major sport event context.

111 **2 Background**

112 The overall purpose of this research is to investigate the determinants of referenda support
113 and participation intentions in the context of a major sport event. Prior to doing so, it is imperative
114 to consider related sport context literature. Likewise, an overview of each of the determinants is
115 provided, including several that are well established in related literature and others that are novel
116 and being explored in this context for the first time.

117 **2.1 Sport-related referenda**

118 It is important to differentiate between stadia and events as referenda contexts. Wicker and
119 Coates (2018) have argued that major event decisions are larger in scope than stadia decisions but
120 are shorter term in nature, as a new stadium is a fixture in the community for decades. A small
121 number of studies have explored referenda to inform the decision to fund the construction of stadia
122 for professional sport teams and universities (Horn, Cantor, & Fort, 2015; Kellison, Sam, Hong,
123 Swart, & Mondello, 2018; Mondello & Kellison, 2016). The vast majority of this research has
124 been undertaken within the United States. Research on stadia referenda has focused on factors that
125 influence voter decisions. Studies have shown that voters may rely on information from

126 stakeholders when considering stadia construction decisions (Fort, 1997; Lupia, 1994). These
127 stakeholders include politicians, the local media, stadium proponent groups, the local business
128 community and professional sport team owners (Brown & Paul, 1999; Friedman & Mason, 2004,
129 2005; Sage, 1993).

130 In the majority of sport-related referenda studies, data were collected post-referendum,
131 with a focus on exploring resistance towards an Olympic bid (Coates & Wicker, 2015, Konecke,
132 Schubert, & Pruess, 2016; Siepell et al., 2016). Most studies have also relied upon secondary data
133 or content-analysed media coverage (Coates & Wicker, 2015; Konecke et al., 2016; Siepell et al.,
134 2016). One exception is Wicker and Coates' (2018) research on Hamburg's referendum to bid for
135 the 2024 Summer Olympics, which was the first to use primary data collected pre-referendum.
136 Their research indicated that local residents' decision to vote favourably was influenced more by
137 the expected costs of hosting the Games rather than the expected benefits. Furthermore, no
138 research has yet explored perceptions of community members about the *nature* of sport referenda
139 and specifically whether it should be binding or not (i.e., the government must act on the result).
140 Previous research has indicated that whether a referendum is binding or not can influence
141 participation in it (Silagadze & Gherghina, 2018).

142 **2.2 Determinants of referenda support and participation intention**

143 One way to develop the sport management discipline is to test and apply theories derived
144 from other related bodies of empirical research (Chalip, 2016). Determinants of referenda support
145 and participation intentions are established lines of inquiry in political science and are
146 unquestionably relevant to sport event referenda. While it is clear from previous research some
147 citizens are more supportive of referenda than others (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015), this line of
148 inquiry has yet to be explored in a sport context. Therefore, the theoretical frame of this study is
149 shaped by related research in political science, but also considers relevant constructs from our
150 understanding of sport events. Hypotheses are proposed that each of the key determinants

151 identified are related to support, and intention to participate, in major sport event referenda. All
152 aside from political interest are depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

153 **2.2.1 Political interest**

154 An individual's level of political interest has a strong influence on referendum support and
155 participation (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015). Referenda are embraced by those who are already
156 politically interested and involved (Donovan & Karp, 2006). Those who are interested in one form
157 of election are generally also interested in another (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015). In addition,
158 people with higher political interest are more likely to vote regardless of the issues on the ballot
159 (Biggers, 2014). Political interest is a product of socialisation (Bowler & Donovan, 2013). Those
160 who are socialised to have an interest in politics are more likely to see politics and voting in a
161 more positive light, and thus are more likely to vote (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). In another study of
162 referenda support in the European Union, it was found that those that were socialised to be
163 interested in politics and to identify with a particular political party were more likely to favour
164 referenda use (Rose & Borz, 2013).

165 **Hypothesis 1a:** Higher levels of political interest contribute to higher levels of support for
166 a major sport event referendum.

167 **Hypothesis 1b:** Higher levels of political interest contribute to greater intentions to
168 participate in a major sport event referendum.

169 **2.2.2 Habitual voting**

170 Habitual voters are more likely to vote no matter the issue (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015).
171 Measures of habitual voting behaviour identifies not only those who are regular participants in
172 elections and referenda, but also those that regularly abstain from voting. Both long-term voting
173 behaviour and long-term abstention are powerful habits (Linke & Petrussek, 2016). Voting
174 behaviour is learned and develops gradually (Bhatti, Hansen, & Wass, 2016; Linke & Petrussek,
175 2016; Plutzer, 2002). The process begins at a 'starting level,' which is the probability that citizens

176 will vote in the first election they are eligible for, and is ultimately characterised by ‘inertia,’
177 which is the propensity for citizens to settle into habits of voting or non-voting (Plutzer, 2002).
178 Generational differences in habitual voting are often evident (Linek & Petrussek, 2016). For
179 example, younger generations are less likely to participate in elections or referenda because their
180 voting habits are less ingrained (Linek & Petrussek, 2016). Most research on habitual voting has
181 focused on elections rather than referenda.

182 **Hypothesis 2a:** Higher levels of habitual voting contribute to higher levels of support for a
183 major sport event referendum.

184 **Hypothesis 2b:** Higher levels of habitual voting contribute to greater intentions to
185 participate in a major sport event referendum.

186 **2.2.3 Political ideology**

187 An individual’s political ideology is an important predictor of both referenda support
188 and participation intentions (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015). Political ideology is defined as a
189 shared model of beliefs groups of individuals possess that provide both an interpretation of the
190 society and a prescription of how that society should be structured (Denzau & North, 2000).
191 Many political ideologies exist on a continuum featuring different views on the role of the
192 government, the role of citizens, and how decisions should be made. Many studies have
193 investigated the impact of political ideology on referenda support and participation intentions,
194 but there is, as yet, no consensus. Donovan and Karp’s (2006) research compared referenda
195 support across New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. The research identified that
196 people with left-leaning political ideologies are more likely than centrists to support the use of
197 referenda in New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden, whereas in Switzerland those with right-
198 leaning political ideologies are more likely to support referenda use. In comparison, Smith,
199 Tolbert and Keller’s (2010) research into referenda support in the United States found that
200 those with central political views are more likely to support the use of referenda. They suggest

201 that this result is due to centrists being a large group of peripheral voters that are ‘long-term
202 structural losers’—those who are not attached to either of the two major political parties, and
203 therefore are less likely to be satisfied with representative government. Thus, although political
204 ideology may be an important predictor for referendum support and participation intentions, the
205 differing results suggest that this predictor of referenda support is contextually based.

206 **Hypothesis 3a:** One’s support for the use of referenda in the context of a major sport event
207 will differ based on political ideology.

208 **Hypothesis 3b:** One’s intention to participate in a major sport event referendum will differ
209 based on political ideology.

210 **2.2.4 Political efficacy**

211 Referenda support and participation intentions are also associated with political
212 efficacy. Political efficacy was first defined by Campbell, Gurin and Miller (1954) as “the
213 feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, and impact upon the political
214 process” (p. 187). Feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness have been found to decrease
215 support and engagement in political practices (Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001). Karp’s
216 (2012) study of political efficacy across 30 countries with a variety of party systems and both
217 established and new democracies, identified the positive influence of political efficacy on
218 political participation and the belief that one’s vote makes a difference. In addition, Bowler and
219 Donovan (2013) found that in the context of the 2011 British electoral system referendum,
220 those that have a high sense of political efficacy are more likely to perceive referenda in a
221 positive light and are more likely to participate in referenda. No research has yet explored the
222 role of political efficacy in the decision to support or participate in a sport event-related
223 referendum.

224 **Hypothesis 4a:** Higher levels of political efficacy contribute to higher levels of support for
225 a major sport event referendum.

226 **Hypothesis 4b:** Higher levels of political efficacy contribute to greater intentions to
227 participate in a major sport event referendum.

228 **2.2.5 Satisfaction with democracy**

229 Numerous studies have indicated that citizens who display higher levels of satisfaction
230 with democracy are more likely to participate in political voting (Donovan & Karp, 2006;
231 Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2014). The foundation of this relationship is that citizens who are more
232 satisfied with democracy tend to be more politically engaged, and thus they are more likely to
233 turn out to vote (Franklin, 2002). However, in other studies, there is evidence that
234 dissatisfaction with democracy generates demand for change, which stimulates a higher level of
235 voter turnout (Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2014). Similarly, people who are disconnected and
236 frustrated with traditional party politics are more likely to support and participate in referenda
237 (Dalton, Burklin, & Drummond, 2001). Despite the conflicting evidence as to the impact of
238 satisfaction with democracy as an antecedent for referenda support and participation, it is
239 evident that satisfaction with democracy must still be considered when measuring sport-related
240 referenda support and participation intentions.

241 **Hypothesis 5a:** Higher levels of satisfaction with democracy contribute to higher levels of
242 support for a major sport event referendum.

243 **Hypothesis 5b:** Higher levels of satisfaction with democracy contribute to greater
244 intentions to participate in a major sport event referendum.

245 **2.2.6 Civic duty**

246 Civic duty is “the belief that a citizen has a moral obligation to vote” (Blais & Galais,
247 2016, p. 61). From this perspective, dutiful citizens believe that participating in elections and
248 referenda is the right thing to do and abstaining is wrong. Civic duty captures motivation
249 rather than habitual behaviour (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015).

250 The concept of civic duty has its origins in cognitive mobilisation theory (Bowler &
251 Donovan, 2013; Schuck & de Vreese, 2015). The theory of cognitive mobilization suggests that
252 those with greater cognitive resources (e.g., education and knowledge), have a higher level of
253 political interest and are more likely to participate in democratic practices (Donovan & Karp,
254 2006). Because citizens' political skills and knowledge are increasing, citizens are now
255 demanding more voice and are less willing to leave decisions to the political elite (Inglehart,
256 1990). People with greater interest and knowledge in politics and possess greater cognitive
257 skills are more likely to support and participate in referenda because it is an opportunity for
258 political expression (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015). Schuck and de Vreese's (2015) research on
259 referenda support found civic duty was not only an important predictor of voter participation
260 intentions but also an important factor for explaining referenda support.

261 **Hypothesis 6a:** Higher levels of civic duty contribute to higher levels of support for a
262 major sport event referendum.

263 **Hypothesis 6b:** Higher levels of civic duty contribute to greater intentions to participate in
264 a major sport event referendum.

265 **2.2.7 Political cynicism**

266 Political cynicism is a concept that has emerged from the dissatisfaction with democracy
267 literature (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015; Southwell, 2008). Political cynicism is characterised
268 not only by dissatisfaction and aversion to politics but also a lack of political efficacy
269 (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015; Southwell, 2008). Higher levels of political cynicism can
270 alienate people from politics, decrease political learning and engagement, and subsequently
271 result in a decreased likelihood of voter participation (Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001).
272 However, several studies indicate that political cynicism can actually stimulate voting
273 participation (de Vreese & Sementko, 2002; Southwell, 2008). In these circumstances, people
274 that are frustrated and cynical about traditional party-based politics embrace a referendum as

275 an unfiltered opportunity to voice on important issues. Southwell's (2008) research on voter
276 behaviour in American elections found that political cynicism can have both a positive and
277 negative relationship with voter turnout. When political cynicism interacts with political
278 efficacy, one will be more likely to vote. However, when political cynicism exists without
279 political efficacy, voter turnout will be low (Southwell, 2008). Therefore, it seems important
280 in future to measure these constructs both individually, and explore if they interact.

281 Despite varying results on its influence, there is strong support for political cynicism
282 as a significant predictor of participation intentions. Whilst political cynicism has been
283 widely researched in regard to participation intentions in referenda, it is less established as a
284 key predictor for referenda support. Through a comparison of referendum support across 21
285 countries in the European Union, Schuck and de Vreese (2015) analysed both civic duty and
286 political cynicism alongside other predictors of referendum support. Whilst both civic duty
287 and political cynicism significantly predict referenda support, political cynicism was the
288 better predictor (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015).

289 Although there is agreement about the importance of political cynicism, there is little
290 agreement on the conceptualisation and measurement of the construct. Because of the lack of
291 standardised measures and interpretations, quantifying political cynicism is problematic (de
292 Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Hetherington, 2001). Despite the varied efforts to operationalize
293 political cynicism, the absence of trust is at the core of political cynicism (de Vreese &
294 Semetko, 2002; Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2013).

295 **Hypothesis 7a:** Higher levels of political cynicism contribute to higher levels of support
296 for a major sport event referendum.

297 **Hypothesis 7b:** Higher levels of political cynicism contribute to greater intentions to
298 participate in a major sport event referendum.

299 **2.2.7 Contextual factors**

300 In the context of major sport event referenda, there are likely to be other determinants of
301 referenda support and participation intentions. Involvement and event status are two additional
302 factors meriting consideration.

303 Rothschild (1984) defined psychological involvement as a state of interest, motivation or
304 arousal between an individual and an activity or product. Involvement is multi-dimensional, and
305 extends beyond individual motives and participation, to the relevance or meaning of an activity
306 within the context of an individual's overall outlook on life (Ridinger, Funk, Jordan, &
307 Kaplanidou, 2012). This concept is frequently represented by three different measurements of
308 involvement: centrality, hedonic value, and symbolic value (Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan,
309 2011; Inoue & Havard, 2014; Ridinger et al., 2012).

310 In research exploring the impact of events on local residents, the involvement
311 construct has been used to most accurately capture underlying psychology of support for an
312 event (Fredline, 2004; Inoue & Havard, 2014). The premise is that those who are involved in
313 sport are more likely to perceive the hosting of an event, and its associated impacts,
314 favorably. Fredline's (2004) research assessed local resident perceptions of a major sport
315 event hosted in two Australian cities: Melbourne, which hosts the Australian Formula One
316 Grand Prix, and the Gold Coast, which hosts the Indy 300. Although there is a range of
317 positive and negative perceived impacts associated with hosting the event in both
318 communities, the findings show that those residents who are involved or identify with
319 motorsport are more likely to disregard or tolerate the negative impacts because of the
320 offsetting benefit they derive through being entertained (Fredline, 2004).

321 **Hypothesis 7a:** Higher levels of psychological involvement in sport contribute to higher
322 levels of support for a major sport event referendum.

323 **Hypothesis 7b:** Higher levels of psychological involvement in sport contribute to greater
324 intentions to participate in a major sport event referendum.

325 In addition, perceptions of an event's status may also affect perceived event
326 impacts. Mao, Zhang, Connaughton, Holland and Spengler (2013) discussed event impact in
327 terms of 'value of association,' in that those who have high regard for a particular event are
328 more likely to respond favourably to that which is associated to the event. Speed and
329 Thompson (2000) argue that event status perception differs from a personal liking of an
330 event, because individuals can still respond favourably to an event they believe is of high
331 status due to the perceived benefits they may receive from it, even if they do not personally
332 like the event. The effects of event status have been typically used within sport sponsorship
333 research, measuring associations with brands with the perceptions of event status (Mao et
334 al., 2013; Speed & Thompson, 2000). However, event status may also influence the local
335 residents' perceptions of the impacts associated with hosting a sport event. In the current
336 research context, for example, it is possible those who view the Commonwealth Games as a
337 significant and high-status event may perceive the benefits and costs associated with hosting
338 the event differently than if the event was of lower status.

339 **Hypothesis 9a:** Higher levels of event status perceptions contribute to higher levels of
340 support for a major sport event referendum.

341 **Hypothesis 9b:** Higher levels of event status perceptions contribute to greater intentions of
342 participating in a major sport event referendum.

343 This research tests a novel set of predictors of referenda support and participation
344 intentions derived from political science that have not yet been examined within a major sport
345 event context. These constructs are tested within the context of a potential Commonwealth
346 Games bid from New Zealand.

347 **3 Method**

348 **3.1 Context**

349 The Commonwealth Games is a quadrennial, international multi-sport event involving
350 athletes from the Commonwealth of Nations. At the 2018 event, nearly 4500 athletes
351 representing 71 nations competed in 19 sports. New Zealand has not hosted a Commonwealth
352 Games since 1990. A bid in the near future is probable, in connection with one of New
353 Zealand's largest cities (Strang, 2018). Auckland (1990) and Christchurch (1974) have hosted
354 the event previously and feature in this research.

355 New Zealanders have an inherent affinity for the consultation process (Hayward,
356 2014). New Zealand has a long history of local referenda to inform high-level political
357 decision making. For example, in the 1990s, referenda were implemented in conjunction with
358 the adoption of electoral reforms as well as implementing a process for citizen-initiated
359 referendums in 1993 (Donovan & Karp, 2006). More recently, in 2016, a referendum was
360 held by the New Zealand Government to determine whether New Zealanders wanted a new
361 national flag (Osborne, Lees-Marshment, & van der Linden, 2016). New Zealanders' support
362 for referenda has been examined in a number of studies (Donovan & Karp, 2006; Karp &
363 Aimer, 2002). The decision to bid for a major event has never been the subject of a
364 referendum in New Zealand. Although community support for referenda in New Zealand is
365 seemingly high, the transferability of this support to a major sport event remains unexplored.

366 The Commonwealth Games are a high profile and well-regarded event in New
367 Zealand. Respondents were asked on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 =
368 strongly agree) whether they believed the Commonwealth Games was a significant sport
369 event, and whether it was important to where they live. The majority of respondents indicated
370 that the event was a significant ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.36$) and important ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.54$)
371 sport event.

372 **3.2 Participants**

373 A sample of 603 New Zealanders completed a questionnaire with items querying
374 determinants of support for a Commonwealth Games referendum and their intention to
375 participate. Data were collected using a questionnaire distributed by a market research
376 company. The firm used an existing database and a quota sampling scheme running until a
377 sample of 300 reporting residence in each of Christchurch and Auckland has been generated.
378 Respondents were excluded if they were less than 18 years old because this age represents the
379 current voting age in New Zealand and subsequently, the eligibility to vote in an event
380 bidding referendum.

381 The sample comprised both Auckland residents ($n = 302$) and Christchurch residents
382 ($n = 301$). The sample reflected New Zealand population parameters in terms of age, gender
383 and education. The largest age group in the sample were those 25 to 34 years old, and this
384 group represented 19.6% of overall respondents. The gender of the sample was fairly evenly
385 split, with 49.1% of respondents male ($n = 296$), and 50.9% female ($n = 307$). Respondents
386 with a university education were the largest group, representing 43.9% of the sample.

387 **3.3 Instrumentation**

388 Two focal dependent variables were included in this research. They represent a
389 distinct attitude and a behavioural intention, which combine to provide a rigorous overview
390 of this phenomenon in the research context. The two items were derived from a similar
391 research context (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015). First, respondents were asked on a 7-point
392 Likert scale (1=strongly against, 7=strongly in favour) to what extent they were in favour of
393 holding a referendum to decide whether their city should bid for the Commonwealth Games.
394 Respondents were also asked whether they believed this referendum should be binding or
395 non-binding. Next, respondents were asked on a 7-point Likert scale (1=very unlikely,
396 7=very likely) how likely they were to participate in such a referendum.

422 supported with the exception of EFF3, which did not load with the other efficacy items (see
423 Table 2). Unlike EFF1 and EFF2, EFF3 was not reverse coded, perhaps contributing to that
424 psychometric issue. Having assessed the wording of the two remaining items, it was determined
425 that the nature of political efficacy was adequately captured by EFF1 and EFF2 ($\alpha = .76$).
426 Remaining items were subsequently used to create composite variables. The overall sample
427 reported higher levels of civic duty ($M = 5.66, SD = 1.33, \alpha = .88$) than political cynicism ($M =$
428 $4.66, SD = 1.18, \alpha = .82$). The sample reported moderate levels of sport involvement ($M =$
429 $4.49, SD = 1.69, \alpha = .93$) and that the Commonwealth Games had significant status ($M = 5.83,$
430 $SD = 1.36, \alpha = .74$).

431 [Insert Table 2 about here]

432 The dependent variables were conceptualized as ordinal (Jamieson, 2004; Wu &
433 Leung, 2017). One of the foundational assumptions underlying ordinal logistic regression is
434 that of proportional odds. The assumption for proportional odds was rejected for both models;
435 therefore, a multinomial logistic regression was carried out (Hosmer, Lemeshow, &
436 Sturdivant, 2013). Multinomial logistic regression requires the dependent variable to be
437 treated as nominal/categorical. Treating the dependent variables as nominal means that no
438 value is attributed to each point on what was implemented as a likert scale (Wu & Leung,
439 2017). The highest level for each outcome (i.e., strongly in favour and very likely to
440 participate) provided the reference category from which other levels are compared.

441 **4.1 Referendum support**

442 The multinomial regression model assessing referendum support included four
443 significant independent variables (political cynicism, civic duty, event status and
444 involvement), $\chi^2(42) = 106.28, p < .01, \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 = .12$ (see Table 3). As support for a
445 Commonwealth Games referendum decreases, so too does political cynicism ($p < .01$). A
446 decrease in support for a referendum also emerges as sense of civic duty decreases ($p = .03$),

447 but the result is not as pronounced as it was for political cynicism. The two contextual
448 variables were also significant for the referendum outcome. As support for the referendum
449 decreases, so too does perception of the status of the event ($p = .03$). Likewise, support for
450 the referendum decreases as involvement in sport decreases ($p < .01$), although this is not
451 manifested at the highest level of referendum opposition. There was no relationship between
452 political ideology and referendum support, $F(3, 525) = .49, p = .69$.

453 [Insert Table 3 about here]

454 **4.2 Participation intention**

455 The regression model assessing participation intention had five significant variables
456 (political cynicism, civic duty, political interest, event status, and involvement), $\chi^2(42) =$
457 $145.71, p < .01$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .23$ (see Table 4). As one's likelihood to participate in a
458 Commonwealth Games referendum decreases, so too does level of political cynicism ($p =$
459 $.02$) although it is noteworthy that this is a relatively moderate effect and does not extend to
460 being *very* unlikely to participate. The relationship between political interest and intention to
461 participate in the referendum is significant and should be interpreted similarly. The
462 interpretation of the relationship between civic duty and intention to participate in a
463 referendum is more straightforward. As intention to participate decreases, so too does a one's
464 sense of civic duty. Each of the two sport context variables had significant relationships with
465 intention to participate in the referendum, in a direction consistent with what was
466 hypothesised (i.e., higher levels of event status perceptions and involvement are related to
467 stronger intention to participate). As was the case for referendum support, no significant
468 differences emerged across groups in relation to political ideology on referendum
469 participation $F(3, 525) = 1.19, p = .31$.

470 [Insert Table 4 about here]

471 **4.3 Type of referendum**

472 Results of an independent *t*-test indicate that referendum support is greater for those
473 who favour a binding referendum ($M = 4.93, SD = 1.80$) over a non-binding referendum ($M =$
474 $3.83, SD = 1.85$), $t(601) = 7.31, p < .01$. Similarly, those more likely to participate in a
475 referendum favour a binding referendum ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.50$) as opposed to a non-binding
476 referendum ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.87$), $t(601) = 5.96, p < .01$.

477 Supporters of a binding referendum reported a higher sense of civic duty ($M = 5.96, SD$
478 $= 1.23$) compared to those who supported a non-binding referendum ($M = 5.65, SD = 1.37$), t
479 $(601) = 2.83, p = .01$. Those who supported a binding referendum did not differ in their level of
480 political cynicism ($M = 4.73, SD = 1.19$) compared to those who supported a non-binding
481 referendum ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.16$), $t(601) = 1.71, p = .09$.

482 [Insert Table 5 about here]

483 **5 Discussion**

484 Referenda are increasingly being used as a means to determine local resident support
485 for hosting major sport events. Therefore, knowing the level of local resident support and the
486 factors which impact this support is important to a variety of event stakeholders. In the
487 context of a possible Commonwealth Games in either Christchurch or Auckland, data were
488 collected related to referendum support, participation intentions, and preference for a binding
489 or non-binding referendum. The regression model explaining a resident's participation
490 intentions was stronger than the model predicting a resident's support for a referendum taking
491 place.

492 Relationships between five of the independent variables and at least one of the
493 outcome variables were significant. Ten of the eighteen hypotheses were not supported.
494 Specifically, no evidence emerged linking habitual voting, political efficacy, satisfaction with
495 democracy or political ideology with either referendum support or participation. That these
496 predictors are not significant in the context of this major event referendum scenario does not

497 suggest they are not important at all. It is not unusual for some variables that have an
498 otherwise solid theoretical basis to end up statistically insignificant in terms of referendums
499 (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015). As evidence emerged in this study that political interest,
500 political cynicism, civic duty, event status, and involvement were significant, they are
501 discussed in more detail next.

502 **5.1 Political interest**

503 Evidence emerged supporting the notion that political interest is positively related to
504 intention to participate in a major sport event referendum but not to a person's support for
505 such a referendum. This finding is in line with the assumption that citizens who are more
506 politically interested tend to be more politically engaged, and thus, they are more likely to
507 turn out to vote (Donovan & Karp, 2006). Political interest tends to be robust no matter what
508 is on the ballot (Biggers, 2014), and this seems to have carried through to the major event
509 referendum context. Although one might expect referendum support from those who are
510 dissatisfied by the political process (i.e., politically cynical), in this study, we found those
511 who are politically interested and have a strong sense of civic duty are more likely to turn up
512 and participate in a major sport event referendum.

513 **5.2 Political cynicism**

514 The results of previous research are equivocal as to whether political cynicism
515 positively or negatively impacts referenda support and participation intention. Some research
516 has shown that feelings of powerlessness and meaningless alienate people from politics, and
517 as a consequence, decrease their likelihood to support or participate in political practices
518 (Valentino et al., 2001). Conversely, several studies have indicated that rather than leading to
519 disengagement in politics, for an efficacious individual, political cynicism can have a
520 mobilizing effect (de Vreese & Semenko, 2002; Southwell, 2008). Our study provides
521 evidence that political cynicism positively impacts both referendum support and participation

522 intention, although it is noteworthy that these relationships did not exist at the extremes (i.e.,
523 strong opposition to a referendum or being *very unlikely* to participate). This suggests that a
524 major sport event referenda may provide an opportunity for ‘critical citizens’ to curtail the
525 influence of politicians (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015; Southwell, 2008), but not to any great
526 extent. Stated differently, those dissatisfied with politics in New Zealand may view a
527 Commonwealth Games referendum as an opportunity to politically express themselves.

528 **5.3 Civic duty**

529 The finding here that referendum support and participation intention are stronger
530 among residents with high levels of civic duty is consistent with previous research (Schuck &
531 de Vreese, 2015). The stability of this predictor in conjunction with political processes is
532 noteworthy and held firm in this context. That civic duty has emerged as significantly related
533 to both referendum support and participation is evidence of its importance. Further, it can be
534 argued as per cognitive mobilisation theory that the cognitive resources linked to a sense of
535 civic duty may be particularly relevant in regards to a major sport event. This finding
536 suggests that those who have a sense of civic duty could potentially be purposefully
537 mobilised to participate in a major sport event referendum.

538 **5.4 Event status**

539 Perceptions of event status were included in the current research because of previous
540 evidence suggesting its importance (Fredline, 2004; Inoue & Havard, 2014). Indeed, the
541 findings support inclusion of this construct in attempting to understand support for and
542 intention to participate in a major sport event referendum. Respondents who believe the
543 Commonwealth Games are a significant event reported greater support for a referendum on
544 whether to bid to host the event, and are more likely to participate in this referendum.
545 Referenda are only utilised for issues of significance, and therefore, for one to support the use
546 of a referendum and see value in participating in that referendum, they must first perceived

547 the issue to be of significant importance. Thus, the perception that an event is significant
548 relates to this notion of importance. The cost and potential impact on residents associated
549 with New Zealand hosting the Commonwealth Games would be substantial, and therefore,
550 respondents that view this event as high-status are more likely to view the use and
551 participation of a referendum in a positive light.

552 **5.5 Involvement**

553 For both referendum support and participation intention, a significant relationship
554 emerged with the involvement construct. As an indicator capturing one's connection to sport,
555 it was expected that it would be related to one's support for a sport-related referendum and
556 one's intention to participate in that referendum. It would stand to reason that one who is
557 highly connected to sport would be more favourable to their community hosting a major
558 event but no evidence yet exists about whether those who are more involved would be more
559 supportive of it or report greater intention to participate. This study generated evidence that
560 those who are more highly involved with sport report more support for and intention to
561 participate in a major sport event referendum. The results here extend Fredline's (2004)
562 conclusion that those who are highly involved tend to disregard or tolerate negative event
563 impacts. It may be possible to mobilise those who are highly involved in sport to participate
564 in a referendum that could help bring an event to a community.

565 **5.6 Binding, non-binding results**

566 In previous research, the type of referendum has not been examined in relation to
567 support or participation in referenda. Findings here indicate that New Zealanders have strong
568 support for a Commonwealth Games referendum and are likely to participate in that
569 referendum if it is binding. Therefore, those who believe that the results of the referendum
570 must be acted upon, rather than simply provide politicians and key decision makers with only
571 an indication, are more likely to support and participate in a major sport event referendum.

572 This finding aligns with the notion of political efficacy whereby one believes in the
573 legitimacy of political processes. Those who believe their vote will make a difference (i.e.,
574 political efficacy) through a binding referendum are more likely to support the use of a
575 referendum to make a bid decision and whether they will participate. If their vote is not going
576 to count, why vote at all?

577 **6 Limitations and future research**

578 It is important to acknowledge several limitations of this study. Importantly, several
579 antecedents were measured using single items, which some argue to lack rigor or robustness.
580 This of course needs to be balanced with brevity in a questionnaire, which was prioritised.
581 **However, the single item antecedents here have often been used this way in previous research**
582 **(e.g. Donovan & Karp, 2006; Schuck & de Vreese, 2015; Smith, Tolbert, & Keller, 2010).**
583 Although respondents were of legal voting age, it is unclear whether they could be reliably
584 expected to vote in an election or referendum, nor is it known if respondents were enrolled to
585 vote. Of course, given the fact more than three-fourths of respondents reported they would be
586 likely to vote if a referendum was held, it might also be the case that the sample was mostly
587 homogenous and trending toward likely voters. In future research, one approach to address
588 this issue is to include individuals who are not enrolled to vote (but are eligible to enrol) in
589 the survey sample. These individuals have chosen not to exercise their democratic rights and
590 could further our understanding of the factors that contribute to certain attitudes toward civic
591 duty and political cynicism. Another response to this issue is to direct inquiry toward those
592 individuals who are enrolled to vote but do not participate in elections. Soliciting feedback
593 via focus groups, for example, could provide new insights that enhance what we know about
594 public perception of both the form and outcome of a Commonwealth Games bid.

595 Similarly, this study utilized a measure of voting intentions rather than actual voter
596 behaviour. In the absence of real voter data, the predictive validity of the voting intentions

597 measures was not assessed in this study. Previous attempts to identify voter likelihood have
598 been plagued by a lack of predictive validity (Traugott & Tucker, 1984). However, more
599 recent research has shown that two items—vote intent and previous vote behaviour—has
600 shown both generalizability and validity over four elections and three decades (Murray,
601 Riley, & Scime, 2009). While the central purpose of this study was not to identify likely
602 voters, this strategy may be employed in future research to forecast a referendum outcome
603 with greater confidence.

604 The extent to which context—that is, the unique facets of Auckland, Christchurch,
605 and the Commonwealth Games—influenced the tested relationships in this study has not been
606 determined. Therefore, this line of research should be extended to investigate hypothetical
607 sport referendums in cities elsewhere and in the context of other major sporting events. An
608 alternate context may well produce a more robust model explaining more variance in
609 referendum support and participation intentions than was found here.

610 Based on these limitations, we offer several other directions for future research. First,
611 because the focus of this study was on New Zealanders' support for and intention to
612 participate in a major event referendum, other unexplored factors may explain the likelihood
613 of a referendum passing. These factors could include the timing of the vote in a general
614 election cycle, the number of other issues appearing on the ballot, and the public cost of the
615 proposed project (Mondello & Anderson, 2004). Particularly for individuals or groups aiming
616 to affect the outcome of a referendum vote, more research is necessary to get a full view of
617 the factors that contribute to a voter's support of or opposition to an event bid.

618 A second area of study might focus not on citizens' attitudes toward the use of
619 referenda, but rather those of policymakers. Given the apparently increasing utilization of the
620 referendum in stadium- and event-related cases, it is largely assumed that it is a popular tool
621 among decision-makers. However, as previous research has shown, elected officials may be

622 disincentivized to promote public deliberation on an issue such as the construction of sporting
623 infrastructure for a club or event (Kellison, Newman, & Bunds, 2017; Scherer & Sam, 2008).
624 Therefore, researchers should consider the effect, if any, the popularity of the referendum
625 among ordinary citizens affects policymakers' willingness to employ it.

626 Another important angle for future research as it relates to major event decision
627 making and referenda has to do with whether the event would take place in a single or
628 multiple host cities. Multi-sport events like the Olympics and Commonwealth Games have
629 historically been hosted by a single city, whereas sport-specific events like the Cricket World
630 Cup are more likely to be hosted across multiple cities within a single country. This contrast
631 has been explored in previous research (Bakhsh, Potwarka, Nunkoo, & Sunnasee, 2017),
632 although that study took the traditional form of focusing on event support as the outcome
633 variable of interest. It is important to explore if key decision-makers' perception of
634 community engagement in major event bids differs based on the number of host cities.

635 **7 Conclusion**

636 Growing public scepticism toward mega sporting events like the Olympic and
637 Paralympic Games and FIFA Men's and Women's World Cup has led to changes to the way
638 in which some governing bodies organize their bidding processes. For example, in 2019, the
639 International Olympic Committee announced it would consider allowing joint bids, in which
640 the Games could be held in multiple cities, regions, or countries (Zaccardi, 2019). The results
641 of this study indicate that reforms may also occur more locally in the cities and regions
642 expressing interest in hosting an event like the Commonwealth Games. In the absence of a
643 referendum, it is unclear whether the public at large would support or oppose a proposal to
644 host a major sporting event. Practically, a lack of support could present problems down the
645 road, including a lack of ticket sales or widespread public protests. Beyond these economic

646 consequences, policy decisions that are suspected (or prove) to be incongruent with the public
647 may ultimately prompt serious questions about the efficacy of the democratic system itself.

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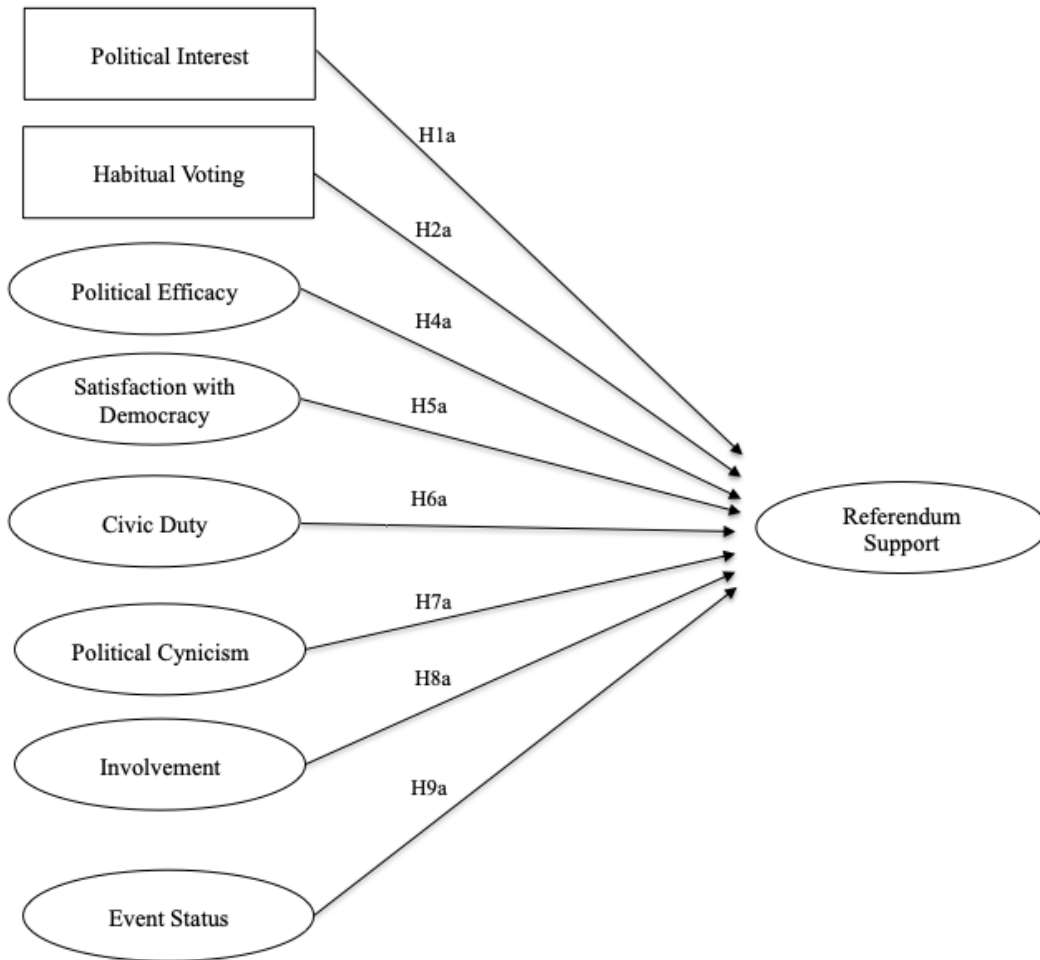
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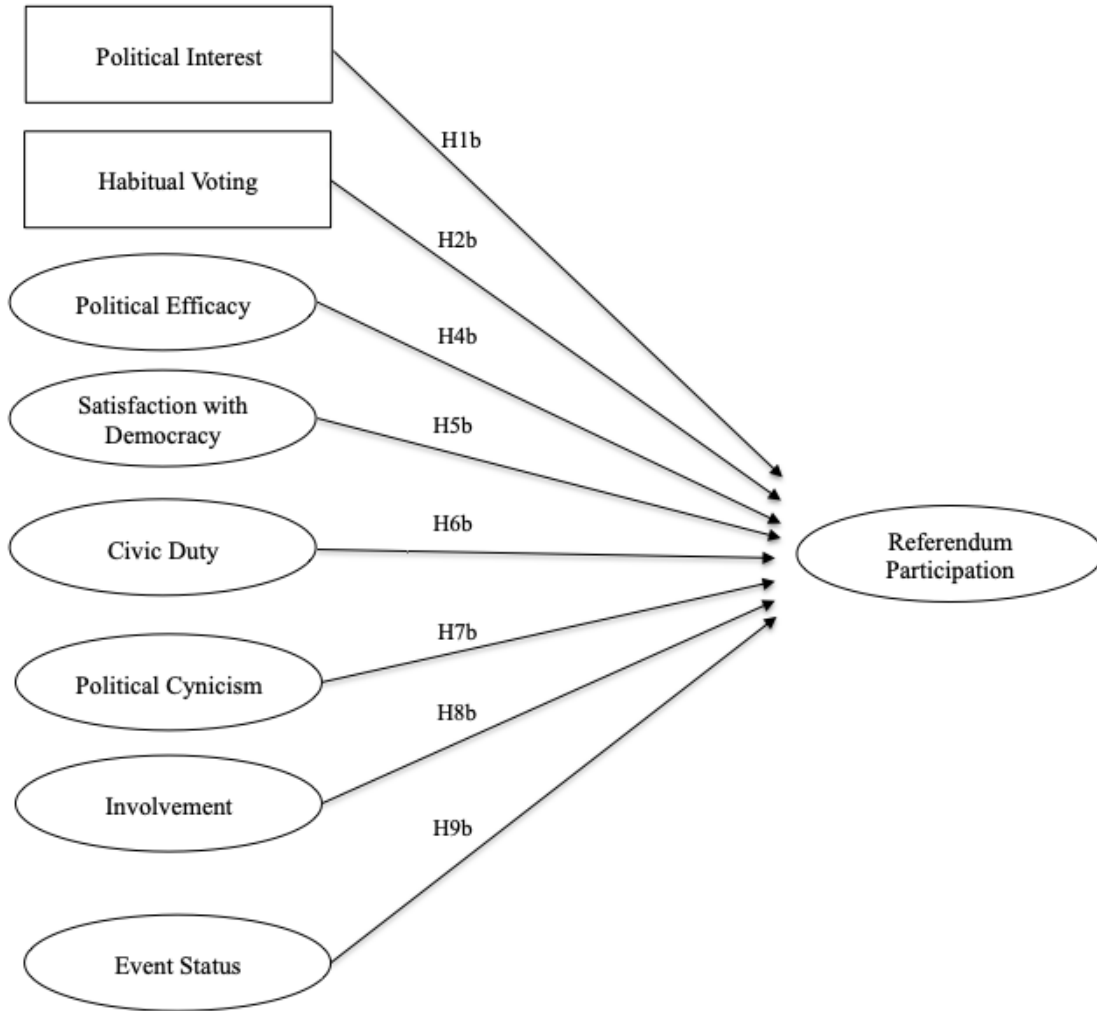
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797 Figure 1
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799 *Hypothesised relationships with referendum support*
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821 Figure 2
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823 *Hypothesised relationships with referendum participation*
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843 Table 1
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 845 *Referendum Support and Participation Items*
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Political Cynicism	CYN1: Almost all politicians will sell out their ideals or break their promises if it will increase their power
	CYN2: Most politicians are in politics for what they can get out of it personally
	CYN3: Most politicians are truthful with the voters*
	CYN4: Most politicians are dedicated and we should be grateful to them for the work they do*
Civic Duty	CD1: It's every citizen's duty to vote in an election
	CD2: I would be seriously neglecting my duty as a citizen if I didn't vote
	CD3: I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote
	CD4: I would feel very guilty if I didn't vote in an election
Political Interest	PI: How interested are you in political issues?
Habitual Voting	HV: Of all elections in which you were eligible to vote, how many times have you actually voted?
Political Ideology	(select from among 7 NZ political parties)
Political Efficacy	EFF1: People like me don't have any say about what the government does*
	EFF2: I don't think the government cares much what people like me think*
	EFF3: Having referenda make the government pay attention to what people think
Satisfaction with Democracy	SD1: Regardless of who is in government, on the whole, I am satisfied with the way democracy works.
	SD2: I am satisfied with the way democracy works in New Zealand
Involvement	INV1: I really enjoy following sport
	INV2: Sport has a central role in my life
	INV3: Being a sport fan says a lot about who I am
Event Status	ES1: The Commonwealth Games is a significant sport event
	ES2: The Commonwealth Games will be important to where I live

847 *reverse coded
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849 Table 2

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851 *Factor Loadings for Political Cynicism, Civic Duty, Political Efficacy and Involvement*

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Items	Pattern Matrix			
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
CYN4	-0.910			
CYN3	-0.796			
CYN2	-0.742			
CYN1	-0.729			
EFF3	0.587			
CD2		0.913		
CD1		0.869		
CD3		0.836		
CD4		0.809		
INV2			0.961	
INV3			0.936	
INV1			0.914	
EFF1				0.957
EFF2				0.750

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872 Table 3

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874 *Multinomial Logistic Regression Measuring Referendum Support*

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	strongly against		moderately against		slightly against		neutral		slightly in favour		moderately in favour		strongly in favour		P value
	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	
Political Cynicism	-.111	.778	-.637*	.523*	-.272	.650	-.319*	.691*	-.389*	.667*	-.285*	.703*	1.000	1.000	.001
Civic Duty	-.399*	.728*	-.554*	.578*	-.375*	.754*	-.409*	.679*	-.275	.763	-.309*	.756*	1.000	1.000	.030
Political Interest	.037	1.039	.087	1.090	-.031	.975	-.069	.934	-.095	.909	.042	1.044	1.000	1.000	.777
Habitual Voting	.288	1.317	.293	1.338	.129	1.113	.055	1.053	.120	1.127	.122	1.123	1.000	1.000	.183
Political Efficacy	-.139	.828	-.132	.868	-.132	.822	-.032	.953	.049	1.043	-.036	.945	1.000	1.000	.858
Satisfaction with Democracy	.325	1.385	.034	1.035	.371	1.450	.100	1.105	.023	1.024	.134	1.144	1.000	1.000	.058
Event Status	-.462*	.654*	-.278	.759	-.335*	.751*	-.162	.857	-.237*	.787*	-.142	.879	1.000	1.000	.031
Involvement	-.171	.879	-.510*	.610*	-.370*	.714*	-.299*	.753*	-.150	.866	-.242*	.800*	1.000	1.000	<.001

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877 * Statistically significant at <.05 level

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881 Table 4

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883 *Multinomial Logistic Regression Measuring Referendum Participation*

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	very unlikely		moderately unlikely		slightly unlikely		neutral		slightly likely		moderately likely		very likely		P value
	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	
Political Cynicism	-.230	.948	-.451	.713	-.912*	.371*	-.294*	.820*	-.229*	.827*	-.197	.835	1.000	1.000	.016
Civic Duty	-.479*	.575*	-.495*	.582*	-.388	.728	-.314*	.703*	-.203	.803	-.190	.820	1.000	1.000	.004
Political Interest	.009	1.021	-.275	.758	-.607*	.558*	-.229*	.796*	-.208*	.812*	-.183*	.832*	1.000	1.000	.025
Habitual Voting	-.147	.879	.165	1.185	-.189	.810	-.105	.908	-.137	.875	.079	1.084	1.000	1.000	.187
Political Efficacy	.124	1.178	.319	1.404	.267	1.207	.298	1.382	.210	1.246	.246	.1287	1.000	1.000	.366
Satisfaction with Democracy	-.318	.728	-.225	.799	.272	1.313	-.193	.825	-.081	.922	-.035	.965	1.000	1.000	.206
Event Status	-.214	.778	-.617*	.529*	-.291	.759	-.276*	.744*	-.291*	.743*	-.172	.840	1.000	1.000	.003
Involvement	-.202	.800	.035	1.015	-.364*	.692*	-.224*	.788*	-.093	.905	-.180*	.832*	1.000	1.000	.032

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886 * Statistically significant at <.05 level

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889 Table 5

890 *Support for Hypotheses*

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Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Result
H1a	Political Interest	Referendum Support	Not supported
H1b	Political Interest	Referendum Participation	Supported
H2a	Habitual Voting	Referendum Support	Not supported
H2b	Habitual Voting	Referendum Participation	Not supported
H3a	Political Ideology	Referendum Support	Not supported
H3b	Political Ideology	Referendum Participation	Not supported
H4a	Political Efficacy	Referendum Support	Not supported
H4b	Political Efficacy	Referendum Participation	Not supported
H5a	Satisfaction with Democracy	Referendum Support	Not supported
H5b	Satisfaction with Democracy	Referendum Participation	Not supported
H6a	Civic Duty	Referendum Support	Not supported
H6b	Civic Duty	Referendum Participation	Supported
H7a	Political Cynicism	Referendum Support	Supported
H7b	Political Cynicism	Referendum Participation	Supported
H8a	Involvement	Referendum Support	Supported
H8b	Involvement	Referendum Participation	Supported
H9a	Event Status	Referendum Support	Supported
H9b	Event Status	Referendum Participation	Supported

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