What can the politically active explain about the politically disengaged? Exploring the pathways and barriers to millennials' political participation

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Abstract

This thesis explores the social factors which produce or inhibit political engagement amongst millennials during their formative years. To investigate these phenomena, this study has conducted one-to-one interviews with millennials who are committed to formal political participation. It has developed an original method and typology to explore what the politically engaged can explain about political behaviour and participation. This technique has been specifically created to analyse the barriers youth face to political participation and develop strategies to overcome these barriers. This research illuminates how collective experiences and social structures mediate the likelihood of involvement in politics. To increase the understanding of how structures influence young people's engagement with politics, this thesis has compared the experiences of politically active millennials with differential social status and access to resources. In particular, the thesis has outlined how social, cultural and economic factors influence the political socialisation an individual receives and the barriers to political participation they face, narrowing or expanding the likelihood of their future political participation. The thesis has made recommendations about how to overcome these barriers which have been developed from insights provided by the research participants.

Contents

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis investigates some of the factors that decrease the likelihood of political engagement and participation amongst millennials. It explores whether we can learn about the influences encouraging political passivity through the experiences of those who are politically engaged and active. This thesis will demonstrate that through discussions with those who are politically active, we can illuminate how barriers are erected to political participation and develop strategies to overcome these barriers. This approach also provides relevant information about the political habits and activities about millennials as a cohort, the influence of structures on political participation and why we should consider the differential journeys of youths to becoming politically active. This thesis argues that the declining political participation of millennials contains negative consequences for the millennial cohort and the democratic system, so examining methods to overcome the disconnect between young people and politics is a critical and necessary aim. In this introductory chapter, we will begin to outline why this topic and approach were chosen, before we detail the research aims, the argument of the thesis and how the thesis will be arranged.

Why millennials' political participation requires investigation

Politics is an inevitable feature of democratic systems (Hay, 2007). Democracy is a method for reaching decisions which involve a collective of people. The needs of a group, region or nation-state are not always fulfilled by individuals competing against one another or pursuing selfish aims. Democracy is a method to pursue the common good for collectives which takes into consideration the views of each within the group, even if the perspectives of each individual of that collective are not reflected in the outcome of democratic decisions (Stoker, 2006). Politics is the process in which we engage in discussions about how we come to choose which decisions to take in a democratic system. Therefore, as Hay (2007: 2) argues, 'politics is concerned, almost by definition, with the construction and, ideally, the realization of a sense of the collective good.' However, what if a significant proportion of the collective are

not engaged in discussions about the collective good? Could we claim that if a large segment of the group is not involved in politics, then democracy is diminished? The argument of this thesis is that the common good is undermined, and consequently democracy itself is weakened, if large swathes of the collective are not involved in discussions about choices that influence the direction of that group.

One such section of the collective is contemporary young people, who have demonstrated an increasing reluctance to engage with politics within many democratic countries across the globe. This thesis will explore why youth are not participating in parliamentary general elections within Britain. As it is the millennial generation which has exhibited this trend, this thesis will focus on that age cohort. It is hoped that by learning why this generation eschews institutional political action, we will understand what measures we can take to encourage future generations to participate in political and democratic arrangements. Before we can understand millennials' political disengagement, we will need to understand who they are as a cohort and their feelings towards the political system.

A common feature of discussions about British young people's presence in elections has been concerned with whether young people are apathetic about politics (Phelps, 2012). Conventional wisdom and relatively few academics (Fox, 2015; Furedi, 2005; Phelps, 2012) suggest that non-voting youth demonstrate an apathetic attitude to political participation. Opposing this view, are a number of academics who suggest that young people's political disengagement has resulted from their alienation from politics (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012; Henn et al, 2002; 2014a; O'Toole et al, 2003; Sloam, 2007). Critically interrogating this question is an important aspect of this study. If youths are apathetic about political action, then the responses needed to encourage participation are different to if they are alienated from politics.

We must also consider if the millennial generation has uniform access to political participation. As Furlong and Cartmel (2007; 2012) correctly point out, contemporary youth

have experienced significant socioeconomic difficulties compared to the generations that preceded them. Yet, youths may not be disadvantaged proportionally, a factor underexplored in the literature. As Sloam (2013: 836) states, '[w]hilst a number of studies have examined the nature of political participation in Europe, […] hardly any research has looked at patterns of engagement "within" a generation of young people.' Indeed, when Henn and Foard (2014a: 373) explored political participation within the youth generation, they found that there are differentiated pathways to political participation:

> '[Y]oung people's engagement with formal politics is complex and nuanced; although there is a tendency in much research to treat young people as a homogenised group, there is no single uniform pattern, and this generation is diverse in its political orientation. Their political views are linked to their backgrounds and life circumstances, and socio-demographic and educational variables have an important impact in terms of shaping political perspectives and outlooks.'

Therefore, to grasp young people's reasons for political disengagement and how we can reverse their disconnect from institutional politics, we need to explore how their journeys to political participation differ, why they vary and develop solutions that consider their unequal access to politics. In particular, there is a need to investigate how structural influences, such as class, education and gender, impact on young people's potential political activity.

To understand how an individual's demographics influences their political participation, we not only need to understand what disengaged youths dislike about politics but also why they do not get interested in politics in the first place. The thesis will term these impediments to political activity, 'barriers to political participation', and explore how they manifest themselves in the political sphere. However, this thesis has not just illuminated what these barriers are but has also explored how they can be overcome. To achieve this aim, the thesis has adopted an original approach within youth studies to explore the pathways politically engaged youths have taken to become active political agents, a facet of youth political studies which is underexplored in the literature (Wray-Lake, 2019). Evaluating the effectiveness of this approach, alongside investigating the barriers to political participation and how these

barriers can be overcome have been converted into three research aims which this thesis has addressed.

Research aims

- Research aim 1: Explore what the politically engaged can explain about young people's political engagement and participation

- Research aim 2: Understand the processes and influences which create barriers to millennials' political engagement and participation

- Research aim 3: Identify methods to overcome the barriers to political engagement and participation

The second research aim has been created to explore what factors create barriers to political participation. The third research aim seeks to identify strategies for overcoming barriers to participation. As we touched upon above, to critically examine the second and third research aim, a new approach and typology has been created. The first research aim is concerned with evaluating how effective this original technique is at investigating youth political participation and engagement. We shall now turn to outlining this original approach and the research methodology which was used in conjunction with it, before outlining how it allowed the thesis to meet the second and third research aims.

This new approach involves using the experiences of those active in politics to increase our knowledge of youth political engagement and participation. This will allow us to document and assess the sources from which young people's political interest is galvanised, how they interact with the political system and the differential journeys to political participation. The second and third research aims utilise this framework to explore what the politically active can elucidate about those who are politically disengaged. To provide context to how demographics influence these pathways, the thesis has conducted interviews with millennials with different social backgrounds. Existing literature has been reviewed to categorise which

social groups are associated with political passivity and which social groups are likely to be politically active. The research participants were assigned categories dependent on their social groups. Interviewees from social groups usually associated with low political engagement and participatory patterns have been termed, 'Unexpected Participants' (UPs) and those associated with high political engagement and participatory trends have been labelled, 'Expected Participants' (EPs). A third category for those who did not fit neatly into either of these groups was also created. The interviewees assigned to this classification were termed, 'Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participants' (NEUP). The most important category within this analytical framework is the UP group. This is because this category contains those with characteristics which suggest they have the least likelihood of participating in formal politics. Consequently, it is the experiences of this group which this thesis is most keen to understand as it seeks to understand the causes behind low levels of political participation amongst disadvantaged groups and find methods to encourage formal political participation amongst these groups.

This method for investigating youth political disengagement is an original approach to understanding how demographics influence levels of political action. No other literature has been found which attempts to discover more about the politically passive through the experiences of those who are politically active. Thus, the analytical categories of UPs, EPs and MEs is also a novel development in academic studies. As this approach is new and unique, the first research aim will evaluate whether this is an effective academic method to illuminating aspects of youth political (dis)engagement. To assess whether this technique is compatible with, and useful for, its intended purpose, the thesis will reflect on whether this approach was able to provide new information about youth political participation and whether this information was valid and accurate and how it could be improved for future research. However, this technique was designed to inform and enlighten us about specific aspects of youth political disengagement – namely, the barriers which are erected to political participation and how we can develop strategies to overcome these barriers. Therefore, when judging the effectiveness of this approach, the thesis will consider how successful this method was in meeting the second and third research aims, too.

This thesis has explored how structures influence young people's political participation and will demonstrate that we should not treat youths as a homogenous group. Consequently, the second research aim investigates how and where the barriers to political participation are erected. By using politically engaged millennials who would not be expected to participate in politics because of their demographics, the thesis has been able to highlight how barriers to political participation are manifested in their pathways to becoming politically active. The UPs recollections of their political journeys and how they contrast to the experiences of the EPs, has provided the thesis with information about how barriers inhibited the UPs ability to become political agents. These barriers were observable during their initial political socialisation and occurred even after the UPs had developed an interest in politics. Indeed, they continued to exert an influence on some of the UPs during their adulthood. Many of the UPs perceived themselves to be incompetent political agents, despite their sustained political engagement and participation.

The third research aim is to identify methods to overcome the barriers to political engagement and participation. In the conclusion, the thesis will outline five recommendations which would help overcome barriers to young people's political participation. These methods have been developed from the understanding of barriers to political participation which the research participants have themselves highlighted in the interviews for this study. In chapter 7, the thesis also evaluates how successful prominent solutions to political disengagement found in the literature could be in terms of overcoming barriers to political participation, by combining discussion with the interviewees alongside a critical reading of the literature concerning solutions to youth political passivity. The analysis conducted for the second research aim provided information about how barriers were manifested in the UPs pathways to political participation. This analysis allowed the thesis to document which social influences created these barriers, but it also allowed the thesis to formulate strategies for overcoming those barriers. Therefore, the contrasting experiences of the UPs, EPs and NEUPs examined in research aim 2, provided many of the foundations for the recommendations made to meet research aim 3.

As we have already touched upon, this thesis will interview politically engaged millennials to meet the three research aims. In total, 35 participants were recruited for these qualitative semi-structured interviews. Each interviewee had to be committed to participating in general elections from when they were first eligible to vote and be at an age to be considered a millennial. Due to the typology used within this thesis, the research participants were required to come from a diverse range of social backgrounds so that experiences could be compared.

Overview of thesis

Chapter 1 outlines who millennials are and their relationship to the political system. It will detail the values associated with millennials and provide evidence for their expanding political repertoires which increasingly occur in non-institutional fields while highlighting their disenchantment with parliamentary politics. Chapter 1 will also argue that young people's declining presence at elections has negative consequences which means that that methods that could reverse this trend are required. It will also note some of the recommendations which have been crafted to increase youth political engagement and participation.

Chapter 2 investigates why many millennials eschew electoral politics. In particular, it will assess existing literature which positions young people as alienated from the political system and politicians. It will also examine the role of non-institutional politics in providing new ways for millennials to participate in politics and whether this can explain young people's increased abstention at general elections. This chapter will also evaluate life-cycle and generational effects as explanations for youth political disengagement.

Chapter 3 critically interrogates the literature to investigate the role of social groups in access to political participation. It will demonstrate that class, inequality, transitions to adulthood, education, gender and ethnicity all impact on an individual's' ability to become a political

agent. This chapter will provide two complimentary roles important for this thesis. Firstly, that demographics influence the likelihood of future political participation. Secondly, it will highlight which social groups are negatively constrained by membership of a social group, so that this thesis can categorise interviewees into the UP, EP or NEUP groups.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological decisions taken for this study. It explains why a pragmatic approach to the study was adopted in this thesis' research and why qualitative semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for meeting the research aims. This chapter elucidates how the typology of UPs, EPs and NEUPs was constructed and how this influenced the sampling used in this study. Chapter 4 also discusses the ethical considerations which guided this research.

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters which analyses the data gathered during the study. Chapter 5 provides information about the interviewees' patterns of political engagement and participation. It then goes on to explore the interviewees' motivations to participate in politics, their opinion of politicians and their thoughts on why other non-participating millennials have disengaged with politics. This chapter will provide some evidence of the contrasting experiences of political activity between UPs, EPs and NEUPs, but it is primarily focused on examining the experiences of political engagement and participation amongst the politically engaged.

In Chapter 6, the thesis will explore the different pathways UPs, EPs and MEs experience when becoming political agents. It will explore the various facets of political socialisation and explain how demographics influence the quantity and quality of political socialisation an individual receives. Chapter 6 will also demonstrate how barriers inhibit becoming politically active amongst those with few resources. It will outline how some of the UPs were repelled from political action by the complexity of politics, insufficient efficacy, a lack of leisure time and cultural and economic distinctions. It will also make some observations about the impact of gender and ethnicity on potential political participation.

Chapter 7 will combine insights provided by the interviewees and evidence from the literature to evaluate which reforms may be successful in galvanising increased political participation amongst young people, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. It will discuss administrative reforms, citizenship education, politicians and the political system and political interest, knowledge and efficacy.

The conclusion develops the insights provided by the preceding three chapters to make five recommendations which could lead to a reduction in barriers to political participation and an increase in youth political engagement. The conclusion will also summarise other discussions mentioned throughout the thesis, before outlining this thesis' original contribution to knowledge, the limitations of this study and how this research could be developed in future studies.

Chapter 1: Millennials' values, political participation and relationship to the political system

1.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 will provide an overview of whom the millennials are and their relationship with politics. Its aim is to examine whether a transformation in millennials' values and behaviours has occurred and if these changes are driving the new patterns of political behaviour amongst the youngest members of society. The subsequent chapter will examine some of the explanations which attempt to explain why young people's electoral behaviour has transformed. Therefore, this particular chapter will limit itself to explaining what has changed about youth political participation and why young people feel disconnected from politics and democracy. Before conducting this analysis, it is necessary to define what political participation is and explain its difference to political engagement.

This chapter will begin by interrogating what the term political participation means. A consideration of how broadly political participation should be defined will form part of this analysis. This section will also discuss the different political acts which can be considered political, from the formal forms of participation which are traditionally associated with politics to new and alternative forms of political activity. Thereafter, a description of terms for contemporary generations will be conducted before we assess the values of millennials. Political disenchantment has been particularly associated with the millennial generation, which is why this thesis has focused on them as a cohort. Consequently, it is important to understand the characteristics of the millennials and whether their political values and behaviour significantly vary compared to other generations. This chapter will then provide a brief overview of millennials' relationship with politics and detail the decline of young people's participation in formal politics during the last 20 or so years. This chapter will then outline why it important that we understand youth participatory patterns and why their

return to formal political participation should be encouraged. Lastly, this chapter will outline proposals which may increase youth political participation.

1.2 Definition of political participation

Defining political participation is far from simple and any discussion requires an understanding that respects the expanding repertoires that contribute to contemporary political behaviour (Fox, 2014; Van Deth, 2014). At the same time, it should acknowledge that a definition that is too expansive will not capture the essence of political participation; classifying any and all behaviour as having potential political motives will lead to a definition of participation which is so broad that it fails to tell us anything about young people's political characteristics (Van Deth, 2001; 2007). Moreover, understanding what political participation is will allow the thesis to effectively evaluate young people's political behaviour. For example, if young people's political repertoires have been expanding or diversifying in recent times, then the claim that today's youth are apolitical may be due to an outdated understanding of political activity.

Political participation is always an activity. It is not passive engagement which increases political knowledge, such as reading media sources (Van Deth, 2001). Therefore, if there is a dichotomy between political activities and political awareness these concepts should be differentiated within the thesis. Political engagement and political participation are suitable terms for these different actions. Pontes et al (2018) convincingly argue that political engagement and political participation refer to two different components of political behaviour. They state that political engagement should be understood as 'having interest in, paying attention to, having knowledge or opinions about, being conscious of, proactive about and constantly informed about politics' (Pontes et al, 2018: 13). As such, political engagement refers to individual development such as having an interest in politics and/or gaining further knowledge of politics, while political participation can be considered involvement in a politically-aligned activity.

If political participation is an activity, then it raises the question, which activities can be considered forms of political participation? Previously, political science has quantitatively gauged young people's political participation by analysing turnout at elections or political party membership. These formal aspects of political participation are important factors when assessing young people's political behaviour. However, it has been claimed that concentrating on formal participation provides a narrow understanding of young people's political activities (Henn et al, 2002). Instead, political participation should be understood more broadly, or it risks underestimating young people's engagement with politics (Dalton, 2008; Fox, 2014; O'Toole et al, 2003; Quintelier, 2007). Various studies (Dalton, 2008; Hooghe and Oser, 2015; Norris, 2003; Quintelier, 2007) have suggested that young people's political participation is more wide-spread than rates of formal participation acknowledge, as young people engage with what is termed alternative political participation. Therefore, when evaluating young people's political participation, these alternative activities should also be considered.

Formal political participation in this thesis will refer to voting, being a member of a party or being a party activist. Formal political participation is also to referred to as institutionalised, electoral and elite-directed participation in the literature, terms which this thesis will occasionally adopt (Dalton, 2008; Fox, 2014; Grasso, 2014). Alternative forms of political participation in the thesis specifies demonstrating, signing petitions, donating money and forming groups which engage with single cause issues. Alternative political participation is also referred to as non-institutionalised, informal and elite-challenging participation in the literature, terms which will be used within this thesis, too (Dalton, 2008; Quintelier, 2007; Soler-i-Martí, 2015).

As we can see, formal political participation is anchored to institutional sites, where activity is restricted to attempts to influence political parties, political representatives and the political system. Alternative political participation may also attempt to influence political institutions. However, alternative political acts do not always need political institutions to mediate their messages and alternative political participation may attempt to influence

private actors, such as attempts by citizens to make corporations alter their behaviour via boycotts or petitions.

So that the thesis acknowledges the growth in the forms of activities that can be considered political this thesis will adopt Norris' broad definition of political participation. She states that political participation is 'any dimensions of social activity that are either designed directly to influence government agencies and the policy process, or indirectly to impact civil society, or which attempt to alter systematic patterns of social behavior' (Norris, 2002: 16). This expansive definition also demonstrates that political participation is an activity, which distinguishes it from political engagement, and highlights that it is attempting to influence or change some aspect of the social world.

1.3 Generational cohorts

Generational cohorts are often used to signify behavioural patterns and attitudes that are common to groups born in certain eras. Researchers have used generational terms to demonstrate how the millennials have distinct political values and behaviour from the generations that preceded it (Fox, 2014; Henn et al, 2002). Therefore, the thesis must specify the ranges and dates for the different generational cohorts so it can begin to understand if and how generation has impacted upon young people's political participation. Generational characteristics have been utilised since Mannheim (1952) argued that historical influences will socialise those born in certain eras towards broadly similar characteristics. In the United Kingdom (UK), five generational groups are commonly discussed: the pre-war generation (also known as the silent generation) - born between 1925 and 1945; the baby-boomers – born between 1946 and 1964; generation X – born between 1965 and 1980; generation Y (also known as the millennials) – born between 1981 and 2000; generation Z – born after 2000 (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012). While the birth dates for these different generations vary across different disciplines and researchers, these cohorts are commonly used to demonstrate collective behaviour for those born in certain eras (Wallop, 2014; BBC, 2017a). Researchers of youth political participation have occasionally used different cohort typologies and

birthdates to classify generational political behaviour (Grasso, 2014), however, this thesis will use the more commonly used generational terms listed above to classify the different behaviour, values and socioeconomic positions that are suggested to be specific to each generation.

As has been touched upon during the previous section, understanding variations in generational ideals and behaviours may provide answers to the question of why young people seem disenchanted with contemporary politics. The millennials, as we shall see in section five of this chapter, were the first wave of young people to demonstrate lower turnout at general elections in Great Britain and their lower electoral turnout has been a persistent theme of their political behaviour since 2001. In the next section, we will focus on the characteristics of generation Y and begin to understand how these have impacted on their political activity.

1.4 The Millennial generation

The millennials are often presented as a distinct generation across Western countries. Academics have positioned millennials as a recognisable generation, marked by their liberal social attitudes, their openness to difference and their inclination to use digital technology (Milkman, 2017; Rekker, 2018; Ross, 2018). In this section, the thesis will explore to what extent millennials are a distinct cohort, focusing on the values and attitudes that are said to typify them.

Nearly 50 years ago, Inglehart (1971) presented his postmaterial thesis. His theory, which we will discuss in more detail during the next chapter, was that a burgeoning cultural change amongst young people within increasingly affluent Western societies was evident. Many were no longer at risk from financial insecurity which meant they could search for and embrace new values based on autonomy, pluralism and liberalism. These postmaterial preferences have increasingly seen young people associated with openness to immigration, a concern for the environment, scepticism of elite institutions and the willingness to explore new forms of

democratic engagement. Inglehart's more recent research has also supported his initial view that values were undergoing swift transformations and that younger citizens were driving this change (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). This evidence suggests that significant amounts of young people have been transitioning towards more postmaterial and liberal values over the last half-century. Therefore, the millennials are not the pioneers of a radically different value set. Instead, there has been a continuation and expansion of progressive preferences among generation Y which originated in previous generational cohorts.

The postmaterial outlook of millennials is illustrated by their inclinations towards political participation and what policies they regard as important. Henn et al (2018) found an openness towards postmaterial values and unorthodox democratic arrangements among many millennials in Britain. Analysis of recent previous elections in Britain demonstrate that there is a contrast in the favoured political policies between millennials and older cohorts. Before the 2010 UK General Election, young people were likely to prioritise unemployment and the environment whereas the older generation were more concerned about terrorism and immigration (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012). Likewise, in the run-up to the 2017 General Election, young people were far more likely than the average voter to prioritise austerity or the environment as key political issues, and less likely than the average voter to see immigration as an important subject for political deliberation (Sloam and Eshan, 2017). Millennials, then, seem to have recognisable attitudes towards social policies and values that are distinct from older generations.

This value change has expanded to such an extent that millennials holding postmaterial values are increasingly viewed as a potent political body. There is evidence that young Europeans recognise themselves as a distinct cohort marked by their commitment to human rights, receptiveness to migration and their hostility towards nationalism (Rekker, 2018; Ross, 2018; Sloam and Henn, 2019). Young millennials in Britain have certainly begun to display a political coherence. For example, 75 percent of those aged 18-24 voted to remain in the European Union (EU) during the 2016 referendum (Ipsos MORI, 2016). 62 percent of those in the same age bracket voted for the Labour Party during the 2017 General Election (Ipsos MORI, 2017a).

Moreover, holding postmaterial values was often the greatest determinant in young people choosing to vote remain or support Corbyn's Labour party (Ehsan and Sloam, 2018; Sloam and Henn, 2019). Therefore, the transformation in social values broadly held among British millennials is now often accompanied by a tendency for young people to vote as a bloc.

It is important not to overemphasise the distinctiveness of progressive and postmaterial attitudes among millennials compared to older generations. While there are considerable differences in values between the pre-war generation and millennials in their social attitudes, these differences are significantly reduced when comparing generation Y to baby-boomers and generation X. For example, British millennials are far more accepting of immigration, homosexuality and critical of traditional gender roles than the pre-war generation, but the differences in attitudes regarding homosexuality and gender roles between generation Y and the two preceding generations are marginal (BSA, 2017; 2018; Ipsos MORI, 2017b). Indeed, the data from the BSA (2018) survey suggests that generation X are slightly more supportive of non-traditional gender roles than the millennials. This supports the claim that millennials are a progressive and postmaterial generation, yet they are not extraordinary or radical in their attitudes.

However, some research suggests that millennials are more authoritarian and less progressive than their generational predecessors. Grasso et al (2017) found that there has been increase in right-wing and authoritarian views among some members of generation Y. Many millennials within Western countries are also prepared to swap democratic rule for an authoritarian leader who does not stand for an election. Indeed, in Britain, millennials are the generation which are least likely to believe that living in a democracy is essential (Foa and Mounk, 2016). British millennials are also the generation least likely to support government redistribution of wealth (Ipsos MORI, 2017b). These findings undermine the claim generation Y are a liberal, postmaterial generation as many seem to be gravitating towards authoritarian forms of government and right-wing economics.

The extent to which postmaterial and cosmopolitan values are driving political orientations amongst millennials in Western countries should also be considered. Across Europe and the United States (US), there has been noticeable youth support for nationalist-populist political representatives. The millennials who have opted for nationalist-populists have often been drawn from white working-class communities who have not experienced the benefits of globalisation and are concerned by cultural changes driven by liberal immigration policies (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). The young people who are opposed to postmaterial values are voting for anti-globalisation parties in significant numbers. For example, 44 percent of France's 18-24 year olds voted for Marine Le Pen in the second round of the 2017 French Presidential Election (Kentish, 2017), 30 per cent of those aged 29 or younger voted for the Freedom Party in the 2017 Austrian Parliamentary Elections (SORA, 2017) and over 50 percent of 18-34 year olds voted for either League or the Five Star Movement in the 2018 Italian General Election (Ipsos, 2018). Thus, millennials are not uniformly attracted to causes espousing progressive beliefs, many are rejecting these attitudes in favour of nationalist-populist parties which reject postmaterial values.

We should also consider that the homogeneity of generational characteristics may be further undermined by the potential of period, cohort and life-cycle effects within each generation. These effects could mean that individuals within a given generational group are differentiated by social influences which alter their values, opinions and activities.

Changes in socio-economic and cultural environments or significant events could lead to period effects, which may mean that older millennials have different values to younger millennials. The increased prevalence of digital media in recent years may create differences between the political repertoires of mature and young millennials as the latter have been socialised via different media conduits and may prefer forms of online activism to the former (Collin, 2015; Oser et al, 2013). Similarly, the growth of young people attending university in the UK (House of Commons, 2019) – which raises the potential of an individual voting (Melo and Stockemer, 2014) – means that older millennials are less likely to vote than younger millennials because fewer of them entered higher education compared to later members of

their generation. Furthermore, significant events, such as the 2008 recession as well as Brexit, and the political fallout from these events, such as the breakdown in the economic consensus between major political parties and the rise of national populism, means that older and younger millennials negotiated significantly different political milieus during their formative years. Thus, historical political developments may produce different forms of political socialisation within a generation (Bartels and Jackman, 2014; Grasso, 2014).

Individuals' interpretations of past and present phenomena, and their political opinions and preferences may also undergo transformation as they grow older. While this notion underpins the variations between different generations, this cohort effect could also happen within a generational group, too. For example, evidence suggests that people grow more politically conservative as they age (Tilley and Evans, 2014). Such a change in values may mean that an older millennial has significantly different beliefs and pursues different political activities than when they had just become eligible to vote or compared to a younger millennial. Indeed, while no research could be found that investigated this specific point, it seems logical to speculate that a 34 year old may well have different opinions about the reasons driving youth political disengagement than they themselves possessed as an 18 year old.

Reflection on the boundaries between youthhood and adulthood is also required in evaluations of millennials' relationship to the political system. Some contemporary millennials could be considered young people, others, particularly the oldest millennials, may not be thought of as still residing in youthhood. Providing a clear demarcation between youthhood and adulthood is not simple, however, and whether one belongs to one of these groups is driven by social factors. For example, life-cycle effects, such as decreased dependency on family members or becoming married, may produce the feeling that a person has entered adulthood (Flanagan et al, 2012). The delay millennials experience compared to previous generations in gaining these markers of adulthood (Gardiner, 2016a) means that youthhood may have extended past the age previously understood as becoming an adult (Sawyer et al, 2018). More pertinent to the examination of differences between individuals within generational groups raised here is that a feeling of adulthood is a subjective

experience. Two individuals of the same age may feel differently about whether they consider themselves a young person or not, particularly if they have disparate socioeconomic circumstances (Moreno and Urraco, 2018). Indeed, it seems that class is an important consideration in the experience of believing oneself to be an adult as those with poor finances and opportunities are likely to feel like a young person for longer than someone who has secure employment and owns their own home (Margot, 2007) - a point we will investigate in more detail in 3.6 below.

In light of the somewhat contradictory research about millennials, it is difficult to specify accurately what typifies British millennials. There is considerable evidence that many hold liberal attitudes and hold postmaterial orientations. Millennials are more comfortable with homosexuality and high levels of immigration than older cohorts. However, except for immigration, their views are not peculiar and only marginally deviate from the two generations which came before them. Furthermore, there is contrary evidence which demonstrates that many millennials' hold authoritarian views, reject egalitarian economics and are hostile to postmaterial values. This does not negate the postmaterial thesis, Inglehart has consistently stressed that young people holding postmaterial values only form a proportion of youth (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). The research discussed in this section does suggest, though, that we should be cautious in generalising about how we characterise millennials or if we even can even bestow a whole generation with uniform attributes. We should also note millennials' increasing openness to non-democratic rule or nationalist-populist parties, as this suggests a deep unhappiness with current democratic arrangements. Moreover, we have examined some issues surrounding life-cycle, period and cohort effects. These suggest that values, preferences and acts may change over the passage of time and would lead to significant differences between the outlook of older and younger members of a generation. This further reduces the effectiveness of understanding individuals via their membership of a generation. Moreover, these points required consideration in how this thesis approached the analysis of the participants in this study – this discussion is continued in more detail in 4.6.2. In the next section, the thesis will begin to explore millennial political participation in more detail and document their disillusionment with politics.

1.5 Young people's reluctance to engage with formal politics

In this section, the thesis will document young people's disconnection from formal political participation. In the UK, young people's turnout witnessed a noticeable downturn from 1997 onwards, though there is evidence that youth participation is now returning to pre-decline turnout figures. British youth's rejection of formal politics forms part of a broader scepticism surrounding democratic participation and institutions among all age groups across much of the world. On average, only 43 percent of citizens across 28 of the most developed countries in the world trust their government (Edelman, 2018) and turnout at elections has fallen significantly across the globe since the early 1990s (Solijonov, 2016). Moreover, many people demonstrate a preference for dictatorial leaders who do not hold elections (Foa and Mounk, 2017). Dissatisfaction with political institutions is particularly evident among young people; contemporary youth in Europe and the US are more likely than older groups to agree that democracy is a bad way to run their country and the least likely age cohort to agree that it is essential for their country to be democratically governed (Foa and Mounk, 2016).

Young people in Britain, aged 18-24, are demonstrating new patterns of political behaviour, marked by a reluctance to engage with formal politics (Henn and Foard, 2014a; McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013; Sloam, 2013). This is clearly evidenced by young people's low turnout at consecutive general elections. Since 1970 – when the age of eligibility to vote in the UK was lowered to 18 from 21 – until 1992, young people's turnout at general elections was above 60 percent (Dempsey, 2017). Young people's turnout during these years was always lower than the average turnout of all age groups and was consistently lower than any other age cohort. However, a significant majority of young people still voted and signalled their democratic preferences. In 1997, young people's turnout (51 percent) dropped below 60 percent for the first time and was followed by further decreases to 39 percent in 2001 and 37 percent in 2005 (Ipsos MORI, 1997; 2001; 2005). Young people's turnout showed a small increase to 44 percent at the 2010 general election before dropping slightly to 43 percent at

the 2015 general election, but even these increases meant youth turnout was still significantly reduced relative to the pre-1997 general elections (Ipsos MORI, 2010; 2015).

However, at the 2016 EU Referendum young people's turnout significantly increased to 60 percent (Ipsos MORI, 2016). This increase in youth turnout was replicated at the 2017 General Election when 64 percent of young people turned out to vote (Ipsos MORI, 2017a). This suggested that young people were re-engaging with formal politics once again and the term 'youthquake' was used to describe the 2017 General Election due to the influence the youth vote had on the resurgence in Labour's vote share – 62 percent of 18-24 year olds voted for Labour - and the eventual composition of parliament (Sloam and Ehsan, 2017).

Yet, doubt was cast upon these relatively high turnout figures when the British Election Study's (BES) survey suggested that only around 43 percent of 18-24 year olds had turned out in 2017 and that more dramatic increases in turnout were registered among the 25-34 and 35-44 age cohorts (Prosser et al, 2018). This research is considered the gold standard of turnout analysis as it validates its results by comparing self-reported turnout against the electoral register, though it only had a sample size of 162 for 18-24 year olds. While the authors of the BES survey acknowledged that the low sample size of 18-24 year olds means that these turnout figures are not precise, they state that '[w]here we can be confident is that these results show no evidence […] of a dramatic rise in youth turnout in 2017' (Prosser et al, 2018: np).

Similarly, a British Social Attitudes paper concluded that only five percent more young people voted in 2017 than had done two years previously, casting doubts about whether the 2017 was an extraordinary year for youth turnout in Britain. However, the same analysis revealed that the 61 percent turnout in 2017 was the same as turnout amongst this age group in 1997 and an increase of nearly 20 percent on the amount of 18-24 year olds who voted in 2001 (Curtice and Simpson, 2018). Therefore, Curtice and Simpson (2018) suggest that the extremely low youth turnouts witnessed in the early and mid-noughties were a temporary

phase of young people's political participation rather than a permanent feature as turnout, according to their analysis, had been consistently increasing since 2010.

Sturgis and Jennings (2018), meanwhile, support the idea that a youthquake did transpire in 2017 but found it was less dramatic than initial polls estimated. They argue that their analysis of the Understanding Society Survey finds that there was an eight percent increase in youth turnout between 2015 and 2017. This study's sample size for 18-24 year olds was 919, which is considerably larger than the BES sample. However, it does not validate turnout by checking electoral records, which the BES research did. Sturgis and Jennings argue that while this increase is not as big as some studies have found, it does suggest that a youthquake did occur in 2017.

The contested turnout estimates for young people was not the only reason why the 2017 General Election was associated with the term 'youthquake'. Youthquake was also used to describe the homogenisation of young people as a voting bloc. For example, the Labour party gained a significant amount of youth voters and young students were instrumental in the elections of several individual MPs (Ehsan et al, 2018). There is also scepticism about the BES's finding (Kellner, 2018; Stewart et al, 2018) and other factors exist – such as an increase in reported youth political interest (Curtice and Simpson, 2018) and certainty to vote (Sloam, 2017), and the record amounts of young people registering to vote (Henn and Hart, 2017) - which indicate young people were more likely to participate in the 2017 General Election than in recent previous elections. The unique significance of the EU referendum and the importance of remaining in the EU to those aged 18-24 – 75 percent of youth voted remain (Ipsos MORI, 2016) – seems to have motivated young people's high referendum turnout.

Yet, it is not clear if young people's turnout at the 2017 General Election continued a significant upsurge in youth political participation first witnessed in the EU referendum or maintained the gradual rebound of youth electoral turnout since 2010. Firmer conclusions about some aspects of youth turnout can be drawn, however. Youth turnout at elections

significantly lags behind older cohorts and means young people are underrepresented when choosing the direction that their country, community or region moves in.

As the definition supplied above states, though, formal politics consists of behaviour beyond turning out to vote. Analysis of political party membership demonstrates that young people are still sceptical about the relevance of aspects of Westminster politics. Young people are significantly less likely to be a member of a political party than those whom are older. Indeed, 18-24 year olds only account for between four and six percent of party members for the Scottish National Party, Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Yet, people aged 65 or more account for between 29 and 44 percent of members amongst these same four parties (Bale et al, 2018). Moreover, despite Labour gaining the majority of youth votes in 2017 (Sloam and Ehsan, 2017), 18-24 year olds only make up four per cent of their membership - the lowest of the four largest parties in Westminster (Bale et al, 2018).

So, while young people may have increased their electoral participation in 2017 many are still not convinced that political party membership is beneficial. The reasons for young people's decision not to join a party is uncertain, but the lack of opportunities to shape party policy, the weakening of attachment to political parties in recent years and the low diversity among existing members – the majority of existing members are likely to be white, middle-aged, middle class and male - may discourage youth from membership of a political party (Bale, 2017; Bale et al, 2018; Whiteley, 2009).

Moreover, young people are the least likely of all age categories to feel attachment to a particular political party or to participate in an activity which influences politics (Hansard, 2015). A significant amount of this unhappiness with formal politics stems from a growing cynicism of politics and politicians (Hay, 2007; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Stoker, 2006; 2012). As Stoker (2012: 121) warns, '[t]he mood of antipolitics that has captured the popular zeitgeist has already begun to have serious consequences. Politicians have started to respond to this world of antipolitics in ways that are beginning to significantly undermine the UK's capacity

for collective and democratic decision making.' Young people, though, are particularly despondent about politicians' intentions. As Henn and Foard's (2014a) investigation found, the large majority of young people were sceptical of politicians' motives, believing that politicians would renege on promises made during an election campaign and that politicians were more interested in winning power than governing afterwards.

Moreover, Henn and Weinstein's (2006) study found that young people believed that the views of British youth were low on the political agenda which decreased the likelihood that they engage with formal politics. Young people are also sceptical that they can influence local politics, about whether parliament is essential to democracy (Hansard Society, 2015), that the democratic procedure can make a meaningful difference to the governance of the country and that election outcomes are positive (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Except for the over 65s, they are also the least likely age group to want to get involved in politics locally, to get involved in politics nationally or to feel they can influence politics at a national level (Hansard Society, 2015). Indeed, those aged 24 or under are significantly less likely to be on the electoral roll than those who are aged above 35; only 70.2 percent of 20-24 year olds are registered compared to 95 percent of those aged over 65 (Electoral Commission, 2014).

In summary, this initial review of young people's under-representation in formal politics has demonstrated that recent youth cohorts have significant misgivings about politics. While there has been considerable despondency with politics and the political system across all age cohorts, young people's disconnect from formal participation is far more acute. Turnout at elections by the youngest age group was extremely low after the turn of the millennium and while this has shown encouraging signs of improvement since 2010, young people's aversion to formal political participation is still apparent. Young people are significantly less likely to vote, or be a member of, or report strong attachment to, a political party than older age groups. Moreover, young people's attitudes to the political system and its representatives is broadly negative. They report a significant distrust of political actors and feel that they are unable to influence a political system which seems remote, unappealing and makes no

tangible difference to their lives. Indeed, it would seem that the relationship between formal politics and young people is uniformly negative.

1.6 Why is it important that we investigate young people's changing political values and behaviour?

Encouraging youth to participate is an important endeavour. Young people's faith in democracy is diminishing and that should be a concern for people who want to live in a fair and free society. Democracy provides citizens with a chance to influence the direction of our societies, but it also provides us with more liberty and security than other political systems have previously provided (Stoker, 2006). A politically disengaged youth could signal long-term consequences for the future of democracy, however. For Sloam (2012a: 10), '[t]he disconnection between young people and electoral politics has created a dangerous divide, undermining the social contract and young people's sense of citizenship.' Young people see themselves as having little influence on the outcomes of political decisions which leaves them situated outside normative relationships to citizenship. Such marginalisation, in Sloam's (2012a) opinion, could lead to young people's disillusionment with politics becoming permanent, further undermining democracy. Voting and non-voting is a habitual act, those who don't start voting when they are young are less likely to vote as they grow older (Birch et al, 2013). Therefore, a politically disengaged youth may result in larger swathes of the population not using their democratic rights, undermining the viability of democratic arrangements.

Moreover, to understand the future of politics we have to understand how new generations relate to and conceptualise politics as they will be the agents of political change (Sloam, 2012a). So, not only is it important that everyone is included in political decisions and democratic arrangements, it is also crucial to gain an insight into new generations' understanding of the political to comprehend the future direction of democracy and how citizenship is being reconceptualised by young people. Political values and behaviour are demonstrably changing for significant sections of the population - particularly young people

(Dalton, 2008; Hooghe and Oser, 2015; Inglehart, 1990). So, it is critical that these new attitudes and the supply-side of politics are explored or citizenship and democracy may become irrelevant to those who prefer new forms of political engagement and participation, leaving young people, in particular, politically marginalised (Sloam, 2012a).

Whether the decline in voting and the growth of alternative forms of politics is a uniformly positive development should be subject to scrutiny, however. Young people's disconnection from formal political participation has contributed to them being marginalised by governments (Birch et al, 2013). The asymmetrical relationship which has developed between young and old people has led to a democratic divide between age cohorts. Berry (2012: 15) has argued that due to politicians' prioritisation of mature voters and the unequal power older age cohorts possess, a hierarchy of political power, based on age, has taken root in the UK which is 'harmful to democracy'. Democratic participation is predicated on the formal equality of one person, one vote, but the oldest cohorts now hold significantly more political power because of their large cohort size relative to younger cohorts and youth abstention at general elections (Berry, 2012). At the 2015 General Election, the baby-boomer generation had an electoral advantage of three million more votes than generation X and four million more than the millennials (Gardiner, 2016b), while the age of the median voter will only increase in the foreseeable future (Berry, 2012).

While it is true that people within cohorts are not uniform in their views or voting intentions, there is growing body of evidence which demonstrates that values (Inglehart, 1990; Dalton, 2008) and political preferences (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012; Sloam and Ehsan, 2017) are increasingly related to age. If values continue to be polarised between the young and the old, but the latter retain or increase their monopoly on political power, then society will conceivably travel towards gerontocratic rule. Indeed, there is already evidence that older cohorts are being privileged by political parties, contributing to economic disparity between the youngest and oldest cohorts (Birch and Lodge, 2015; Gardiner, 2016a). Politicians will rationally target policies at groups who have high turnout at elections (Duff and Wright, 2015; Mahler, 2008) and low-voting blocs are often targeted for retrenchment of public expenditure

(Birch et al, 2013; Sloam, 2013). An increase in voter turnout by young people could offset governments discriminating against youth in future policy decisions.

Young people doubt their political efficacy and claim this has led them to their disconnect from formal politics, but good reasons exist for young people to be optimistic about their ability to influence governments. For example, increased youth participation during the 2010 General Election, could have changed which MP was elected in up to 83 constituencies (Intergenerational Foundation, 2015). The ability to influence the outcome of so many constituencies would make politicians attentive to young people's opinions and needs. Indeed, while there are conflicting reports of young people's turnout in 2017, more attention was paid to them as group when it was presumed that youth turnout had denied the Conservatives their expected majority. The months after the 2017 election saw the Conservative party have significant discussions about how to attract young voters and meant that the political system was again paying attention to youth issues (Collinson and Topham, 2017; Maidment, 2017; Watts, 2017). If young people vote in higher numbers, it is likely political parties will broaden their policies to include proposals that would encourage young adulthoods to vote for them.

This section has made some evidenced claims as to why young people's withdrawal from formal electoral politics should be investigated and, more importantly, why it should be reversed. Young people who don't vote at their first opportunity may never become active citizens and there is growing evidence that this retreat from formal political participation is damaging their future as it leads to economic marginalisation. Claims that young people are participating in new forms of politics in non-institutional settings may be true, but if youth are being ignored in social policy outcomes and their chances in life are suffering as a result, then the positiveness of withdrawing from formal politics should certainly be questioned. Therefore, ways of making institutional politics more appealing to young people will benefit both contemporary youths and the sustainability of democratic life.

1.7 Encouraging young people to participate in politics

There have been various approaches suggested to promote a sense of citizenship and increase political participation amongst youth. There is also uniform agreement amongst stakeholders that it is the supply of politics of that requires modification to achieve these aims. Consequently, suggestions have mostly focused on shaping the political system to make it more appealing and easier to navigate for young people. How this can be achieved will be documented in this section.

A common suggestion to improve youth political participation within the literature is to improve the ways in which youth contribute to, and are considered within, the political process. The youth wings of political parties should be updated to provide youth with the opportunity to shape policy and reflect the rise in single issue concerns among younger generations (Mycock and Tonge, 2012; Rainsford, 2014). Similarly, youth councils should be given a greater voice in shaping the policy of governments (Stoker, 2014). It has also been opined that youth advisory panels could be organised which would allow youths to scrutinise new policies or that all new polices are subject to impact assessments evaluating how they will affect young people (YCC, 2009). Decentralising the political system and making politics more localised has likewise been suggested as a method to attract youth to formal politics (Sloam, 2007). Thus, empowering young people is believed to be a significant aspect of increasing young people's political engagement.

There have also been calls to improve communication between politicians and young people. It has been argued that young people would be more likely to engage with politics if politicians demonstrated a greater inclination to understand their viewpoints and lives (Sloam, 2007). However, this must be reflected within policy outcomes, which need to engage with the issues that afflict young people (Chareka and Sears, 2006; Henn and Oldfield, 2016). Facilitating an increase in more young politicians may also bring attention to the issues that afflict youths (Mycock and Tonge, 2014). Therefore, politicians need to spend more time engaging with young people, so that they can understand why young people are concerned about certain

issues. This will only be beneficial, though, if policy outcomes seek to tackle the concerns young people have.

Creating a civic spirit amongst young people has also been at the forefront of proposals to increase youth political participation. The parliamentary Crick Report suggested that citizenship education was the primary method to encourage civic engagement and political participation. It recommended the mandatory promotion of citizenship within the curriculum to provide young people with a political and civic ethos (QCA, 1998). There has been widespread agreement with the suggestions of the Crick Report. Increasing knowledge about the political system will increase the confidence of young people when they come to participate in political activities (Kisby and Sloam, 2009; 2014; Mycock and Tonge, 2014; Sloam and Henn, 2019). Encouraging students to actively participate within citizenship classes, rather than being passively taught, will complement the participatory nature of politics while making citizenship classes more enjoyable and relevant to young people (Kisby and Sloam, 2009; YCC, 2009). A civic spirit could also be increased by encouraging young people to become involved in civic and voluntary organisations, which may then translate into greater political participation (McFarland and Thomas, 2006; YCC, 2009).

Furthermore, several researchers have recommended administrative reforms which have sought to make voting more attractive to youth or ingrain a civic responsibility within young adulthoods. Lowering the voting age to 16 may lead to stronger political socialisation as first-time voters are likely to be living at home and still attending school (Berry and Kippin 2014). It may also increase awareness of youth issues among politicians (Wagner et al, 2012). Making registering to vote simpler and the process of voting easier may also increase political participation. Offering or insisting that schools register students on the electoral roll would mean that young people have a simpler path to voting (Mycock and Tonge, 2014; YCC, 2009). Using technology to remind people it was election day (YCC, 2009) and allowing them to vote electronically would also be welcomed by contemporary youth (Electoral Commission, 2002). Proportional voting systems tend to have higher turn-out rates and so moving away from the first-past-the-post to a proportional voting system may boost young people's attendance at

the polling booth (Electoral Commission, 2002). Lastly, there have been suggestions that compulsory voting when an individual is first eligible would ensure that young people's views are represented and ensure their turnout on election day (Birch and Lodge, 2015).

As this section has illustrated, there are several suggestions to increasing youth turnout. Those strongly advocated by most researchers have sought to place the onus on the supply-side of politics. In other words, if young people are rejecting politics, then it is up to the political system and politicians to make efforts to encourage young people to vote. Furthermore, efforts need to be made to empower young people so they can become active participants within politics and contribute to the formulation of strategies to improve the lives of youths. Nevertheless, recommendations also include providing young people with confidence and knowledge about politics through educational establishments and encouraging youth voting through technical alterations to the political system. In Chapter 7 we will interrogate these suggestions alongside the suggestions made by the study's participants, evaluating how successful such reforms can be in removing barriers to political participation.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an initial exploration of millennials and their scepticism towards formal political processes and their institutions. It began by outlining what political participation is and delineating it from political engagement. It then moved to a discussion about the expansion of alternative political participation in young people's repertoires. These sections provided an initial understanding of the expansions in definitions of political participation that have occurred in recent years.

The next two sections built upon the transformations in youth political activity by investigating generational characteristics and evaluating whether the millennials are a distinct generation. This supplied us with the time spans which define each generation and developed

the idea that generational characteristics may influence political values and behaviours. The analysis conducted of the millennial generation's attributes suggests that we should be cautious in over-prescribing generation Y with homogenous attitudes and practices as there is conflicting information about the characteristics of the millennials. However, there was considerable agreement between many of the studies. So, we can make some generalisations about millennials even if we must caveat any such claims.

Many millennials embody postmaterial, pluralistic and liberal attitudes. Significant numbers of generation Y are open to globalising features of contemporary society, such as anti-nationalism and inward migration, and have united as a political bloc to achieve these aims. Many within this generation are positive about homosexuality, non-traditional gender roles and diversity. Across many indicators the millennials are more progressive than the older generations. Yet, we should not endow them with too much distinctiveness as a cohort as there has been a noticeable trend towards liberal attitudes across generation X and the baby-boomers, too. Moreover, millennials are not uniform in their beliefs and significant numbers of millennials are not pursuing postmaterial aims.

This chapter also highlighted that many millennials are deeply frustrated with contemporary politics. Youth turnout at general elections significantly decreased across the noughties and while in Britain this has rebounded, millennials still exhibit a deep scepticism of politics. The political system appears to young people as unresponsive, delivering little positive change. Not only has millennials' formal political participation become more uncertain, their attitude towards politics and politicians is, for the most part, negative. Millennials distrust politicians and feel that they are part of an unreachable elite who have little concern for issues that concern young people. Consequently, young people feel excluded from political discussions and marginalised from the political system and its representatives. It has been suggested that, in response, significant numbers of millennials are turning away from orthodox modes of politics and turning towards politics located in non-institutional settings.

This chapter went on to discuss the negative consequences of young people's declining presence in formal politics. It suggested why this should be investigated and why remedying this participatory malaise is important for retaining the formal equality of democracy. Namely, that young people's socioeconomic status and opportunities in life may suffer if youth continue to be under-represented in formal politics. Moreover, 1.5 presented reasons why young people can be optimistic about participating in politics and utilise increased turnout to combat the aspects of politics they hold negatively. We also examined proposals which seek to encourage youth political participation, which will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

The aim of this chapter was to provide initial information about millennials' political participation. These discussions were important for meeting each of the research aims of the thesis. Outlining millennials' declining political participation demonstrated that they are suffering unequal access to political participation. Highlighting the values of millennials provides some indication for why they are eschewing formal politics and pursuing alternative modes of political participation. However, the thesis has also provided arguments for why reversing youths' declining attendance at elections is important for young people and democracy. Thus, this chapter confirms that finding ways to increase youth political participation is a necessary undertaking. The focus on how academics have suggested improving youth political participation was also necessary to meet research aim 3, as the recommendations to overcome barriers to political participation included in Chapter 7 and the conclusion will be developed from some of these existing sources.

Chapter 2: Why are millennials rejecting formal politics?

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 will encompass a discussion of a broad range of explanations which surround why many young people are not participating in formal politics. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate which theories best explain young people's rejection of formal politics as this will inform part of the analysis for understanding how barriers to political participation are erected. The explanations for youth political disengagement are complex and the accounts are often divergent. The aim of this chapter is to detail the some of these various explanations and evaluate their veracity. This chapter will begin by considering both life-cycle effect and generation effect theories as potential (rival) explanations of youth political engagement. Neither provide conclusive answers to why young people are rejecting formal political participation, but nor can the explanations they provide be discounted. An examination of a period effect will not be conducted as it is rarely used as an explanation to understand political engagement, but brief critiques of a period effect will be included in the discussions over life-cycle and generational effect. The discussion will then progress to evaluating whether young people are apathetic about politics or are alienated from politics. Thereafter, the different but related claim that young people are turning to alternative forms of political participation will be analysed. This will also draw upon the theory of postmaterialism which has been used as a conceptual tool for political scientists to understand transformations in political behaviour. Evidence will be deployed to evaluate the claim that young people are performing alternative political activities.

2.2 Life-cycle effect

Life-cycle theory consists of two connected aspects. Firstly, that today's young people are 'maturing' at a later age compared to previous generations. So, for instance, youth are getting married, gaining secure employment and settled accommodation at later ages than was the

case for older cohorts. Second, that this delay in achieving these markers of adulthood has repercussions for young people's voting behaviour and political interest. It is claimed that achieving these markers of adulthood encourage positive political attitudes and behaviour and because obtaining them is being delayed contemporary young people do not have the stimulus to engage with politics at the age previous generations did.

Whether life-cycle effect theory provides a conclusive response to young people's underrepresentation in formal politics is hampered by the lack of longitudinal studies that investigate its applicability (Norris, 2003). Life-cycle effect theory focuses on a temporary difference in attitude as people navigate through different stages of their life. Whereas proponents of generational effect identify a permanent change in the attitudes and norms of the contemporary generation, life-cycle sees the norms of participation as staying the same, but that it might take the new contemporary generations a longer time to acquire these norms (Flanagan et al, 2012; Phelps, 2004; Quintelier, 2007). Life-cycle effects can explain a reduction in young people's political participation through changing patterns of life experiences. As each individual traverses through the life-cycle they have various experiences which inform and expose them to different factors which encourage certain choices and tacit modes of action, including political participation (Norris, 2003).

The reason that young people are not voting, according to life-cycle effect theory, is that the journey between youthhood and becoming a young adult has increased from previous generations. As Flanagan et al (2012: 30) suggest, '[c]ompared with earlier generations, contemporary youth take longer to find steady work, establish households and families and set down roots in local communities.' In other words, the formal and informal predicators of political participation are likely to be achieved by people at a later stage in their life compared to previous generations. Young people will eventually begin to participate politically when their life-cycle has reached the right stage (Flanagan et al, 2012).

Life-cycle theorists have attached both negative and positive connotations over young people's role in this delay in reaching adulthood. Kimberlee (2002), who does not advocate this position, explains that some commentators stress the agency of contemporary youngsters in reaching adulthood. This negative view of young people, therefore, stresses that they have made a choice in delaying the transition to adulthood. Other theorists, such as Flanagan et al (2012), have argued that structural influences which are generally bound up with macro-economic changes have caused this delay and that young people are just reacting to the socioeconomic fluctuations they have been presented with. Evidence supports the suggestion that socioeconomic conditions are worsening for many British youth and that structural factors outside the control of young people are causing delays to the life-cycle (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Gardiner, 2016a). Young people have been suffering stagnating wages since the mid-noughties and poor wage progression is a permanent feature of employed young people (Gardiner and Gregg, 2017). Moreover, young adults are finding themselves priced out of homeownership and forced to live in privately rented accommodation which takes a higher percentage of wages than was the case for older cohorts when they were young (Corlett and Judge, 2017).

While there may be a lack of longitudinal data to absolutely confirm or deny the existence of the life-cycle effect, there is empirical evidence which makes a life-cycle effect a conceivable explanation for lower formal political participation. Quintelier's (2007) analysis of Canada and various European countries has found that a number of social factors which denote maturity and reaching adulthood, such as being married, educational achievement and experience of work, encourage voting. Indeed, except for the education level an individual achieves and age (which, of course, is related to life-cycle experiences) life-cycle factors cause the most variance in voting.

Norris' (2003) investigation which uses the data collected from 15 countries, whose political systems range from those which are Post-Communist to those which are Liberal, has found that in all 15 countries there is evidence of a life-cycle effect causing lower rates of political participation amongst the young. Finding such a uniform pattern across 15 countries whose

political, cultural and socioeconomic structures are so wide-ranging undermines the idea of lower political participation being the result of a period effect. If this turnout was due to a period effect, then we would expect to see variances across regions as key events will impact the political participation of those in these areas in different ways.

Smets' (2016) study of Britain found evidence of a life-cycle effect in voting patterns. Getting married, cohabiting and obtaining homeownership all increase the likelihood of voting. Residential stability and being in employment also positively influence the likelihood of voting, though these findings are not statistically significant. Thus, contemporary trends for delaying obtaining these markers of adulthood may be contributing to a decrease in turnout amongst the youngest cohorts. Flanagan et al's (2012) study of life-cycle effects in the US has similarly found evidence that a life-cycle effect is occurring. Drawing upon a rare longitudinal study, they found that as people grew older, they were more likely to participate in formal politics. Those who were between the ages of 19 and 29 were likely to be less active and more ponderous about formal politics whereas when these same people were aged between 27 and 37 they more likely to vote or engage in politics formally. Moreover, at the start of the study those who were older were more likely to participate in all civic activities than those who resided in the younger age categories.

Emmenegger et al's (2017) study of German citizens has also illustrated the influence that employment in the early stages of adulthood has on political interest. Their study suggests that peoples' political interest is partly influenced by their social experiences when young adults. Emmenegger et al (2017) found that young people who were not employed were less likely to develop an interest in politics. Conversely, once middle-age has been reached, being unemployed does not curtail existing political interest. Therefore, political attitudes are formulated in early adulthood and seem to persist throughout a person's life. This demonstrates one of the negative consequences of a delayed transition to adulthood for contemporary young people. Studies have illustrated that both political interest (Prior, 2010) and voting (Cutts et al, 2009; Dinas, 2012; Gerber et al, 2003) is habitual. If young people are

less likely to have an interest in politics or vote due to a delayed life-cycle, there is a significant chance that they will not acquire these attitudes or behaviours in later life.

It would appear, consequently, that there is widespread evidence - even if not conclusive or overwhelming - that life-cycle effects have an influence on political participation. Of the studies concerning life-cycle found within the review of literature, all find significant evidence that supports life-cycle effects. Contemporary young people's transition towards markers of adulthood are being delayed compared to previous generations and youthhood seems to be extending beyond what was typical for older cohorts at the same age. Much of this delay seems to arise from changes to structural factors rather than differences in youth's agency. Furthermore, achieving these markers of adulthood has, in many cases, a positive influence on the likelihood of voting. This is problematic, however, as other studies discussed in this section have demonstrated that political interest and voting are often learned behaviours that become habitual. If young people are not becoming interested in politics and are not voting at their earliest opportunity, then it seems likely that they will not develop this trait at later points in their lives. Consequently, we may be seeing an ongoing and enduring democratic divide.

2.3 Generational effect

A generational explanation of the declining participation of young people at UK elections depicts participatory withdrawal as the result of living in an original political and social milieu which has fostered a lower propensity amongst young people to vote. In other words, contemporary young people have experienced a political socialisation which has given them the implicit understanding to not engage with politics formally and regard politics with suspicion and distrust (Kimberlee, 2002). As Henn et al (2005) have explained, there are fewer traditional cleavages which provide information about politics and give cues about whom to vote for. Each new generation inhabits a different political and social environment from those before and with the rapid fluctuations which are occurring within late modernity, young people are forming different participatory habits. Employment has become decoupled from

class identity in post-industrial societies which reduces interest in politics and political party alignment (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). As O'Toole (2003: 75) summarises, 'the political issues and arenas familiar to other, older, generations as foci and sites of political activity may well have little relevance to young people.' For Phelps (2004), generational effect should also be distinguished from a life-cycle effect as the latter impacts on all age groups and is a temporary stage which dissipates with age, whereas the former is unique for each generation and permanently socialises them in a particular pattern of behaviour and engagement with politics.

Generational effect advocates are hampered in their ability to prove that a generational effect is occurring as they need longitudinal data to display whether contemporary young people are generationally different to older cohorts and exhibit permanently differing patterns of political participation (Norris, 2003). As disengagement with formal politics by young people is a fairly recent occurrence it is hard to say whether this slump in turnout is a temporary phenomenon which could be described as a life-cycle effect or a permanent manifestation which falls within the parameters of a generational explanation (Russell et al, 2002; Franklin et al, 2004). Thus, we must remember that we are looking for a norm of non-participation to be created and sustained among young people rather than transitory fluctuations which cause participation rates to temporarily decline.

Phelps (2004) is one scholar who has suggested that a generational effect is occurring. Firstly, he highlights the large decline in overall voter turnout between 1992 and 1997 which continued to vastly decrease at the 2001 general election and compares it to the relatively steady turnout levels at UK elections since 1964. He then draws attention to the fact that amongst the general decrease in total voter turnout, the two youngest age groups (18-24 and 25-34) have shown the largest decrease in electoral participation. For Phelps (2004: 242), this 'clearly shows the growing age gap in voter turnout is a consequence of changing political behaviour amongst the younger sections of the population.' Phelps stresses that these results demonstrate a generational effect rather than a life-cycle effect as participation amongst 25-34 year olds, if subjected to a life-cycle effect, should increase as individuals begin to vote as

they get older. Instead, as Phelps points out, the 25-34 year olds' participatory levels have decreased proportionally further than the 18-24 year olds even if the latter group have a lower turnout than the former. Moreover, this participatory decrease amongst younger people cannot be attributed to a period effect in which all age groups demonstrate an increasing disinclination to vote as the two younger age groups' decrease in formal participation has occurred more rapidly and is more persistent than is the case for older age groups. In other words, even though the total turnout at general elections has fallen among all age groups it is far more pronounced amongst the younger cohorts.

Dalton's (2008) study of citizens within the US has suggested that the youngest generations have new values about citizenship. He found that there is a strong positive correlation between Citizen Duty, which includes voting at elections and being knowledgeable of the formal political landscape, and those in older age cohorts (Dalton, 2008). Conversely, Dalton (2008) found that the norm of duty-based citizenship is being reformulated by young people into a new norm he terms Engaged Citizenship, which includes an increased focus on autonomy, postmaterial values, an active participation in voluntary groups and the preference to engage in forms of unorthodox politics.

Dalton (2008) utilises Inglehart's postmaterial thesis to explain why young people's values are changing. For Inglehart (1971; 1990), the growing material affluence and educational levels of young people was leading them to prioritise postmaterial rather material values. As young people in Western democracies were experiencing significantly high levels of wealth, their political values transformed as they were no longer concerned about material acquisition. Instead, they were concerned about lifestyle issues or freedom of expression. Moreover, they felt constrained by the existing elite-directed forms of political action, such as voting, and displayed a new preference for elite-challenging political activities, such as demonstrating, and the inclination to be involved in making political decisions (Inglehart, 1990: 4-5). Consequently, Inglehart argued that younger generations who were socialised in affluent societies would display new values and unfamiliar political preferences while simultaneously rejecting formal types of political participation.

Grasso's (2014) research of 10 countries using the European Values Survey locates the source of value change differently to Inglehart's postmaterial thesis, however, and suggests it is political socialisation not levels of material affluence that drive political values and behaviour. Indeed, her research posits that the political socialisation of contemporary younger generations has led them to be apolitical rather than instigators of radical forms of political participation. Grasso (2014) argues that political values and behaviour are formed between the ages of 15-25, but it is the political environment not the levels of affluence that create values and drive forms of political action amongst different generations[1]. Indeed, she found that the 60s-70s generation are more likely to participate in non-institutionalised, elite-challenging political activity than the 80s and 90s generations. Therefore, even as affluence increases, young people are not demonstrating increasing postmaterial values as Inglehart's thesis would suggest. Furthermore, the 90s generation were less likely to engage with alternative politics than the 80s generation. For Grasso (2014), the 80s and 90s generations grew up in a depoliticised environment which curtailed political activity, whereas those whose formative years were in the 60s and 70s were stimulated by a highly-charged politicised environment which stimulated both their institutional and non-institutional political participation. Therefore, Grasso argues that the prime influence on each generation's values is the political milieu not the socioeconomic conditions they mature within.

If the generational effect is leading to new norms, then this raises the question of whether this a positive development? Young people in post-industrial society inhabit a world where traditional signposts to political participation and understanding, such as work, family or community, are being eroded and, as such, they are building identities which lack political knowledge or judgement. Quintelier (2007) furthers this point, warning that young people are more passive than those who are older in formal politics. Quintelier (2007: 167)

[1] Grasso (2014: 66) uses a different typology for generations than the form used in the definition for the thesis. The generation is classified by the formative years of each cohort and is as follows: Pre-World War 2 generation: Formative Years (FYs) - 1929-1945; Post World War 2 generation: FYs – 1946-1965; 60s-70s generation: FYs – 1966-1977; 80s generation: FYs – 1978-1988; 90s generation: FYs – 1989-2001.

acknowledges that young people face barriers to participation, but warns that if this is a generational effect, which is permanent, then the current electorate could be 'replaced by a more passive generation of political participants.' As discussed in 1.6 and 3.6, a more electorally passive approach from young people has left them feeling some of the harshest cuts under austerity due to politicians rationally focusing policies on those who can give them power by voting. An electorate which is more passive can expect a political class who are unaccountable and a public without the political knowledge to challenge government.

According to some academics (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2003; Melo and Stockemer, 2014), however, the new norm of non-participation does not indicate apathetic young people, but a transformation of the previous norms into a new attachment to politics which may leave people more, rather than less, politically aware. For Dalton (2008: 92), just focusing on politics which revolves around electorally-based political participation 'dissuades people from participating in direct, challenging activities.' He argues that a broader conception of political participation demonstrates a citizenry who often participate in political activities, albeit in new guises.

There is certainly some evidence that a generational change is occurring with young people more likely to turn to alternative forms of participation based on new notions of citizenship. Phelps (2004) and Dalton (2008) provide fairly strong evidence that a generational effect is occurring with Dalton, in particular, demonstrating a norm change amongst young people. Whether this is due to a generational effect as opposed to a life-cycle effect has not been conclusively proven and without a longitudinal study tracking participatory activities as people age it is unlikely to. Dalton (2008) has also constructed strong arguments to demonstrate why a change in citizenship norms, and the consequent decline in formal political participation, should not be necessarily construed as negative, as people are turning to more direct forms of political engagement. He suggests that non-institutionalised forms of participation promote a form of engagement amongst citizens that broadens forms of political action, consequently revitalising politics. This argument rests on an assumption that such an electorate will hold parliament to account. As this thesis will discuss in 3.6, however,

young people have borne the brunt of many cuts to public services and find that policies offered by the political parties are not relevant to them. If young people cannot hold government to account or are neglected due to a lack of voting, then Dalton has overestimated the impact of alternative forms of participation and underestimated the consequences of low levels of voting.

2.4 Alienation

The increasingly lower rate of political participation by the young has led to the claim that young people are apathetic about politics (Phelps, 2012) and have chosen to indulge in other non-political activities (Stoker, 2012). This has been countered by many studies which have found that young people are not apathetic but are either alienated or have adopted new patterns of political participation (Dalton 2008; Henn and Foard, 2014a; Melo and Stockemer, 2014; Norris, 2003; Sloam, 2014). Alienation refers to the disenchantment young people feel towards politics, politicians and the political system. The alienation thesis suggests that young people are interested in the decisions that influence their lives, but due to the conduct of politicians and the organisation of political institutions, they choose not to participate in formal politics. Phelps (2012: 288) has termed the scholars who refute the apathy explanation as the 'anti-apathy school'. Many of the theorists who write from within the anti-apathy paradigm have two objections to the apathy thesis: firstly, that it relies on the unsubstantiated claim that young people are not interested in politics – which we will discuss in this section - and, secondly, that it does not recognise other more unorthodox activities which young people are turning to which are also political in nature – which we will discuss in the next section (Dalton, 2008; Henn et al, 2002; Henn et al, 2005; McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013).

The anti-apathy school thesis is predicated on the belief that young people are interested in politics and are advocates of the democratic process. Conventional wisdom would suggest that young people are declining to engage with formal politics because they are apathetic about politics and have turned their attention elsewhere. Some commentators have even

claimed that young people are 'too stupid' to understand the importance of political participation (Kirkup, 2015).

However, the assertion that young people are not interested in politics has been challenged across several studies. Some scholars have claimed that youth have become disenchanted with politics because of hegemonic neoliberal values in which inequality has increased, economics are depoliticised and politicians are consistently depicted as duplicitous and selfish (Adsett, 2003; Edwards, 2009; Hart and Henn, 2017; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Kyroglou and Henn, 2017). Indeed, young people possess the characteristics to become political agents and display attachment to democratic norms. Haug's (2017) and van Deth et al's (2011) investigations established that a large majority of prepubescent youth demonstrated some interest in politics and were able to converse about political topics. Chareka and Sears (2006: 532) stated that most young people investigated in their study 'exhibited a fairly sophisticated understanding of voting and its place in the political system.' Similarly, Cammaerts et al (2014) found most of their research participants had opinions on a variety of political topics. Indeed, many of Henn's investigations (Henn et al, 2002; Henn et al, 2005; Henn and Foard, 2014a) have concluded that young people, for the most part, have an interest in politics. Not only do young people have interest in politics, but they also, in general, have faith in the democratic process (Busse et al, 2015; Cammaerts et al, 2014; Henn and Foard, 2014a; Mycock and Tonge, 2012). In addition, Henn and Foard (2014a) found that a majority of young people believed that elections meant that MPs are accountable to citizens and that the democratic process makes MPs listen and engage with voters' concerns.

If young people are interested in political issues and have faith in the democratic process, then why has their turnout at elections dropped so dramatically? The primary reasons suggested by the anti-apathy school are that young people have turned away from formal politics because they doubt their ability to influence politicians or politics (Bastedo, 2015; Chareka and Sears, 2006; Henn and Foard, 2014a; Sloam, 2007), politics is too complicated and obscure (Henn and Foard, 2014a), political parties have homogenous polices (Busse et al, 2015) which are not relevant to young people (Henn and Foard, 2014b; O'Toole, 2003) and

formal politics is organised in a hierarchal and centralised fashion (Busse et al, 2015; Henn and Foard, 2014a; Holmes and Manning, 2013). Henn and Foard (2014a) found from their surveys that a majority of young people said that they have no 'say in what the government does' and there were not 'enough opportunities for young people like me to influence political parties.' The same investigation discovered that although young people were supportive of the democratic process in creating dialogue between the government and voters, many young people felt that elections did not 'really change anything' and were a 'waste of time and money.' Cammaerts et al (2014) also found that even though many younger people feel ignored and are disillusioned with their political representatives, they still wanted politicians to listen to (and act upon) their views.

Kimberlee (2002) has argued that the lack of efficacy young people feel is hardly surprising considering that most members of political parties are older and are therefore unrepresentative of the population. Indeed, there are not many young people who are politicians and youth wings of political parties do not, for the most part, influence the parliamentary political parties (Mycock and Tonge, 2012). Young people are also likely to feel that they don't have the political knowledge to engage with politics correctly, that politics is shrouded in boring and unnecessary complexities, and that political discussions are often opaque (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Furthermore, young people have complained that there is little difference between the policies of major political parties which consolidates their lack of interest (Busse et al, 2015; Holmes and Manning, 2013; Manning and Holmes, 2013). This worry over the homogenous nature of political parties is compounded for young people by the sense that political parties are ignorant of their circumstances (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012; Henn and Foard, 2014b; Sloam, 2013) and are too hierarchal, remote and centralised to be relevant to contemporary society (Busse et al, 2015; Henn and Foard, 2014a; Kimberlee, 2002).

The disillusionment young people display towards formal politics is underpinned by the belief that politicians should not be trusted, that politicians want power for its own sake and that politicians show little interest in the lives of ordinary people, particularly those who are young

(Bastedo, 2015; Henn et al, 2007). Henn and Foard's (2014a: 367) study found that young people believed that politics is 'overly complex and populated by a professional political elite that is more concerned with pursuing its own narrow self-serving agenda than it is in championing the interests and issue concerns of young people.'

Even when the political decisions impact on young people, the younger generations are excluded from the debate which surrounds the decision-making. Poor youth employment is framed as the failure of young people to adopt the right skills, the rise in tuition fees from the perspective of the older taxpayer and the necessity of austerity measures so as to protect future generations (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012). Exclusions from the debates around issues which affect their lives have led young people to search for new ways to become involved in politics. There is a large body of evidence that supports the proposition that young people are interested in politics and believe in democracy, however, they are not happy with how politics functions and are sceptical about the intentions of politicians and the relevance of institutionalised politics to their lives.

Yet, the anti-apathy position does have opposition. Fox (2015) argues that calling recent youth cohorts alienated is a misnomer. Fox calls attention to the varied and imprecise definitions of political alienation and argues that a more precise, evidence-based understanding of the term is needed to explore the phenomenon. He suggests that the term should be based on powerlessness – where the individual does not feel they have the power to influence the political system; normlessness – where the individual does not trust the outcomes of political interactions; and meaninglessness – where there is a lack of understanding and knowledge by the individual of the political system. Tracing the millennials' responses over their life course via the British Social Attitudes and British Election Study surveys, Fox brings attention to the fact that young people are notable for their *lack* of alienation from formal politics. In terms of their normlessness and meaninglessness responses, they are no different to older cohorts and millennials are the least alienated generation in terms of their self-perceived ability to influence the political process and their confidence in the political system. What distinguishes young people from their older contemporaries, however, is their high levels of

apathy. Thus, according to Fox's research, there is significant evidence that young people are not alienated but apathetic about electoral politics.

Nevertheless, there are issues with Fox's research. For example, Fox (2015) measures millennials' apathy by using responses to surveys which measure political interest. Millennials' reported lack of relative interest compared to other generations at a similar age leads him to declare that millennials are more apathetic than other generations. However, reducing millennials' supposed apathy to their interest in politics could be argued to be conflating two different aspects of political participation. As many studies we have examined have concluded, young people are not interested in politics because they dislike their political representatives and the political system. Indeed, they often report an interest in democracy and decisions that affect their lives. It is unclear, then, why Fox's quantitative findings should supersede the findings from several qualitative investigations reporting these findings (Almlund, 2018; Gordon and Taft, 2011; Henn and Foard, 2014a; O'Toole et al, 2003). If young people are claiming across multiple studies that their disenchantment towards politics is because of their unhappiness with the political system and their political representatives, then this evidence should not be discounted.

This section has focused on the first of the anti-apathy school's arguments, namely, that young people are not apathetic about political matters, but, instead, feel alienated from the political process. The anti-apathy school has presented strong evidence from a variety of investigations that young people are interested in politics. Indeed, it's not just that young people are interested in politics, but they have strong faith in the democratic system and believe that voting is as important as older people hold it to be. The anti-apathy school also provide a wide-body of evidence to account for why young people are not voting but report engagement with political issues and believe that the democratic process is important; namely, that young people doubt their efficacy, find politics complicated and feel that political parties do not represent their views. This is further compounded by the feelings young people hold towards politicians. For most young people, politicians are only interested in gaining power, putting personal interests before responsibility to their constituents while ignoring or

patronising young people. While we have highlighted one criticism with this position – the veracity of which is debateable – the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that youth are not apathetic about democratic participation or decisions that impact on their lives.

2.5 Alternative forms of participation

The anti-apathy school have demonstrated that young people are turning to new forms of political participation which are more relevant to contemporary youth and allows them to avoid contact with the aspects of formal politics they dislike (Dalton, 2008; Hooghe and Oser, 2015; Melo and Stockemer, 2014; Norris, 2003). Proponents of the anti-apathy theory have stated that conventional political science has continuously utilised a narrow definition of political participation which focuses on the institutions of government and traditional modes of participation, such as voting or political party membership (Henn et al, 2005; McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013; Stockemer, 2014). McCaffrie and Marsh (2013: 115) have highlighted the problem inherent with such a constrained understanding of political participation, stating that 'a restrictive conception of politics forces a restrictive understanding of participation. Once politics is more broadly understood, there are examples of young people engaged in political actions almost everywhere.' Therefore, a narrow definition of politics will not allow for the totality of political participation to be understood and if modes of participation are changing then a definition of political participation is needed which can fully explore the new contours of these activities.

A more expansive understanding of political action highlights that young people are more politically active than figures over voting and party membership propose. Young people's political activities are being increasingly driven by postmaterial values (Inglehart, 1971; 1990). Henn et al's (2018) analysis of British youths highlights that postmaterial/material value preferences have greater explanatory power than is the case for gender, class, ethnicity, educational qualifications or time spent in education (Henn et al, 2018). In their analysis of 21 countries, Hooghe and Oser (2015) found that those who could be classified as Engaged

Citizens nearly doubled from 16 percent in 1999 to 30 percent in 2009. This group of Engaged Citizens displayed a primary concern with environmental issues and human rights and were disparaging over the importance of voting or being a member of a political party. Conversely, those who could be classified as Duty Citizens, who demonstrate a high regard for voting and party membership, have dropped from 22 per cent in 1999 to 15 percent in 2009. Indeed, various studies have found that young people are demonstrating an increased preference for postmaterial values and non-institutional politics compared to older cohorts (Dalton, 2008; Hooghe and Oser, 2015; Melo and Stockemer, 2014; Norris, 2003; Schnaudt and Weinhardt, 2018; Sloam, 2013; Torney-Purta and Amadeo, 2011).

Young people are attracted to alternative forms of political participation for many of the reasons they dislike institutional politics. Several studies have found that young people prefer a more direct, flexible and individualised experience when they participate politically (Busse et al, 2015; Dalton, 2008; Soler-i-Marti, 2015; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011), while they dislike the hierarchical, centralised and remote manner in which formal politics is conducted. Dalton (2008) has argued that voting offers an infrequent and marginal form of influencing politics. People now prefer to directly change or influence politics through 'working with public interest groups, direct contact, contentious political action, political consumerism and similar methods' (Dalton, 2008: 85). As Bastedo (2015) found, young people believe that the only way to get their voice heard was through demonstrations or petitions, whereas their opinions were marginalised within conventional means of political participation. Alternative forms of participation offer a more inclusive political environment for the creation of political policy and action as marginalised groups, such as women or the young, find that their opinions are listened to and acted upon (Marien et al, 2010).

Indeed, for Dalton (2008), though a decrease in citizens with a preference for duty-based norms leads to a decrease in voting, it is removing normative obstacles from direct political action and may galvanise participation outside of the formal arenas of political engagement by increasing the regard in which alternative forms of participation are held. Therefore, it would seem prudent to agree with Soler-i-Marti (2015: 412) when he states that we should

'speak of institutional disaffection rather than political disaffection' when discussing young peoples' relationship with politics and government. Young people are also moving their preferred sites of participation from national issues to local issues which allows them more direct contact in their participation and the ability to closely monitor the results of their political activities (O'Toole, 2003). For Dalton (2008: 85), the preference for engaged types of participation should be celebrated as it marks 'a change in the nature of citizenship and political participation leading to a renaissance of democratic participation – rather than a decline in participation.'

There are some, however, who have questioned whether a move to engaged forms of citizenship is an entirely positive development. For example, Hay and Stoker (2009) have warned that politics is a collective, not an individual, decision-making process and that any form of politics which tries to negate the collective and compromising characteristics of democratic debate will mean many difficult decisions will be avoided. Proponents of engaged forms of politics, according to Hay and Stoker (2009: 234), are ignoring the complexities and concessionary aspects of politics, 'which is rarely an experience of self-actualisation and more often an experience of accepting second-best.' In other words, politics is a plural and social process which produce decisions which will not necessarily conform to all of an individual's requirements. Therefore, young people have to be realistic about the limits to politics, as it is unlikely to satisfy the desires of each individual within a society.

This viewpoint is given more weight by the observations of Stolle and Hooghe (2011); they suggest that new forms of political participation are paradoxical, as even though political action can seem the result of concerted and collective endeavour, many participants do such acts alone. This assertion suggests that alternative forms of political participation are individualistic and are not wholly compatible with the social compromise required for democratically informed political change. Stoker (2006: 88) has also questioned the worth of engaged forms of participation stating that alternative politics 'appears to have a "consumer" feel, and activism could be in danger of becoming more of a lifestyle statement than a serious engagement.' This point also raises questions about whether all engaged forms of citizenship

demonstrate a political function. For an act to be political, it has to be formed and put into action with political intent (Pilkington and Pollock, 2015; van Deth, 2014). If, then, young people do not regard some of their own activity as political (Pilkington and Pollock, 2015; Sloam, 2007) it does beg the question whether political scientists can classify this same behaviour as political? If a young person is engaging with activities without any political purpose, then it would surely be speculative to try and posit that these behaviours are political.

Sloam's (2013) research of 15 European countries suggests that young people were not equally prevalent in different forms of alternative participation. So, while young people are the most likely age cohort to attend a demonstration, they are less likely than older people to boycott a product and no more likely than older citizens to sign a petition. Indeed, Stolle and Hooghe's (2011) investigation found that it was the middle-aged who were more likely than young people to boycott a product or sign a petition. Similarly, Grasso (2014) highlighted that those socialised in the 1960s and 1970s were more likely than those whose formative years were in the 1990s to sign a petition, attend a demonstration or join a social movement organisation. Therefore, Grasso's investigation suggests that today's younger people are less inclined then their older contemporaries were at the same age to pursue elite-challenging political activity.

Indeed, there are only a limited amount of investigations into the claim that young people are replacing formal political participation with alternative modes of political participation (Henn et al, 2018; Ødegård and Berglund, 2008). Ødegård and Berglund (2008) found support for the claim that young people are redirecting their participatory preferences away from elite-directed to elite-challenging political activities in their study of Norwegian youth. Nevertheless, Henn et al's (2018) study of British youth found that, while young postmaterialists demonstrate stronger support for alternative political participation than is the case for materialists, the former is still more likely to engage with formal politics than the latter. Therefore, postmaterialists are a group with high political efficacy relative to materialists and are subsequently more likely to engage with both elite-directed and elite-

challenging political action. Such a finding does dampen the claim that many of today's young people are political but instead of voting they have found new locations to practice their political inclinations. To really examine the claim of the transformation in young people's political repertoires, more investigations are needed to compare whether young people who do engage with alternative political action also vote or eschew the formal mode of political participation.

Related to this weakness within the existing literature is the lack of investigations which seek to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative participation in bringing about reform or change in the policies which are adopted by the government. The anti-apathy school have presented solid evidence which suggests that young people are not apathetic yet there is little evidence that the young people who are not participating in formal politics are taking part in alternative actions instead. If the anti-apathy school wish to present alternative forms of participation as a new form of politics, it is not enough to demonstrate that young people profess to care about issues which affect them. It is also incumbent on them to demonstrate that this new form of engagement can influence political outcomes or bring about social change (Pilkington and Pollock, 2015; van Deth, 2001).

Furthermore, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) have also reminded us that single cause issues pre-date this generation, young people from the 1960s and 1970s also attended protests and signed petitions over nuclear disarmament and the US's invasion of Vietnam. Furthermore, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) question whether young people have moved to, and more precisely prefer, a more individualised form of politics. Young people frequently cite issues which are collective in nature and if they do practice more individualised solutions to these issues it is because of their isolated socioeconomic positions. Put another way, young people may demonstrate an individualistic approach to politics, but this has been caused by the imposition of social and economic changes in post-industrial societies rather than young people adopting a new set of political behaviours. Many of the issues young people face are felt collectively and the solutions to these problems can only be accessed through a concerted approach to politics.

We can also be sceptical about whether a move to postmaterialist values has really occurred among young people and if this can be linked to the relative affluence of that society (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Hooghe et al, 2016; O'Toole, 2003; O'Toole et al, 2003). Henn et al's (2005) study found that many young people shared the same traditional and materialistic concerns as the older generations, though a minority did voice concerns over issues which could be classified as postmaterial. Furthermore, Furlong and Cartmel's (2012) analysis of the British Election Survey from 2010 demonstrates that values associated with materialism, such as employment, are far more important to members of generation Y than postmaterial issues, such as a concern for the environment. Admittedly, these results are likely to be influenced by the ongoing fallout of the 2008 recesssion, but the investigation by Grasso et al (2017) also suggests that levels of affluence is not the main driver of value identification. Instead they suggest that the political environment that youth are socialised in produces their social and economic values. Thus, the consolidation of New Right values by the Blair government has led to those young people socialised during New Labour's time in office being more authoritarian and economically right-wing, despite their affluent material environment.

The notion that this cultural change occurs in countries of relative affluence is also questionable, as Hooghe et al (2016) have demonstrated that engaged forms of citizenship are more likely to be found in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe than the richer post-industrial economies. It has, moreover, been observed that postmaterial values are mediated by class position. The poorer sections of society face insecure employment and low wages and continue to feel that material issues are the most significant factors in their lives. It is only those who are affluent who seem to have adopted postmaterial values (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Manning and Holmes, 2013; Sloam and Henn, 2019).

Whether a move to alternative forms of participation is positive or not is open to debate. Whilst Dalton (2008) is an advocate of changing norms surrounding participation, Hay and Stoker (2009) have suggested that such changes risk undermining democratic functioning and

do not appreciate that politics is always a form of compromise. Dalton's advocacy of Engaged Citizenship does not really acknowledge that individualised forms of political participation will not sit comfortably with the concession's individuals are required to make in the political process. Nor does Dalton consider the neglect groups who don't vote experience from the legislature when the latter rationally implements polices in return for votes. The available literature which supports the anti-apathy theory does not really demonstrate how alternative forms of participation can have consistent and concrete influences on political policy or overcome the issues linked to concessionary politics or rational politicians. As Quaranta (2016: 806) argues, 'political systems do not live on demonstrations and new social movements organizations.' Therefore, until the political system is reformed to take alternative political activities in consideration, encouraging youth to engage with formal structures is crucial. Otherwise, 'the distance between political parties and the young may translate into a problem of political representation and, in turn, of political and social inequality' (Quaranta, 2016: 806-7).

There is a distinct lack of evidence to comprehensively conclude that young people's preferences for forms of political participation have evolved from elite-directed to elite-challenging. Older generations may have engaged with more alternative forms of politics than today's young people at the same age and there is a lack of evidence to conclude that young people prefer elite-challenging activities instead of elite-directed participation. Furthermore, there is a failure to provide evidence that alternative forms of participation are meaningful, contain political intent and attempt to influence the direction of society. This is not to claim that the anti-apathy school is definitively wrong when they claim that young people are replacing formal politics with alternative politics. However, the competing evidence suggests that further work is needed to justify this claim. Consequently, the anti-apathy argument is strong when it positions youth as alienated about politics but is more contentious when proposing that alternative politics are replacing formal politics in young people's repertoires.

2.6 Conclusion

Chapter 2 began with the intention of evaluating some of the various claims around the decrease in participation in formal politics amongst young people and providing an answer as to why young people are not engaging with conventional politics. Competing explanations have been evaluated, though no one answer can be given to why young people have become dissatisfied with formal politics in recent years. Though all of the examples discussed contain merit, they also all contain flaws, and none provide a full understanding about the decline in young people's political participation.

Both generational effect and life-cycle effect are supported by research data. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the millennials have unique participatory characteristics that separate them from previous generations. There is also some evidence that today's young people have different values which have led to them exhibiting different participatory characteristics to previous generations. However, the source of the value change is disputed with Grasso (2014) and Inglehart (1971) both offering different perspectives as to what drives political values. Also, the notion forwarded by Dalton (2008) that young people's underrepresentation in formal politics is uniformly positive should be challenged. Young people have undergone a significant decrease in opportunities and support from the state; much of this can be traced to the political system's neglect of young people which has partially arisen due to low youth turnout at elections (Birch et al, 2013). Indeed, these changes in socioeconomic conditions may have led to delays in the life-cycle as young people are unable to access markers of adulthood as early in their life as was the case for past age cohorts. Unfortunately, there is a lack of longitudinal research to evaluate either theory with absolute certainty.

The weight of evidence indicates that it would be inaccurate to state that young people are comprehensively apathetic about politics. Young people certainly report a disenchantment with the political system and feel excluded from political interactions. Fox's (2015) research suggests that young people are apathetic, but when young people are asked their opinions in qualitative investigations, their responses advocate that their feelings towards politics are

more complicated than his research suggests. There is also a significant body of research which provides evidence of young people's political alienation.

There is some evidence that young people's values have changed and led to preferences for elite-challenging alternative forms of politics. However, this value change is far from uniform for young people and there is little evidence to suggest that all alternative forms of political action are leading to changes in political institutions or are even attempts by participants to influence the political system or social norms. Furthermore, there is competing evidence which suggests that contemporary youth's participation in alternative politics doesn't exceed that of previous generations. If young people's involvement in alternative politics is less than previous generations or this participation is not attempting to change social outcomes or the composition of political institutions, then this part of the anti-apathy argument appears less convincing.

The aim of this chapter was to evaluate some of the explanations which outline why young people are rejecting formal politics. This has mainly focused on whether young people are apathetic towards, or alienated from, politics. This is a significant consideration for meeting the research aims, as each theory would lead to different notions of how barriers to participation may be overcome. If, for example, young people are apathetic about politics, then the thesis would need to consider methods to decrease political apathy amongst youth. However, the theories assessed in this chapter provide compelling evidence that many disengaged youths are alienated from politics. Therefore, the thesis has considered how to overcome this alienation when it addresses research aims 2 and 3. However, young people are not homogenous and their political participation is mediated by their social group membership (Henn and Foard, 2014a; Sloam, 2013). In the next chapter the thesis will consider how social group membership also influences the ability of individuals to become politically active.

Chapter 3: The influence of demographics on political engagement and participation

3.1 Introduction

Young people are often treated as a homogenous group when explaining their political engagement. Chapter 2 investigated some of the most prominent theories which explain youth political disengagement, yet this analysis was devoid of how demographics impact on young people's political values and activities. This chapter aims to address this simplification by exploring how membership of specific social groups can increase or decrease political participation. The literature reviewed throughout this chapter investigates if and how socioeconomic status, education, gender and ethnicity impact on the relationship between politics and citizens. These demographics have been chosen because they are prominent within the literature explaining declining political participation. The review of the literature in this section is also important for meeting research aim 2 as it has identified which social groups are most likely to face barriers to political participation. This allowed the thesis to categorise the research participants according to their demographics and examine how access to resources impacted on their journeys to become politically agents.

This chapter will begin by reviewing the claim that post-industrial society can be characterised as an environment where reflexive individuals have emerged and whose values and behaviours cannot be contextualised by their structural position. We will then discuss the sources of political socialisation and link this to the reproduction of inequality. Thereafter, the thesis will explore the influence of socioeconomic status on political participation by investigating class, inequality and transitions to adulthood. The thesis will then move to understanding the impact education, gender and ethnicity have on political participation. A substantial body of research will demonstrate that, in varying ways and to differing extents,

people's political engagement and participation is dependent on the social position they occupy.

3.2 A debate about the declining significance of structures

The importance of social group membership in understanding the course of one's life has been rejected or downplayed by several social theorists. They describe post-industrial societies as environments in which the individual is liberated from collective forces, such as class or gender, and allowed to construct a personal milieu dependent on their preferences and desires. As Giddens (1991: 7) postulates, '[t]he self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible […]. We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves.' Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), similarly, state that a process of individualisation is happening in late-modernity where '[y]ou may and you must lead your own independent life, outside the old bonds of family, tribe, religion, origin and class' (p.12) in a society where it is 'questionable to assume that collective units of meaning and action exist' (p.14).

The transformation towards reflexivity and individualisation also influences how agents practice politics. For Giddens (1991), political values have transitioned from collective emancipatory politics to individualised life-style politics. Late modernity's freedom from tradition, hierarchy and ascribed social positions has meant that people have now abandoned emancipatory politics to consider questions of life-style. Life politics is an individualised pursuit of authenticity, self-actualisation and identity creation in response to fluctuating social conditions. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have also highlighted how contemporary political participation has evolved to encompass more individualistic considerations in reaction to the perils and uncertainties of post-industrial societies. The decay of traditional locations of collective belonging have led to a politics based on individual preferences. However, political participation does not disappear, but is adjusted to meet the needs of individuals who pursue micro or grass-root forms of democratic engagement away from the institutional political sphere.

Giddens' and Beck's similar diagnosis of modern social and political life has been subjected to much scrutiny and the veracity of their claims is certainly debatable. For example, Atkinson (2007) has drawn attention to Giddens' failure to make clear how life politics is not influenced by a person's social position. Atkinson argues that Giddens has adopted a position of volunteerism as he does not set out the foundations for how agents choose to adopt new lifestyles, habits and behaviours. Therefore, it is hard to understand how individuals would make reflexive choices over lifestyle and behaviour without those decisions being influenced and guided by their pre-existing lifestyle. As Atkinson (2007: 542) comments, '[e]ither the self must somehow […] be able to transcend the orientations of lifestyle in order to choose or else lifestyle choices are not as "free" as [Giddens] would like to make out.' This suggests life politics has not been effectively conceptualised and, quite possibly, that Giddens' insistence that structures are losing their explanatory power is overemphasised.

Beck's theoretical position has been the subject of ongoing debate within youth studies. Woodman (2009; 2010) has sought to defend Beck from what he feels are misapplications of his theories. Woodman (2009) argues that Beck believed that inequalities between social groups was an ongoing and persistent issue, but that 20th century conceptions of class could not satisfactorily explain 21st century economic inequality. In Woodman's view, Beck has provided a good way of understanding youth transitions to adulthood as his explanations of risk and instability provide a critical account of the uncertain environment today's young people face. Though Beck does highlight the inherent possibilities within societies decoupled from traditional forms of collective understanding, he also stresses the difficulties agents face due to the unpredictable and insecure societies they inhabit.

Roberts (2010) has responded to Woodman's reassessment of Beck's work by suggesting that Beck's contradictory writing had led to this conceptual ambiguity over choice biographies and that it is premature to suggest class analysis cannot tell us about inequalities within contemporary society. Furthermore, while the individualisation hypothesis accurately describes the weakening of class identification and solidarity, Roberts' (2010) argues that Beck is wrong to posit the death of class analysis. Class still influences the expectations,

values, habits and opportunities of agents. Today's youth may be facing more uncertain transitions to secure employment and financial security than previously, but there are still those with better resources relative to others who can more easily navigate the risks of late modernity. The claim that there is more opportunity in these uncertain times, should be counterbalanced by the acknowledgement that there are certain young people – due to superior access to wealth, culture, connections and educational credentials – who are more able (and likely) to make the most of those opportunities.

Class (Atkinson, 2010; 2013; Savage, 2015), gender (James, 2009; Karatas-Özkan and Chell, 2015), ethnicity (Sin, 2013) and education (Stahl, 2015) are all collectives which influence the choices and outcomes of the individuals who reside within those groups (Reay et al, 2005). According to Furlong and Cartmel (2007: 143), the claim that young people are the sole authors of their own destiny is the 'epistemological fallacy of late modernity' and does not provide insight into the barriers and obstacles that youth encounter in their journey towards adulthood. As Furlong and Cartmel (2007: 138) explain, '[t]he paradox of late modernity is that although the collective foundations of social life have become more obscure, they continue to provide powerful frameworks which constrain young people's experiences and life-chances.' Therefore, to fully appreciate and understand the influence that structures have on young people's lives we should also investigate how their agency is dependent on demographics and factors outside their control.

3.3 Political socialisation

The study of political socialisation has taken place on both macro and micro levels (Sapiro, 2004). The macro-level studies seek to understand how the creation of a political culture within society could encourage the development and expansion of democratic practices (Almond and Verba, 1963). Alternatively, as Sapiro (2004: 3) explains, '[a]t the micro level, political socialization frames research on the patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationships to the political contexts in which they live.' The micro level of political socialisation, due to the

research design's emphasis on structural influences during individual millennials' pathways to political participation, will be the focus for our review of political socialisation. Micro level investigations of political socialisation have tended to highlight the importance of family, peers, media and educational establishments to the development of political interest and activities (Warren and Wicks, 2011). Therefore, this section will pay attention to these aspects of micro political socialisation.

While individual political socialisation can occur at any age (Sears and Brown, 2013), the formative years between the ages of seven and 17 are where the sociological and psychological prerequisites necessary for political engagement most rapidly form (Bartels and Jackman, 2014). Whether preadolescence (Haug, 2017; Russo and Stattin, 2017; van Deth et al, 2011) or adolescence (Arens and Watermann, 2017; Eckstein et al, 2012) are the most crucial years for political socialisation has been subject to debate.

Exposure to forms of political socialisation during the formative years is important for later political engagement and participation as it develops the interest and characteristics required to navigate the political sphere (Duke et al, 2009; Eckstein et al, 2012). Social and media networks allow pre-adults to become aware of political issues and provide opportunities for them to discuss and deliberate about those topics, which improves both political efficacy and knowledge (Lee et al, 2012). Indeed, during youthhood, political efficacy and political knowledge form a reciprocal and reinforcing relationship; understanding politics produces more confidence in political engagement and vice-versa (Arens and Watermann, 2017). Adolescents who are not exposed to environments where political interest is nurtured face barriers to becoming a political agent because there are no stimuli inclining them towards political participation (Russo and Stattin, 2017). Throughout the rest of this section, we shall investigate some of the locations and social spaces where political socialisation occurs.

The family, particularly parents, form an important conduit for political socialisation. Children whose parents discuss politics with them are more likely to become interested in politics

when they are older (Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Jennings et al, 2009). The family space forms a safe milieu for children and adolescents to discuss, learn and test political knowledge as disagreements are often easily reconciled (Ekström, 2016). The parents' political engagement and participation norms also influences youth during their formative years. Shared civic and political activities between parent and child encourage future political participation among the latter (Warren and Wicks, 2011). Similarly, being the offspring of a voter substantially increases the likelihood that a person will be politically active in later life (Gidengil et al, 2016). Preadults who have harvested political proclivities from their parents demonstrate greater political knowledge, efficacy and confidence in later life. Such children have more stable and competent political knowledge when they enter adulthood compared to those children who gained little politically socialisation from their parents (Jennings et al, 2009). Likewise, discussing political topics with parents during youth is also a predicator for higher educational achievement and social confidence in later life, though it is likely that general socialisation arising from the family, rather than specifically political socialisation, can be considered the prime influence on these attributes (Lauglo, 2011).

Peer networks are an important component within political socialisation for similar reasons to the family. They provide sources for political discussions which lead to greater political knowledge and efficacy (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015; Quintelier, 2015). However, they also provide elements of political socialisation that parents may not be able to offer. For example, it may provide exposure to a broader range of opinions leading to more combative and conflictual political interactions than family environments (Ekström, 2016; Ekström and Östman, 2013). However, socialisation by parents may guide youth towards peer groups similar to themselves, so the diversity of friendship networks should not be overestimated (Šerek and Umemura, 2015). Indeed, while peer groups have been found to provide the largest influence on political socialisation amongst the various variables in some studies (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015; Quintelier, 2015; Šerek and Umemura, 2015), parental socialisation may be the foundational mechanism within political socialisation. For example, despite Koskimaa and Rapeli's (2015) investigation finding that having politically-inclined friends was the most important predicator of political curiosity among young people, they

argue that the family is the primary site of political socialisation. As Koskimaa and Rapeli (2015: 151) state:

> '[c]onsidering the typical lifecycle of the individual, the effect of the family comes before the effect of friends or school. When the individual enters the educational system and other arenas that create social circles and friendships, politically curious adolescents seek the company of others who are to the same degree interested in societal matters.'

Therefore, parents may foster dispositions and inclinations which guide subsequent choices about which social networks to access, meaning children and adolescents form ties with those with similar backgrounds to themselves. These networks then transmit more political socialisation to those preadults already immersed in the political sphere. This perspective suggests that the family environment is where political socialisation most frequently originates.

Links between educational institutes and political socialisation have been established within the literature (Claes et al, 2009; Keating and Janmaat, 2016; Pontes et al, 2019; Wiseman et al, 2011). Open class climates - which encourage debates about diverse social and political topics in a nurturing environment - were found to stimulate political interest and engagement, while allowing pupils to gain confidence within political discussions (Eichhorn, 2018; Godfrey and Grayman, 2014; Hoskins et al, 2017; Wiseman et al, 2011). Participating in classes specifically focused on teaching students about politics (Claes et al, 2009) and political events at schools (Hoskins et al, 2017) also increase the potential of future political participation. Quintelier's (2015) research supports the claim that schools do encourage later political participation, though its effect is weaker than political socialisation gained from peers, parents and voluntary organisations. Moreover, Quintelier (2010; 2015) found that class environments and lesson design had little influence on political socialisation. Thus, while educational establishments can foster an interest in politics it may not be as effective as the political socialisation arising from peers or the family.

Participation in voluntary associations during adolescence also provide political socialisation. There is evidence in the literature that involvement in politically-aligned or civically-orientated organisations during adolescence increases the likelihood of future formal political participation (Frisco et al, 2004; McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Quintelier, 2008; 2010; 2015). Voluntary organisations instil confidence into adolescences by encouraging them to engage with public speaking, debating and increasing their knowledge about social issues (Quintelier, 2008). Moreover, the collaboration required within these associations cultivates a feeling of collective responsibility and cooperation, increasing interest in democratic arrangements and the confidence to be an influential political agent (McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Verba et al, 1995). Indeed, Quintelier's (2015) findings suggest that participation in voluntary organisations provides more political socialisation effects than peers or the family. However, van Ingen and van der Meer's (2016) analysis found that voluntary organisations have relatively little influence on political socialisation.

Engagement with forms of media is also a component within the matrix that produces political socialisation. If media is used to research news then it has a positive influence on political socialisation (Quintelier, 2015), whereas consuming entertainment media deceases the likelihood of political engagement (Moeller and de Vreese, 2013). Internal political efficacy is increased if adolescents read newspapers and actively contribute to political discussions online and increases their chances of voting when they first become eligible (Moeller et al, 2014). Opportunities to actively participate online are an increasing aspect of contemporary youth's media usage, but they also have been found to increase civic engagement if those forums are politically aligned (Conroy et al, 2012; Lee et al, 2012). Indeed, online political engagement leads to an increased probability of offline participation, such as voting (Kim et al, 2017). However, political engagement online has drawbacks which undermine its effectiveness as a form of positive political socialisation. Family and, to a lesser extent, peer networks provide adolescences with a trusting environment where they can experiment with politics and improve their political knowhow away from public scrutiny – factors which are not available online (Ekström, 2016). Indeed, the public nature of online interactions has led to some youth actively avoiding political discussions on the internet (Vromen et al, 2016).

We should also consider how socialisation conduits reproduce structures within political participation. Those youths from higher socioeconomic backgrounds gain higher cultural resources from their parents which makes future political participation more likely compared to youths with lower socioeconomic status (Johnstonbaugh, 2018; Ødegård and Berglund, 2008). Preadults from affluent backgrounds are likely to have more efficacy in their pursuits because of the hereditary transmission of resources from their parents (Diemer, 2012; Persson, 2015). Political efficacy does not just originate within political socialisation, confidence in achieving success in political participation comes from other socialising factors. Failure in other non-political domains and lower access to resources means disadvantaged youths are less confident of success in the political sphere (Condon and Holleque, 2013). Family socialisation also guides young people towards networks populated with people with similar resources, so lower socioeconomic status youths are likely to form friendships with others who are unable to provide significant political socialisation (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015; Šerek and Umemura, 2015). Therefore, the class of the parents impacts on political socialisation directly – via the increased chance of political discussions and exposure to activities – and indirectly – by guiding children towards networks with superior political socialisation potential. Inequalities between classes also continue to exert influence within educational establishments. Despite the supposed formal equality of schools, lower socioeconomic status adolescents are less likely to receive political socialisation from schools than youths from higher socioeconomic families (Hoskins et al, 2017; van Deth et al, 2011). Therefore, social group membership has an influential role within political socialisation. Those from affluent backgrounds are more likely to become politically socialised, while those youths with less affluent families face barriers to becoming acquainted with politics.

Political socialisation is an important factor in understanding how young people develop the proclivity to participate in politics. Parents, peers, educational institutes, voluntary organisations and the media all develop the political knowledge, efficacy and interest adolescents require to become political agents in later life. Overall, peers and parents seem to have the strongest influence on political socialisation. Nevertheless, it is possible that that

parents and the family environment are the most crucial aspect of these different facets of political socialisation. This location is where adolescents are often first exposed to politics and family socialisation propels young people towards networks which provide further political socialisation. Voluntary organisations also seem to provide a large stimulus to future political participation. However, while providing political socialisation, the stimulus which educational institutes and media seems more contentious within the literature. We have also discussed the influence of how structures impact on political socialisation, highlighting how inequality is reproduced via socialisation. In subsequent sections we will discuss how social group membership influences potential political participation, some of which will relate to political socialisation.

3.4 Class and political participation introduction

In this section we shall consider the importance of class as a guide to levels of political participation. Class analysis uses a person's occupation as the independent variable to measure the patterns or outcomes of other dependent variables. This gives a partial indication of how economic resources interact with certain behaviours and activities – in the case of this analysis, political participation and values. Class analysis does not give us the complete picture of how affluence influences levels of political participation, as class analysis refers to occupation not access to resources. Those in higher-level occupations, for example, may have less resources to call upon than those who are located in poorly remunerated jobs (Parry et al, 1992). However, there is a significant relationship between class and access to resources in contemporary Britain. Generally, those in the higher classes in have larger incomes, better job security, higher educational achievement and less instances of poor health than those in the lower classes (Evans and Tilley, 2017a). Therefore, though occupation is closely correlated to access to resources and affluence, it is not the case in every single instance. For example, it is possible for a semi-skilled manual worker in social grade D to achieve a higher financial remuneration than a junior manager in a higher social grade C1. Class provides an understanding of how political participation differs between occupations and only partially explains how differential levels of affluence influence political participation.

3.4.1 Class and formal political participation

As we can see from Table 3.1 below, class exerts a clear influence on the likelihood of a person from any age cohort voting in the UK. Since 1992, members of the AB classes have voted in higher numbers than those from the C2 and DE groups. Furthermore, apart from the 2017 election, AB members have higher turnout rates than those from the C1 class in the same period. Indeed, the only other example over this period of a class turning out to vote in greater numbers than a higher occupational group was is in 1992, when 77 percent of members of social class D voted but only 75 percent of C1's cast their ballot. Thus, in Britain those in the higher classes are far more likely to vote than those in the lower classes. Moreover, the link between class membership and turnout at elections is replicated within Europe. Caínzos and Voces (2010), in their study of 20 European countries, found that there is a strong and persistent relationship between occupation and electoral participation across these countries. Therefore, there is good evidence that class membership is influential on voter turnout within Western countries.

Table 3.1. Class turnout at General Elections in Britain 1992-2017[2]

(Source: Ipsos MORI, 1992; 1997; 2001; 2005; 2010; 2015; 2017)

	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017
AB	83%	79%	68%	71%	76%	75%	73%
C1	78%	75%	60%	62%	66%	69%	74%
C2	75%	69%	56%	58%	58%	62%	66%

[2] Ipsos MORI only provides class-based voting patterns from 1992 onwards. Also, Ipsos MORI does not provide data about the turnout of occupational group E.

D	77%	66%	53%	54%	57%	57%	61%

In Britain, the difference in turnout between the higher classes and lower classes has risen overtime to relatively high levels as Table 3.2 below demonstrates. For example, in 1987 the difference in turnout between the highest and lowest occupational class groups was only four percent (Lawrence and Birch 2015). By 1997 this difference had more than trebled to 13 percent, with the gap peaking at 19 percent in 2010. This gap had decreased to 12 percent by the 2017 General Election, but there is still a significant difference in voter turnout between the highest and lowest classes (Ipsos MORI 1997; 2010; 2017). Moreover, Tilley and Evans (2017b) have adopted a typology which delineates between those with a high education and professional/managerial occupation and those with a low education and working-class occupation. Using this classification, Tilley and Evans demonstrate that the middle classes are more likely to vote than those in the working classes. The difference in turnout between these groups was 31 percent at the 2017 General Election. Therefore, contrary to the death of class thesis suggested by some theorists, it seems that the influence of class – at least in relation to electoral participation – has increased rather than diminished over the last few decades.

Table 3.2. Difference in turnout between class groups AB and D in Britain 1987-2017

(Sources: Lawrence and Birch, 2015; Ipsos MORI, 1992; 1997; 2001; 2005; 2010; 2015; 2017a)

1987	**1992**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**	**2010**	**2015**	**2017**
4%	6%	13%	15%	17%	19%	18%	12%

3.4.2 Class and alternative political participation

Class position also mediates participation in alternative forms of politics. Online participation has become an important part of young people's political repertoires, though it would seem that those with higher financial resources are more likely to engage with politics online than those from less advantaged backgrounds (Oser et al, 2013). Quintelier's (2008) analysis of political activism demonstrates that young people from backgrounds with access to large levels of economic capital are more likely to be civically engaged and participate in political consumerism. Similarly, those with higher occupational statuses have higher levels of political knowledge and are more confident in their ability to work within civic institutions and, while less significant, higher levels of affluence increase the likelihood of civic participation (Manganelli et al, 2014). Caínzos and Voces (2010) hypothesised that large levels of inequality between occupational groups would encourage participation in alternative political action, yet they found that there were large levels of class inequality involved in boycotting, demonstrating and other forms of protest activity, while voting was the activity that contained the least class inequalities.

3.4.3 Class and political values

Class also has an influence on an individual's political values among all age groups. Those from the lower classes consistently demonstrate the lowest political satisfaction, interest and engagement in the UK. As we can see in Table 3.3 below, there is considerable variance between the occupational groups AB and those below them across the indicators. The AB groups display significantly higher levels of intention to vote, interest in politics, knowledge of politics and satisfaction with the present system of governance. Furthermore, those in the two lowest groups, D and E, demonstrate the lowest political engagement scores across each indication except for the feeling that getting involved in politics is effective. Indeed, across nearly every indicator, as we ascend through the class groups, we see an increased likelihood of political engagement and participation. The two outliers to this trend are between groups C1 and C2; they both report an equal satisfaction with the present system of governing with the latter reporting that they are more likely to vote. However, this caveat aside, the data

does suggest that class is an important indicator of political values. Therefore, class provides a good, if only a partial, understanding of a person's political values. Those in the two highest occupational groups A and B receive a significant political dividend from their class position compared to those classes which are lower than them.

Table 3.3 Political engagement and satisfaction according to class

(Source: Hansard, 2019)

	Certainty to vote	**Interest in politics**	**Knowledge of politics**	**Knowledge of parliament**	**Satisfaction with present system of governing**	**Feeling getting involved is effective**
AB	75%	78%	79%	74%	36%	38%
C1	59%	59%	56%	49%	23%	35%
C2	61%	35%	35%	31%	23%	21%
DE	48%	34%	34%	25%	17%	29%

According to Henn and Foard (2014a), the occupation of youths' parents has a statistically significant influence on that young person's interest in politics. Similarly, children from families who are in the higher occupational groups have greater civic knowledge (Ekström and Östman, 2013; Manganelli et al, 2014) and efficacy than children of families from the lower socioeconomic groups (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Furthermore, those young people from middle class backgrounds were significantly more likely to be confident in their knowledge of politics and value the importance of voting than those youths with working class backgrounds. Conversely, class does not influence young people's trust in politicians/political

parties, the effectiveness they bestow upon politicians/political parties and their faith in the electoral process (Henn and Foard 2014a).

3.4.4 Understanding working-class politics

There has been a large volume of investigations into why those from the lower classes have become disillusioned with formal politics (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Evans and Tilley, 2017a; Holmes and Manning, 2013; Manning and Holmes, 2013; Winlow et al, 2017). As we have seen, many working-class citizens have stopped voting altogether. Some of these non-voters have lent their support to overtly nationalist and, in many cases, racist street-movements such as the English Defence League (EDL) which negate formal political participation (Winlow et al, 2017). However, some working-class voters have started to turn to populist or nationalist parties to register their unhappiness with contemporary formal politics (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). Therefore, even amongst those working-class members who continue to vote, there is an increasing unhappiness with mainstream liberal democratic politics.

The explanations for why working-class citizens are becoming increasingly disenchanted with politics are wide-ranging, however, they are all united by the lower classes' unhappiness with the political system and the behaviour of their political representatives. Indeed, many of the grievances members of the working-class have with politics mirror the issues young people have voiced. For example, the lower classes recount a large degree of scepticism about politicians' motives, believing that they are part of a distant elite who seek to provide advantages to those of a similar status at the expense of working people (Holmes and Manning, 2013; Manning and Holmes, 2013; Winlow et al, 2017). While some of the qualitative accounts of working-class disillusionment with politics highlight the participants' scepticism about multiculturalism and, in some cases, outright racism – factors which are not prevalent in the accounts of youth when they discuss their political disengagement - there are parallels between youth and working-class political disenchantment. For both groups, there is a strong current of resentment displayed towards politicians who are viewed as an

elite class with little understanding of the situation of those people they are meant to represent. Moreover, there is a palpable sense of political abandonment across youth and lower-class groups in which they feel politicians have deserted them when those groups have been confronted by insecure work conditions, poor levels of pay and dissolving communal ties (Holmes and Manning, 2013; Manning and Holmes, 2013; Winlow et al, 2017).

According to Evans and Tilley's (2017a) analysis of data from the British Election Study since the 1960s, ongoing class identification makes it a mistake to separate class analysis from the decrease in working-class electoral participation. Although there has been a considerable dealignment between voter's occupation and their political party preferences, Evans and Tilley highlight the continuing attachment to working-class identity, values and behaviour. Their data demonstrates that social distinctions have not evaporated in a postmodern milieu, as the working-class demonstrates persistent attitudes towards identity and ideology while experiencing significant levels of inequality. The reason for declining turnout amongst the working-class, according to Evans and Tilley, is that in recent years the Labour party have moved closer to the Conservative economic position, advocating policies which attract middle-class voters but exclude the preferences of the lower classes. Consequently, it is not the demand-side but the supply-side of politics which has encouraged the withdrawal of the lower-classes from political participation. The political triangulation of Labour up until Jeremy Corbyn's premiership has led in Britain to working-class voters feeling marginalised from politics and have encouraged many of them to abandon politics. Moreover, despite Labour's recent (re)adoption of leftist economics, the party's preference for liberal and cosmopolitan social policies have failed to resonate with the working-classes who are more likely to favour traditional and nativist policy platforms (Evans and Tilley, 2017b).

The resistance towards social and economic liberalism has not meant that all members of the working-class electorate have given up on voting, some have turned towards non-traditional political parties instead. An increasing number of working-class voters are turning towards populist parties across the Western world or, in the case of Britain, challenged the establishment consensus and voted to withdraw from the European Union (Eatwell and

Goodwin, 2018). Nor should we forget, as discussed in 1.4, these parties have begun to attract young voters, too (Ipsos, 2018; Kentish, 2017; SORA, 2017).

A striking feature within accounts of working-class political disengagement is that its sources are similar to those reported by young people. Many members of the working-class do not trust politicians, do not believe in the efficacy of the current political system and feel abandoned by a political class who prefer electoral efficiency rather than engaging with people's concerns (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). Those in the working-class who now opt for populist options may still vote but their reasoning for this choice highlights the existing democratic deficit the lower classes experience and supports other evidence which suggests this is driven by the behaviour and attitude of their political representatives.

3.4.5 Class conclusion

Class is an important indicator in a person's likelihood to vote. At all UK general elections in the last few decades, the higher classes have always voted in larger numbers than those from the lower classes, though the 2017 election did see slightly larger electoral participation from those in the C1 category compared to the AB groups. Since 1987, there has been a significant increase in turnout between the top and bottom groups as many in the lower classes have withdrawn from institutional politics. Therefore, class has begun to exert more, rather than less, influence on levels of political participation in recent years. Those from lower occupational groups, and this is also true for young people, are far more likely than those from higher occupational groups to record a low certainty to vote, a lack of knowledge about politics and a low expectation of being able to influence political discussions. This is also true for alternative participation with those in the higher classes more assured about their ability to participate in civic society, political consumerism, boycotting and demonstrating.

Despite some authors attempting to diminish the role of class as explanatory device, occupation continues to wield a large influence over many aspects of political participation.

It's effect on turnout at general elections has grown since the turn of the millennium as some from the working-class have decided not to vote. There is considerable evidence that the working-class distrust politicians and are not satisfied with current democratic arrangements. This has led the lower classes to turn their backs on voting as they do not see it as a viable mechanism to enact change. Class still demonstrates a significant influence on values, identity and ideology in Britain, so the individualisation theory also lacks explanatory power in this circumstance. Instead, the evidence suggests it is the realignment of British politics towards a centre ground and middle-class voters and away from working-class politics that has led to the widening gap in political participation between the highest and lowest classes. When working-class voters are consulted about their feelings towards politics, there is a wide-spread sense of anger and resentment directed towards politicians and the political system over their abandonment of the lower classes. This disconnect seems to have driven many in the lower classes towards non-participation or engagement with populist parties. The evidence would suggest that to reverse these trends, political parties need to reengage with the issues which are important to the working-class.

We can also see that many of issues young people raise about politics and how they have responded to these problems are shared by the working-class. Both groups have suggested that politicians are a distant elite who prioritise self-interest over the concerns of the electorate which makes the political system seem redundant. In response, many from both groups have become disengaged or sought to move their political participation to other locations which are seen as distinct from Westminster. While some young people have turned to alternative forms of politics, they and the working-class are becoming increasingly attracted to anti-establishment parties. Clearly, these responses to political neglect are different, but they seem to be united in their anger towards the traditional political system and current democratic arrangements.

The disengagement from contemporary politics is not the only factor which unifies the working-class. Values, ideas and choices, in many cases, remain class-based. Therefore, class still matters in attempting to understand political participation. Far from being free from

overarching social forces, individual's available options are often mediated by their occupation. If one is from the three lowest occupational groups in Britain, then they are less likely to participate in politics, be interested in politics and feel that they can influence politics than those in the three highest groups. Yet, we need to be mindful not to overemphasise the influence of occupation when analysing political activity and attitudes. Class only gives us a partial understanding of the relationship between the individual, their political behaviour and their access to resources. To gain a more complete picture of how resources are utilised and interact with the likelihood of an individual voting, we must also understand how their resources compare to others in their society.

3.5 Income inequality and political participation introduction

While class clearly influences people's engagement in politics, there are other ways in which the socioeconomic conditions of society mediate the levels of political participation. It has been suggested that income inequality may be correlated with participation in traditional and alternative forms of political participation. The previous section demonstrated how occupational class and socioeconomic status determines political participation. This does not provide complete information on how levels of income inequality affect political actions and values, so this section will investigate how the variation between incomes in Western democratic societies influence political participation.

3.5.1 Individual resource inequality and political participation

There is certainly support for the theory that large levels of income inequality between individuals reduce the likelihood of electoral interest and action. While this is most pronounced amongst poorer social groups, Solt's (2008) study has found that large levels of income inequality within states reduce rates of political interest, volume of political discussions and electoral participation across all income groups. Conversely, societies with low levels of income inequality between individuals produce higher rates among these variables across all income groups.

As discussed in the previous section, those in the lower classes - and in most cases, they have the lowest incomes – have less interest in politics relative to those in the higher classes. Solt's analysis demonstrates that it is not only differences between classes (and income) that influence political participation, but also how large the differences in wealth are between classes. Solt does not provide an explanation for why states with large levels of income inequality decrease the political activity and interest of the most affluent. However, he suggests that the lower political engagement and participation amongst those with low and medium incomes have occurred becuase these groups feel they can't influence politics due to their low amount of resources compared to those with high incomes. Wealthy individuals prevail in clashes between rich and poor groups and those who are rich can obstruct the concerns of poor groups becoming an issue for political discussion. Consequently, poorer groups disengage with politics as they don't believe it can provide positive change in their lives. In societies where incomes are more equal, however, political influence cannot be monopolised by those on high incomes as resources are more evenly distributed between income groups (Solt, 2008).

3.5.2 State resource inequality and political participation

The relationship between inequality and political participation finds support in studies which analyse how states manage and provide resources. The previous subsection investigated how individual resource inequality influenced political participation. This subsection will discuss those studies which have investigated how resource inequality is influenced by redistribution of wealth via the state. Individual and state resource inequality are closely linked and while these aspects of resource disparity have been discussed in different subsections, they should not be regarded as completely distinct aspects of inequality. As Lancee and Van de Werfhorst (2012: 1168) state, '[e]ssential to the resource explanation of inequality effects is the idea that equal societies not only have a more equal income distribution but also have a more equal system to provide a wide range of services to members of society.'

Sos and Jacobs (2009) have argued that egalitarian and universalist welfare policies in the US in the post-war years facilitated greater political participation by low and medium income groups. Increased redistribution from high income groups to lower and medium income groups, a growth in organisations that encourage political involvement and an increasing recognition of, and attempts to tackle, issues faced by minority groups were all factors that invigorated a sense of citizenship and collective responsibility for medium and lower income groups. This encouraged more people to engage with electoral politics.

Lister (2007) draws similar conclusions to Sos and Jacobs about the significance of redistribution of wealth through the welfare state and the subsequent impact on the likelihood of voting. Lister found that there was a significant negative relationship between electoral participation and income position. He suggests that how welfare is distributed contributes to lower political participation. So, societies which favour universalist forms of state support are not only more likely to have less income inequality, they also foster a sense of togetherness and citizenship through the egalitarian delivery of welfare. Conversely, individuals in societies which prefer means-tested delivery of benefits are forced into a more compliant relationship with the state in which they are required to acquiesce to bureaucratic commands. This submissive relationship negates the togetherness created by universal welfare policies and reduces, rather than encourages, a sense of citizenship for the potential electorate leading to lower levels of political participation (Lister, 2007). Furthermore, this seems to have a socialisation effect on the children of means-tested recipients. Young people from households receiving means-tested benefits are less likely to be politically engaged and active than those who are in receipt of universal welfare (Barnes and Hope, 2017).

Birch et al's (2013: 17) analysis also demonstrates that income inequality influences political participation. Western European countries with large levels of inequality have had lower electoral turnout, while those countries with lower levels of income inequality generally had higher turnouts. Those countries with compulsory voting laws and penalties to enforce participation, such as Australia and Belgium, had low levels of income inequality. This supports the notion that high levels of political participation create more economically equal

societies as the high turnout of low-income groups means that the concerns of the poor garner more attention and are acted upon by political parties. Conversely, low turnout, often caused by income inequality, leads to further material inequality.

This is also true for the UK, and recent government decisions on budget allocations have led to non-voting groups having their state support as a percentage of house income cut by nearly double that of voting groups. The 2010 spending review by the UK government resulted in those with an income under £10,000 losing over 40 per cent of their household income, while those with an income over £60,000 saw a reduction of around 3 per cent in household income due to cuts in state support (Birch et al, 2013). Indeed, further research reveals that local authorities which suffered the most cuts due to government spending priorities were also the areas in which there were the largest declines in voter turnout in the four years after the 2010 spending review (Birch and Lawrence, 2015). This suggests that there is a considerable relationship between income inequality and low political participation. Higher levels of income inequality supress levels of political participation as the larger resources of the most affluent monopolise political power. This contributes towards the decline in political participation amongst low and middle income groups as they cannot influence the political system due to their relative disadvantage. Consequently, debates about reallocation of wealth diminish as those who would most benefit from redistribution have become alienated from politics and no longer have a voice in political discussions. This leads to larger levels of inequality as those who benefit from large disparities in wealth are able to consolidate their financial position through political mechanisms.

Lancee and Van de Werfhorst (2012) also provide evidence that income inequality influences civic participation. Civic participation refers to involvement in civil sorganisatons, such as membership of political and voluntary organisations or professional groups, and is associated with stimulating political participation (Putnam, 2000). Combining both individual and state-level analysis of inequality, Lancee and Van de Werfhorst's (2012) data indicates that participation in civic activity varies far more significantly across income groups in countries with higher levels of inequality. They demonstrate that poorer individuals are discouraged

from civic participation in countries with larger levels of inequality. Poorer individuals are less likely to participate in unequal societies because they are aware of the severe disadvantage they experience in relation to affluent groups and are less likely to display trust in wider society and more likely to suffer from poor health. In more egalitarian societies, though, these barriers to participation are removed so poorer people are more likely to engage in civic participation.

3.5.3 Critiques of inequality and political participation

There is not uniform agreement that inequality leads to declining political participation. Arzheimer (2008), who found no link between electoral participation and income inequality, has criticised Lister's investigation for having an unreliable methodology which does not establish the causality between inequality, institutional behaviour and declining electoral engagement. Indeed, Lister's (2007) own research revealed that there is no tangible relationship between rising inequality and declining electoral engagement in the UK. Stockemer and Scruggs' (2012) widespread investigation of over 90 percent of countries which have had democracy in the last 40 years revealed that inequality does not negatively influence voter turnout levels.

Additionally, Lancee and Van de Werfhorst's (2012) research found that large levels of income inequality between households did not discourage political discussions among family and friends among poorer groups. However, the likelihood of engaging in political discussions with friends and family is related to income, so those with higher incomes are more likely to discuss politics compared to someone with a low income. Therefore, in more unequal societies the discrepancy between income groups is magnified. Lancee and Van de Werfhorst's analysis also found that the most affluent in states with large levels of inequality were more likely to participate in civic associations. This is contrary to Solt's analysis which found that large levels of inequality in a society depressed political participation and engagement amongst all income groups.

3.5.4 Income inequality conclusion

There is certainly a wide body of research which supports the proposition that inequality depresses electoral participation. Individuals in low income groups in countries with large income inequality are less likely to have an interest in politics, discuss politics or electorally participate compared to low income groups in more equal societies. There is also links between inegalitarian welfare distribution by the state and lower rates of civic and electoral participation.

Evidence also suggests that income inequality reproduces itself via low levels of electoral participation. If this data is correct and inequality leads to the less affluent withdrawing from political participation, then this may lead to further inequality which then leads to lower political activity amongst those with lower incomes. It has been suggested that large levels of inequality lead to those with fewer resources declining to vote because political power and influence is concentrated in the hands of the most affluent. If this is accurate, then it arguable that this would further consolidate the political power of the most affluent who may resist efforts to increase redistribution of wealth or reverse inequality. There is some evidence to support this proposition. Groups associated with low electoral participation have faced harsher cuts than groups who turn out to vote in high numbers and areas with larger reductions in state support have witnessed a larger decrease in electoral participation compared to areas that have been subject to smaller cuts. However, the influence of inequality on political participation is not certain as some investigations have found no link between income inequality and formal political participation.

Therefore, investigations into income inequality and political participation are problematic. There is no clear answer to whether income inequality mediates formal political participation as there is a large disagreement amongst scholars. Until a more comprehensive study of income inequality and the forms of political engagement can be conducted and can be replicated and tested for validity, the strength of this relationship will remain opaque.

3.6 Transitions to adulthood

Analysis that only addresses class position and income inequality as measured by the head of the household does not provide the full picture of how young people are uniquely afflicted by their socioeconomic situation. To understand how economic structures mediate young people's political participation we should also investigate their socioeconomic circumstances when they become adults, the opportunities available to youth at this juncture in their life and how this has changed over time compared to previous generations. There are normative understandings of markers of adulthood – such as homeownership, secure employment and getting married. Transitions to adulthood allows us to examine the ease or difficulty that young people are able to obtain these markers and compare this journey to previous age cohorts (Bynner, 2005).

However, Woodman and Wyn (2006) are concerned that the transition to adult typology uses the baby-boomer generation life-cycle as a normative model to judge each subsequent generation. If individuals in later generations do not reach the stage of development at the same age as baby-boomers, then they are considered deviant and in need of intervention. Such a restrictive typology limits our understanding of how social, economic and political change create new patterns of life that would rule out a normative life-cycle classification. However, the markers of adulthood which typified the baby-boomer generation still hold relevance to today's young people. They are still concerned about gaining secure employment and financial stability (Prince's Trust, 2018). Using a transition to adulthood model to describe some of young people's experiences is also still valid to understanding changes in their political participation. If young people are occupying a different milieu to previous generations and their life-trajectory has been subsequently transformed, then it may shed light on why this generation has displayed lower level of political participation.

Young people have often been cast as actively seeking to delay their transition to adulthood, but it is much more accurate to describe young people as situated in an economic environment they cannot influence, which they navigate to the best of their ability (France

and Threadgold, 2016; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). The contemporary economic system has changed considerably over the last few decades due to the implementation of monetarist economics. Transitions towards an economic system which follows the principles of neoliberalism has led to considerable changes in the possibility of homeownership, access to education, levels of state support and wage levels, while the potential of secure and settled employment is increasingly unlikely (Côté, 2014; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). This has had particularly negative consequences for those with few resources to call upon when pursuing markers of adulthood (Yates et al, 2011). While this has certainly impacted on all age cohorts, it has significantly impacted on young people (Côté, 2014) - particularly since the global recession in 2007/8 (Birch et al, 2013; Gardiner, 2016a).

One of the main issues today's young people face is stagnating wages. Successive generations have seen their affluence and prospects increase with the presumption that this would continue for their children. Yet, the millennials will potentially have lifetime earnings that are lower than the previous generation (Gardiner, 2016a; Gardiner and Gregg, 2017). Significant decreases in wage growth for contemporary youth compared to previous generations has occurred because of limited mobility, less opportunities for in-work training and businesses and governments allocating employee expenditure to fill shortfalls in pension schemes ahead of promoting wage growth (Gardiner, 2016a).

Young people's earning potential has also been reduced because of reductions in state support which has seen Educational Maintenance Allowances discontinued, higher university tuition fees introduced, and the limiting of minimum wage increases to the over-25s since 2010. As a known non-voting group, with a relatively small cohort size (Berry, 2012), young people have suffered harsh cuts relative to older cohorts who are more inclined to vote (Birch et al, 2013; Gardiner, 2016a). Moreover, if welfare payments are analysed over time, there is the suggestion that state support is being transferred from younger cohorts to the older, more affluent cohorts (Gardiner, 2016a).

The house and renting market have also added to the difficult socioeconomic conditions that young people now inhabit. A person from the baby-boomer generation was 50 per cent more likely at the age of 30 to be a homeowner compared to an individual who is from the millennial generation at this age. Today's young people, furthermore, are paying £40,000 more in their 20s on rent than the baby-boomers did at the same stage in their life-cycle. Moreover, in 2015, 50 per cent of young people required financial support from their family to be able to afford a deposit for a house, which has risen from 30 per cent in 2005 (Gardiner, 2016a). This has meant that homeownership for young people on low and middle incomes has fallen by 25 per cent over the 20 or so years up to 2014 and today's young people are four times as likely to privately rent their accommodation than 50 years ago (Corlett and Judge, 2017).

The decreasing opportunities for homeownership cause a variety of problems for young people which reduce the likelihood of them voting. Access to markers of adulthood, such as homeownership and settled employment, galvanise a sense of citizenship which encourages young people to engage in political action (Flanagan et al, 2012). This is supported by research compiled by Hansard (2016) which reveals that homeowners are more interested in politics and have more faith in their knowledge of politics than social or private renters. The lack of homeownership available to young people also means they are less likely to be registered to vote (Berry, 2012).

Young people are facing difficult transitions to adulthood. Changes in the labour and housing markets, coupled with changes in state support have meant that young people's ability to find economic security has been reduced compared to previous generations at the same stage in their life-cycle. This complicated environment reduces the likelihood of young people's political participation by undermining the social contract and feelings of citizenship. Citizenship is a contradictory notion for young people in contemporary society. Youth are criticised for not voting, but their subjective experience of complicated socioeconomic conditions and difficult transitions to adulthood negates their sense of citizenry. In comparative terms, young British people's financial conditions are far more problematic than for previous generations. Consequently, young people are becoming conscious of the

discrepancy within the social contract; they are acutely aware of the inconsistency between being a sovereign individual in control of their destiny, their obligation to vote and socioeconomic conditions which hampers their ability to achieve homeownership, secure employment and good living standards (Edwards, 2009).

3.7 Education

Education is an important factor in explaining political participation (Mayer, 2011; Sondheimer and Green, 2010). At the 2017 general election, 76 per cent of those with a degree turned out to vote, whereas only 64 per cent those with no qualifications and 67 per cent of those with other qualifications voted (Ipsos MORI, 2017a). If overall turnout rates begin to decrease further, then education may begin to exert a greater influence on the likelihood of voting. The dwindling number of voters are likely to be even more concentrated amongst those who hold higher educational qualifications and will be less representative of populations as a whole (Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017).

Qualifications also impact on an individual's confidence when engaging with politics in the UK. Hansard (2017) found that three quarters of graduates stated they were certain to vote compared to only 49 per cent of those who have not attended university. 72 per cent of graduates claim to be at least fairly knowledgeable about politics, whereas only 27 per cent of people with no formal qualifications felt fairly confident in their political knowledge. Likewise, over 75 per cent of those who have attended university feel at least fairly interested in politics, but this drops to 30 per cent for those with no formal qualifications. Indeed, this distinction between those with different educational qualifications is replicated in self-perceived efficacy; 23 per cent of graduates feel that they can influence national decision-making, yet only 8 per cent of those with no qualifications feel influential in national decision-making.

The influence of educational achievement on formal political participation is supported by academic literature and is also found in other Western countries. Melo and Stockemer's (2014) investigation of Germany, France and the UK revealed that educational level, alongside political interest, is the most influential indicator of a young person's probability of voting. Similarly, those with higher levels of educational qualifications in Germany are more likely to be members of a political organisation than those with lower educational qualifications (Busse et al, 2015). Investigations of the US have revealed that those individuals with post-secondary school qualifications were significantly more likely to vote (Mayer, 2011; Wray-Lake and Hart, 2012) and contact a public official (Mayer, 2011) than those with lower qualifications. Moreover, in the US being a student significantly increased the likelihood of a young person registering on the electoral roll and turning out to vote (Tenn, 2007). Sondheimer and Green (2010), whose research found a causal link between higher educational attainment and future political participation in the US, suggest that educational establishments increase the potential of voting by instilling citizenship norms within students and through the broader access pupils have to networks which encourage political interest.

Educational qualifications and staying in full-time education also specifically impact on young people's political engagement. Those young people with higher qualifications are significantly more likely to be confident in their knowledge of politics, have faith in the democratic process, to support the principle of voting and believe in the effectiveness of political parties and politicians than those who do not possess higher qualifications (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Staying on in full-time education has an even wider impact on young people's relationship with politics. Those who have continued in full-time education are also more likely to be confident in their knowledge of politics, have faith in the democratic process, to support the principle of voting and believe in the effectiveness of political parties and politicians than those who have not stayed in full-time education. Yet, those in full-time education are also more likely to be interested in politics, have confidence in the political system, and value elections compared to those who have left full-time education (Henn and Foard, 2014a). In fact, in Henn and Foard's (2014a) study, staying on in full-time education had a statistically significant impact on all of the dependent variables they used; the only exception identified

in their study was that young people who are in full-time education and those that have left full-time education each display similar low levels of trust in politicians and political parties.

A considerable body of evidence suggests that education has a substantial influence on alternative forms of political participation. Ehsan's (2018) research of British youths found that educational attainment only had a limited effect on non-electoral participation, but continuing attendance in full-time education increased the likelihood of unorthodox participation. Marine et al (2010) have conducted research in 25 countries across the world which found that those with higher educational qualifications are more likely to sign a petition, donate money to a cause, join a demonstration or join an internet forum than those with lower qualifications. They note that educational inequality exerts the least influence on voting, making it a far more egalitarian form of political action than non-electoral political engagement. However, Marine et al (2010) suggest that the inequality in alternative political action may be due to differences in income and not educational achievement. Stockemer's (2014) extensive research of 39 countries found that those who were more highly educated were significantly more likely to engage in non-electoral political action. Sloam's (2014) investigation of the UK and Stolle and Hooghe's (2011) analysis of the Netherlands, though smaller in scope than Stockemer's study, also revealed that alternative forms of political action were dominated by those who had attended higher education.

The role of education in predicting future political participation has been subject to criticism, however. Quintelier (2015) found that schools had relatively little impact on political socialisation. Some researchers have even suggested that education is a proxy rather than a cause of electoral participation (Kam and Palmer, 2008; Persson, 2014). These authors claim that the factors that make certain individuals decide to attend higher education institutes are the same factors that increase their proclivity for political participation, so preadult socialisation is a larger determinant on political participation than the human capital or social experiences gained at university. They suggest that parental factors are the strongest

ingredient in an adolescent's socialisation. An agent's decision to attend postsecondary education or participate in politics is predicated on the values that have been bestowed upon them by their parents and the occupation and education that their parents have obtained. This constellation of socialising factors drives the choices an individual makes as an adult. Consequently, the decision to participate in politics is propelled by the same socialisation that encourages the choice of engaging with politics or attending higher education, it is not attendance at the latter that causes engagement with the former.

This line of reasoning has led to claims that socioeconomic inequalities and educational achievement are intrinsically linked, furthering unequal voting patterns between social groups. Hoskins et al's (2014) investigation found that in Germany and the UK socioeconomic status had a significant influence on educational selection between schools and within schools, which in turn effected those students' self-efficacy and future intention to vote. Therefore, the process of selection and placement into, what is perceived to be, lower ability groups lowered this cohort's inclination to vote upon reaching adulthood. Likewise, Kawashima-Ginsberg and Levine (2013) found that students whose educational progress was ahead of others at a similar age, which is linked to higher socioeconomic status, were more likely to electorally participate. Moreover, schools do not diminish existing inequalities of political interest between the lower and higher classes. Poorer children are less likely to be attentive to politics than more affluent youth when they begin school, but democratic climates within schools (Hoskins et al, 2017) and school attendance (van Deth et al, 2011) do not reduce these disparities in political interest.

Of all the predicators of political engagement analysed in this chapter, education appears to be the most significant indictor of electoral participation. Those with higher educational qualifications are more likely to vote, be interested in politics, feel confident in their knowledge of politics and have high belief in their efficacy compared to those with lower or no educational qualifications. Indeed, if you are young, then educational achievement and length of time in full-time education improves the likelihood you will engage with politics. These findings are replicated in alternative forms of political participation as those with higher

qualifications are more likely to pursue non-institutional political action compared to those with lower or no educational qualifications.

However, education may be a proxy for, rather than a cause of, lower political participation. Socioeconomic status may be the real driver of this relationship as those with higher educational qualifications are likely to come from relatively privileged backgrounds and have higher wages when they enter adulthood. Therefore, attendance at university may not cause the increased political activity among its members. Instead, access to higher levels of resources increase the likelihood of attending university and leads to the heightened chance of political participation. The lack of consensus about the links between education and political participation means that it would be accurate to state that those who have attended postsecondary education are more likely to engage with political activities, but it is less clear whether education is the cause of, or the proxy for, increased political participation.

3.8 Gender

Gender has a more contested influence on political engagement than do either socioeconomic status or education. Women's and men's turnout (all ages) at the 2017 UK General Election were equal at 69 per cent and turnout rate variations between the genders have been relatively small since the start of the new millennium; female's turnout at the previous three elections was one percent less than for males, while this participation gap was three percent in 2001 (Ipsos MORI, 2001; 2005; 2010; 2015; 2017a). Yet, while voting may be a fairly equal form of formal political participation between genders, females are less likely than males to be a member of a political party, attend a political meeting or contact a politician (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010; Marien et al, 2010; Whiteley, 2009).

The variation in turnout between genders is more pronounced amongst young people, however, as Table 3.4 illustrates. Young males demonstrated a higher inclination to vote than young females at the first three general elections of this century. The 2010 election is

particularly noteworthy, as 11 percent more young men voted than young women. This gender imbalance then reversed in 2015 and 2017 as young females started to vote in greater numbers than young males. The change between 2010 and 2015 is considerable and is the combination of fewer young men voting and an increase in young women voting (Ipsos MORI, 2001; 2005; 2010; 2015; 2017a). No literature has been found which investigates why youth political participation between genders changed dramatically between 2010 and 2015, so an explanation cannot be provided. We should also note that variation between the genders has been more significant amongst those aged 18-24 at each of the last five general elections than for the general population. This suggests gender loses significance when explaining turnout as people become older.

Table 3.4 Female and Male turnout at General Elections in Britain 2001-2017

(Source: Ipsos MORI, 2001; 2005; 2010; 2015; 2017)

	2001	**2005**	**2010**	**2015**	**2017**
Female (all ages)	58%	61%	64%	66%	69%
Male (all ages)	61%	62%	66%	67%	69%
Female (18-24)	36%	35%	39%	44%	66%
Male (18-24)	43%	39%	50%	42%	62%

For alternative forms of political participation, however, gender imbalances are slightly more complicated. Amongst all age groups, males are more likely than females to demonstrate or

join a politically-aligned internet forum, though this is reversed for signing a petition or joining a boycott with women more likely than men to utilise these forms of political action (Marien et al, 2010; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011). According to Marien et al (2010), this suggests that women are not less interested in politics or they would not participate in unorthodox political action.

Gender has a larger impact on political attitudes than participation. Hansard's (2019) study of political engagement demonstrated that males are slightly more committed to voting at future elections than is the case for females. However, females display far less confidence in their political knowledge and report less interest in politics than males. Yet, previous research by Hansard (2017) suggests that males do tend to overestimate their political knowledge, while females underestimate their understanding of politics. It would seem imperative, then, to try and explore why women are less satisfied with politics, report less interest in politics and doubt their knowledge about politics.

Accordingly, academic studies have predominantly focused on women's political values rather than their political behaviour. Preadult socialisation, for example, exerts an influence on the political engagement of genders. Boys are likely to have significantly higher political efficacy than girls (Arens and Watermann, 2017; Cicognani et al, 2012) because gendered socialisation propels young females to regard politics as a pursuit for males (Gordon, 2008). Moreover, both younger (Henn and Foard, 2014a) and older females (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012) are less likely to be interested in politics.

There are various explanations for why females demonstrate less political interest, knowledge, and efficacy than males. It has been postulated that females' self-perceived lack of knowledge about politics (Ondercin and Jones-White, 2011) and the narrow conception of what is considered political (Briggs, 2008) drive their lower interest in politics. The overrepresentation of males in parliament (BBC, 2017b) mean that females have few women role-models in politics and there is lack of focus on issues which afflict women (Campbell and

Wolbrecht, 2006; House of Commons, 2017). Furthermore, male domination of time and money in the private sphere mean that females do not have opportunity or resources to engage with politics to a greater extent (Adman, 2011; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010).

Access to resources also leads to stratification between females, as well as between genders. Compared to females who have not attended university, women with university degrees are far more likely to vote, be interested in politics, report a good understanding of politics and engage in alternative activity. Similarly, females with higher household incomes are more likely to vote, be a member of political party, be interested in politics and sign petitions than women with lower incomes (Gidengil et al, 2010). Furthermore, females from the ABC1 class groups turned out to vote at the 2017 election in far greater numbers than women from the C2DE class groups (Ipsos MORI, 2017). It could be tentatively claimed, therefore, that objectified (wealth) and embodied (education) resources provide a greater explanatory power than gender for levels of electoral participation and political engagement.

In terms of voting, gender does not exert a large influence across all age groups; there has been little variation in turnout between genders over the last 20 or so years and at the 2017 UK General Election female and male turnout was identical. For the youngest age cohort, the variations in turnout between genders has been wider over this period. Furthermore, there has not been a stable trend favouring one gender. Both young men and young women have voted more than the other gender at different elections since the millennium. We do not have the information about why these unstable patterns have occurred, but currently it seems that young women are more likely to participate than young men. There are more notable gender imbalances when we review political attitudes, however. Women are less likely to be confident in their political knowledge and generally have less interest in politics than men do. It is possible that this is due to traditional definitions of political participation which associate political activity with institutions dominated by men. There is evidence that a more equal gender composition of political representatives would increase the political interest and knowledge of females. It has also been suggested that females are often unable to pursue time-consuming political activities, such as attending political meetings or rallies, due to their limited time and resources relative to males. Consequently, even though gender has little

impact on voting, gender inequalities do exert an influence on women's ability to engage with certain, often time-consuming, political endeavours and their interest and knowledge of politics.

3.9 Ethnicity

Ethnicity certainly impacts the likelihood of participation in electoral politics. For example, in general elections in the UK since 2010, those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds have voted considerably less than their white counterparts. Nonetheless, this deficit in voter turnout between ethnic groups is decreasing; in 2010 it was 16 per cent, before narrowing to 12 per cent in 2015 and 5 per cent in 2017 (Ipsos MORI, 2010; 2015; 2017). Ethnicity also exerts an impact on political party membership, only 6 per cent of UK political party members are from BME groups (Whiteley, 2009), yet BME groups account for around 19 per cent of the population in the UK (Cabinet Office, 2017).

Young people from BME groups, similarly to their young white counterparts, record far lower rates of turnout at elections than the same ethnic minorities in older age cohorts (Saalfeld, 2011; Sanders et al, 2014). Furthermore, generation influences the political engagement of those with migrant origins; first generation migrants are more likely to vote than second generation ethnic minorities (Sanders et al, 2014) and are likely to become more active in politics the longer they have been in their adopted country (de Rooij, 2012). Conversely, however, it has been suggested that the increased integration of the second generation may lead to higher political disengagement as they become more aware of the unequal treatment BME groups suffer leading to a decreased confidence in political institutions (Sanders et al, 2014).

There are differential levels of participation between different ethnic minority groups in the UK, however. Within BME groups, Asian participation is generally higher than that of non-Asian groups and those of Indian origin are more likely to turn out to vote than those with Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Afro-Caribbean antecedents. In fact, participation rates amongst those with Indian backgrounds, is higher than for their white counterparts (Saalfeld, 2011). The differences in political participation demonstrated by different ethnic minority groups

can be partially explained by the socioeconomic status and educational qualifications of the different BME groups. So, for instance, those with an Indian heritage are more likely to enjoy higher levels of education and affluence than those from Pakistani or Afro-Caribbean groups (Cabinet Office, 2017) which, as has been discussed above, impacts on the likelihood of voting. It is possible that the relative lack of BME politicians in the UK may also decrease the likelihood of ethnic minorities voting as they feel that they lack political representatives who understand their experiences. Also, BME groups are more likely to be populated by younger people than is the case for white groups, so the lower rates of voting among younger cohorts leads to the decreased turnout amongst ethnic minorities. However, the variation of participation rates between ethnic minority groups has not been overwhelmingly answered within the literature, so, consequently, there is no conclusive causal explanation (Saalfeld, 2011).

Ethnicity has a diverse impact on political values in the UK. Hansard's (2019) audit of political engagement suggests that ethnic minorities of all ages are substantially less likely than white people to be absolutely certain to vote or to be interested in politics. However, there is little difference in the confidence each of these groups has in their knowledge of politics and parliament. However, BME groups report a significantly higher satisfaction with the present system of governing and are more likely to feel getting involved in politics is effective than is the case for white people. Sanders et al (2014) found that BME groups as a whole and each individual ethnic minority group are far more civically-minded than is the case for white people. Moreover, Sanders et al concur with Hansard about faith in political and democratic institutions; this is far higher among BME groups, except for those with African heritage, than is found amongst white groups.

In the UK, young people in BME groups demonstrate different political values compared to ethnic minority groups as a whole. Youth in BME groups had more faith in the idea of democracy than their white counterparts and there was no significant difference between these group's interest in politics. However, young non-white groups have significantly less faith in in the current political system, are less trusting of politicians and feel they have less influence over the direction of politics compared to their white counterparts (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Moreover, younger BME cohorts demonstrate lower levels of interest in, and knowledge about, politics than those ethnic minorities in older age cohorts (Sanders et al, 2014). It has been suggested that young BME people are exploring alternative forms of politics

because they are disenchanted with the institutions and political agents they encounter when engaging with formal politics (O'Toole and Gale, 2011).

Younger BME cohorts also seem to be questioning the inclusiveness of British politics; BME youths are far less satisfied with political institutions and representatives than older BME people (Henn and Foard, 2014a; Sanders et al, 2014). Younger ethnic minorities vote far less than older ethnic minorities and demonstrate a proclivity for alternative political action that circumvents engagement with Westminster politics. It has been suggested that young people from BME groups derive the distrust of political institutions – and, consequently, eschew voting - due to the institutional racism and islamophobia they have suffered (Sanders et al, 2014) and the underrepresentation of ethnic minority politicians (Saalfeld, 2011).

The experiences of political engagement for BME groups is far from uniform. Differences between various BME groups, variations between younger ethnic minorities and older ethnic minorities and examples of BME groups being more positive than their white counterparts about politics have been discussed. While most BME groups have lower turnout rates than the white majority, both of these groups - with a few exceptions - have relatively similar political values. However, while young white people are dissatisfied with politicians and political institutions, young ethnic minorities demonstrate significantly less external political efficacy than is the case for white youth. Therefore, a key aspect of improving young BME people's voting rates is to establish a trust between BME youth and political institutions which takes into account the distinctive factors, such as institutional racism, which afflict BME communities.

3.10 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to highlight how social group membership mediates the likelihood of political participation and highlight which groups are least likely to engage with, and participate in, politics. All the variables discussed in this chapter had some influence on political behaviour. The variable which seems to have the most impact on political engagement and participation is class. This is because class often influences other variables. For example, this chapter discussed how education often acts as a proxy for class. Those who

are likely to attend higher educational institutes are also more likely to come from the middle or upper classes. Similarly, affluent women are more likely to engage with politics than females who are financially disadvantaged. Moreover, ethnic minorities with higher incomes, such as those with Indian antecedents, are more likely to be involved in politics than less affluent ethnic minorities, such as those with Afro-Caribbean origins. This is not to claim that class is the only explanation for differing rates of political participation, but an acknowledgement that class often mediates political behaviour within the other variables discussed in this chapter.

We began this chapter by reviewing claims that individuals have been decoupled from traditional links to their social groups, but the evidence reviewed significantly diminishes these claims. Socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender and educational achievement all - though to different extents – influence a person's political attitudes and behaviours. At the 2017 general election, those who are from BME groups, those from lower occupational groups and those without higher educational qualifications all recorded lower turnouts than white groups, those from higher occupational groups and those who had gained university qualifications. Moreover, gender, ethnicity, education and class are influential in a person's relationship with politics. Those from traditionally weaker social groups are less likely to feel interested in politics, feel that they can influence politics and have belief in their knowledge of politics. Educational achievement appears to be the most influential of these demographics on political engagement. It is true for both formal and informal political engagement, though it is likely that educational qualifications and attendance at higher educational institutes are influenced to some extent by socioeconomic status. In fact, except for income inequality, there is a high level of agreement about the role that membership of these various social groups has on political participation and engagement within the literature. Therefore, claiming that gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and education influence rates of political participation is certainly a valid claim as evidenced by this review of existing empirical studies.

While not all the literature reviewed was specific to young people, it seems correct to infer that young people will also be influenced by these structures. They do not exist in a vacuum and when the literature does examine structures and young people there is support for the suggestion that certain demographical factors influence young people. The objective of this

chapter was to demonstrate that young people lead complex lives influenced by structures, so to position youth as a uniform group fails to recognise the different pathways to political activity they encounter. The analysis of this chapter was also crucial for meeting research aim 2; to understand the barriers to participation and categorise the research participants, the thesis required information about how demographics influence political participation. In the next chapter, the thesis will discuss the methodological considerations the thesis made, how the research was designed and outline how structures are to be investigated within this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology and research design

4.1 Introduction

This thesis has adopted semi-structured, in-depth interviews to empirically investigate the research aims. This chapter will explain why this method was chosen, issues that arise from using this method and how this method can be evaluated for validity. It will also detail the process of data gathering and analysis. This chapter will begin with a critical discussion of ontological and epistemological ideologies and explain why pragmatism was the chosen approach for this investigation. Thereafter, the research strategy for the project will be reviewed before elucidating why the methods chosen were suitable for the research aims of the study. Thereafter, it will provide an explanation and overview regarding data gathering; this will consider data analysis, data collection, sampling, access issues and the interview process. The chapter will finish with a consideration of the ethical practices conducted within this thesis, before offering some concluding remarks.

4.2 Research aims

1. Explore what the politically engaged can explain about young people's political engagement and participation

> This thesis has developed original categories to explore young people's political engagement and participation. This new approach and the research design were constructed to meet the objectives of this thesis. This entailed using the experiences of those who are active in politics to investigate these facets of youth political behaviour. This was designed to explore barriers to political participation and how strategies to overcome these barriers could be developed from these insights. These aspects of youth political participation will be explored in research aims 2 and 3. However, as this is an original approach in youth political studies, evaluating how successful this method was in exploring young people's political engagement and

participation is an important consideration for this study. Therefore, research aim 1 has focused on assessing the validity of this analytical model. Moreover, relevant additional information has been gathered in the process of this study which do not specifically relate to research aims 2 and 3, so this information has been included in consideration of research aim 1. For example, the thesis has documented the political activities of the interviewees, providing us with information on their wide-ranging political participation. It has also allowed the thesis to critically analyse their motivation for engaging with politics, their opinions on politicians and why they think the political participation of millennials is lower than for previous cohorts. This investigation has provided insights into the political repertoires of the interviewees, while simultaneously providing data which was employed to evaluate aspects of the literature – for example, whether alienation or apathy is a better explanation for young people's widespread political disengagement. Much of this analysis has been reported in Chapter 5.

2. Understand the processes and influences which create barriers to millennials' political engagement and participation

The second aim of this thesis sought to understand what barriers are erected to millennials' political participation. The thesis has investigated how these barriers are erected, analysed how the interviewees became engaged with politics and outlined the factors which have inhibited their political participation. The literature has identified that certain social groups are more likely to face barriers to participation, so this thesis has contrasted the experiences of these groups as they navigate the political sphere. An important factor in this analysis was understanding how resources limit or broaden access to political participation. Therefore, the thesis employed Bourdieu's concepts to extend our understanding of this process. This aim was largely interrogated in Chapter 6.

3. Identify methods to overcome the barriers to political engagement and participation

Aim three sought to identify methods which remove or allow young people to circumvent the barriers to political participation. The responses of the interviewees have allowed the thesis to categorise what the main barriers to participation are, but they have also offered indications about how these barriers may be overcome. Combining these insights with evidence from the literature has allowed the thesis to evaluate what methods are suitable to overcoming barriers to participation. These strategies will be developed within Chapter 7, though final recommendations for overcoming some of the barriers to political participation are outlined in the conclusion of this thesis.

4.3 Research paradigms

Research methodologies are underpinned by assumptions researchers claim about the world, what should be investigated and how research is analysed and explained (Bryman, 1988). Competing paradigms within social research have been used to answer these questions and have made claims regarding the nature of reality (ontology) and what can be claimed as knowledge (epistemology). These beliefs about ontology and epistemology influence the methods of research deployed in studies of the social world (Alexander et al, 2008).

The main paradigm distinction that has often guided social research is between positivism and objectivism, on the one hand, and interpretivism and constructionism, on the other (Sarantakos, 2013). Positivists believe that social life is a reality distinct from agents' interpretations of the world which can be objectively observed and catalogued. From this ontological position, positivists often produce quantitative social research which claims that social life can be measured independently of the researcher or research subjects (Creswell, 2009). Conversely, interpretivists start from the ontological foundation that the world is socially constructed (Alexander et al, 2008). Interpretivists are sceptical that all social phenomena can be observed via the senses, so they usually adopt qualitative research to explore agents' experiences and interpret concealed aspects of the world (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

Another research paradigm is found within the pragmatist tradition. Proponents of pragmatism do not have a preference about whether to use qualitative or quantitative methods in social research, though this is due to the pragmatists' concern that disputes over ontological and epistemological distinctions hinder the research process (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The pragmatic approach adopts the view that claims that a certain paradigm can uncover 'truth' is a pointless exercise as none have proved entirely successful. How knowledge is gathered and interpreted is subject to constant change, so, according to the pragmatists, research paradigms are not transcendental and are unable to uncover ahistorical truths. Different methods of research should therefore be utilised depending on what the researcher is attempting to investigate (Baert, 2005). Accordingly, pragmatism maintains the position that philosophical conflicts about epistemology and ontology are superseded by the suitability of the method, the validity of the knowledge it creates and an acknowledgement of 'the complexity and messiness of social life' (Feilzer, 2010: 14).

This thesis will use inspiration from the pragmatic approach in its research methodology. It will make no claims about the legitimacy of particular ontological or epistemological claims. Instead it will use the methodological approach which is most appropriate for increasing our understanding about millennial's political participation and the barriers they face to engage with politics. It will be guided by the principle of whether the researcher 'found out what [they] want to know' (Hanson, 2008: 109).

4.4 Research Strategy

A research strategy is the methods employed to conduct social research (Bryman, 2012). The strategies employed are often developed from ontological and epistemological preferences, but social research may benefit if methods are chosen for their applicability to the phenomena investigators are trying to analyse (Baert, 2005; Hanson, 2008; Felizer, 2010). The research strategy is used to establish links between 'ideas and evidence to produce a representation of some aspect of social life' (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011: 51). Qualitative and

quantitative research methods are the two most common forms of research strategies, though these can be combined to form a mixed-methods approach (Sarantakos, 2013). This thesis has adopted semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the method best suited to meet the research aims. Why this qualitative method has been chosen will be the focus of this section.

As we discussed in 1.2 above, quantitative research has often not provided nuanced accounts of why young people are choosing not to participate in formal politics. Allowing youth to provide deep or qualitative explanations for their declining electoral presence has permitted researchers to explore and document young people's varied and complicated political choices (Almlund, 2018; Gordon and Taft, 2011; O'Toole et al, 2003). As the first research aim has attemted to broaden our understanding of these same issues, it was decided that young people should be provided with the opportunity to explain their political choices and activities without their responses being constricted (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Thus, also avoiding the restrictions which a quantitative method may impose.

The second research aim sought to understand why and how barriers to political participation have been erected. Therefore, it was partially searching for causal relationships to be established between social phenomena – the literature review suggests structural roots – and the erection of barriers to political participation. While quantitative data provides solid understandings of correlations, it often fails to explain causal relationships. Qualitative methods, however, are better able to investigate the origins of causes and how they lead to social effects (Gilbert, 2008). Furthermore, the second research aim will give a voice to disadvantaged groups in society. In Chapter 3 we explored how certain social groups are marginalised within the political sphere, so this research has attempted to provide a platform for their experiences. A qualitative method is more able to reveal the latent features of these social groups and produce more accurate representations of their lives (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011).

The purpose of the third research aim was to develop recommendations of how to overcome the barriers to participation. As quantitative methods are usually deductive, in which data are used to test theories, and qualitative methods are inductive, where theories are developed from the data provided, a qualitative approach seemed most suitable to generate schemes for overcoming barriers to political participation (Bryman, 2012). As Ragin and Amoroso (2011: 115) argue the extensive knowledge produced from qualitative research 'provide rich raw material for advancing theoretical ideas'.

The reasons for choosing to conduct interviews were similar to the reasons a qualitative method was discerned as the best research method; interviews provide an open environment for participants to supply rich data. The purpose of interviewing is about gaining knowledge and awareness about the world through the experiences of subjects who have had exposure to certain social phenomena. As Seidman (2006: 14) states, '[i]t is a powerful way to gain insight into […] important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues.' Moreover, 'interviews examine the context of thought, feeling and action and can be a way of exploring relationships between different aspects of a situation' (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 32).

Interviewing has been chosen as suitable method for this study because the research aims require an insight into the lived experiences of subjects who have navigated a path to political participation. Understanding the processes through which youth become interested in politics, their experiences of political action, the barriers they face to participation and how they overcame these barriers would be difficult to capture through statistical analysis. The points in their lives when young people traverse these experiences could not be observed in a single moment and a researcher cannot hope to be there to witness them all. By recounting their experiences, the participants have allowed this study to gain access to the processes that led them to becoming political agents and allowed the study to grasp insights into the social factors which mediate, encourage and discourage political participation. Moreover, it was anticipated that the explanations for the phenomena being investigated would be complex and multifaceted. The Interviews have provided the scope for these numerous

experiences to be captured and has provided the researcher with direct contact with the participant to mutually seek out where, how and why these social episodes occurred (Fujii, 2018).

After evaluating the various formats for interviews, in-depth, semi-structured and face-to-face interviews were assessed as being the most relevant to achieve the research aims. It was necessary for the interviews to be in-depth to allow the participant to provide context to their experiences and provide them with the space to reflect on the aspects of those experiences which may be hidden from the researcher (Marvasti, 2004). The interviews were semi-structured to create a balance between flexibility and covering the issues which are most relevant to the research aims.

As Matthews and Ross (2010) suggest, there is a continuum between structured and unstructured data collection rather than three distinct forms; structured, semi-structured and unstructured. This research, while being semi-structured, tends towards the unstructured side of that continuum. This was preferred to allow the conversation to flow and permit the interviewee to document their experiences as they wished (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). This was important because it provided the opportunity for the interviewee to control how they detailed their life experiences. The research aims require the participants to reflect on their journey through the political sphere, overwhelmingly while they were in their formative years. Allowing the participant the flexibility to construct their recollections from this period provided them with the greatest opportunity to remember important events and influences from this stage of their life and present their story as it made sense to them (Fujii, 2018). Not only did this help the interviewee create a coherent narrative, it provided extra details which were useful for study – for example, how did their home environment influence their political participation or did a friend suggest going to a political event? This allowed the researcher to probe more deeply into areas of interest that arose during the interview which would not be possible during a rigidly structured data collection process (Bryman, 2012).

Qualitative semi-structured, in-depth interviews were adopted by this thesis because it was believed this format would be most effective in achieving the research aims (Hanson, 2008). It provided rich data to improve our understanding about influences which kindle political engagement and barriers which prevent political participation. This method also allowed the interviewee to describe their journeys through the political sphere as they best understand it but provided the researcher with the certainty that all relevant topics were discussed for the purposes of comparing the experiences of the interviewees. Additionally, this qualitative method provided the researcher with the best opportunity to analyse causal relationships and construct solutions to barriers to political participation. In the next section, the thesis will outline how to assess the validity of the research method.

4.5 Evaluating the validity of research

This thesis has used categories of validation to examine how successful this method is and how effectively the research aims have been engaged with and answered. Reflecting on the validity of the study is necessary as it allows the researcher to consider whether the data deepens our understanding of the world, how reliable and applicable the methods used are, how legitimate the data and interpretations are and the impact of the findings on knowledge creation and real-life outcomes (Seale, 1999).

One technique for evaluating the validity of the research method is assessing the quality of the craftsmanship employed in the study (Kvale, 1996; Hesse-Biber, 2010). Evaluating the quality of the craftmanship leads to several ways of testing the validity of the methodological approach utilised. It includes assessing the investigator's actions during the research process. For example, has the researcher covered all the salient topics? Are inconsistencies between the data analysed and have these been reflected upon and discussed within the data analysis?

These questions are particularly pertinent for this study because the qualitative approach has been criticised on the grounds of reliability and anecdotalism (Silverman, 2011). For example,

Silverman has argued that certain social phenomena will be categorised and interpreted in contrasting ways by different researchers which means findings may not be consistent. For instance, how barriers to political participation are manifested may be interpreted in various ways by different scholars. The validity of qualitative research may also be undermined by anecdotal approaches in which small segments of data are used to draw conclusions which do not accurately represent social phenomena (Bryman, 1988).

To ensure that the thesis provided reliable results, contrary findings have been discussed when analysing the data. For example, in 5.5 many of the interviewees believed that young people's political disengagement was due to alienation – which supports the conclusions of the data analysis and evaluation of the literature review (Henn and Forad, 2014a; Melo and Stockemer, 2014; Sloam, 2014). However, it was also noted that a significant minority of participants believed that apathy was a better explanation, so quotes which elaborate these contrary findings were provided and discussed. To safeguard against the thesis slipping into anecdotalism, two different procedures were employed. Firstly, an interview guide was created so that all salient topics were discussed at some point during the interview. Secondly, only topics which were discussed by most, if not all, participants were included in the data analysis chapters. On the one occasion where a topic was only discussed by two participants but discussed in the data analysis chapters this was clearly highlighted in the text in 6.3.1. Therefore, the thesis has taken proactive measures to provide reliable results and avoid, or bring attention to possible, anecdotalism to ensure valid craftmanship within the methodological approach.

Assessing craftsmanship also involves evaluating the depth of understanding of the methods used during research (Hesse-Biber, 2010). For example, is the correct terminology used? Is the researcher aware of the limitations of the method used? Were the methods used suitable for the research aims? To meet this area of craftmanship the thesis has employed a range of techniques. In the preceding section, a detailed explanation for why qualitative interviews were chosen was conducted. Some of the limitations of the qualitative approach have also been raised in this section above. Furthermore, the researcher has conducted a wide-ranging

exploration of the literature to ensure the correct terminology has been used and to provide information about the drawbacks of the chosen methodology.

Another important consideration is whether the research analysis has enriched our understanding of the topic? As this thesis has adopted a pragmatist approach to research, the most fundamental aspect of evaluating the methodology employed is whether the research has provided useful and accurate knowledge about the topic under investigation (Hanson, 2008). The data analysis conducted in this thesis has covered a wide breadth of topics – millennials relationship to the political system, how barriers are erected to political participation and what methods can be used or developed to overcome these barriers – while providing significant depth to these issues. In the introduction, the thesis drew upon existing literature to explain why there was a need to investigate these topics. Additionally, the conclusion has listed how this study has provided an original contribution to knowledge in various areas. Therefore, there are examples highlighted throughout the thesis of it enriching our understanding of the themes under analysis.

As this methodology has been underpinned by a pragmatist approach, assessing the pragmatic validity is another vital calculation. Pragmatic validity is demonstrated by the impact the study has on policy outcomes and the wider world. If the study can establish new forms of approaching a problem, provide a positive strategy for overcoming a social issue or give a voice to a marginalised group, then it has demonstrated it has pragmatic validity (Kvale, 1996). This thesis has sought to meet each of these pragmatic aims. It has used the experiences of active political agents to provide insights about those young people who are disengaged from politics – a novel approach in youth studies. It has sought to develop strategies for overcoming barriers to political participation amongst disadvantaged groups. The thesis has also given a platform to those who were side-lined in the political sphere, providing a voice to those who often do feel influential in politics. Indeed, while this thesis has sought to develop a theory for youth political participation and the barriers they face to political action, it has also sought to use this theory to advance practical solutions to the social issues it has highlighted (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

4.6 Data collection, interview process and data analysis

4.6.1 Sampling and representativeness

For the most part, qualitative research does not employ generalizable or representative samples as they are often small-scale and in-depth. Instead it relies on non-probability samples where participants are selected due to their characteristics which are relevant to the topic of study (Ritchie et al, 2003). Qualitative researchers generally do not claim to that their findings represent the world as it is but provide examples that illustrate or illuminate the phenomena they are investigating. Therefore, their sampling does not have to follow the probabilistic formula which is common to quantitative research (Mason, 2002). The aims of this thesis include finding out how young people became interested in politics and understand barriers to political participation, so purposive sampling - where participants are selected due to their knowledge and experience of social phenomena (Ritchie et al, 2003; Marvasti, 2004) – was chosen as the strategy for selecting participants. The aim of this research is to produce more knowledge about under-explored issues within youth political participation. The project was not created with the expectation of being able to document how *all* millennials became interested in politics or explain barriers to participation which are representative of the *whole* population. Instead, it intended to provide more context for the processes which lead to interest in politics, shedding more light on the barriers that exist to participation and providing data which allows us to extrapolate strategies to overcome these obstacles. Accordingly, the sampling strategy is appropriate for the research aims.

In total, 35 people were interviewed for this research. This is a comparable figure to PhD investigations of youth political participation in which participants were interviewed: 38 interview participants (Geniets, 2009), 21 interview participants (Hong, 2015) and 40 interview participants (Hed, 2017). Choosing the sample size by a numerical figure is an

arbitrary form of selection in qualitative research, however. Indeed, as Patton (2002: 244) states, '[t]here are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry.'

Rather than focusing on the number of participants, the researcher should be focused on whether the size of the sample has provided them with enough information and knowledge about the phenomena they are interrogating. Moreover, the sample size should be contextualised within the sampling strategy used; purposive sampling was employed to illuminate the social issues under investigation, not provide generalisable and representative research outcomes (Patton, 2002). Researchers can also gauge whether they have enough participants through data saturation. This occurs when nothing new is being learnt from data collection and the process begins to become redundant (Mason, 2002; Ragin and Amoroso, 2011).

Interviewing was discontinued in January 2019. Data saturation for Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participants (NEUPs) and Expected Participants (EPs) had already been reached by this time as very few insights were being gained from those types of participants. This was not the case for the Unexpected Participants (UPs). Each UP had continued to contribute interesting and relevant data. However, a substantial amount of data had been provided by the UPs and, as discussed in 4.6.3, accessing UPs had been troublesome and laborious. It was decided that, while further data from UPs would be welcome, it was not necessary for meeting the research aims or producing valid research.

4.6.2 Participant categories

To meet the aims of the research project, all of those who were interviewed were required to be millennials who were engaged with politics and participated in formal politics. All participants had to be committed to voting in future general elections and to have had voted in general elections at every previous opportunity. There were no other conditions based on their political engagement or participation for inclusion in the study. For example, it was not

a requirement that the interviewee had to have been a member of a political party or have previously signed a petition. In all bar one case, interviewees had previously voted in a general election and reported that they were highly likely to vote in the next general election. The one interviewee who had not previously voted was George. At the time of the interview, George had only just turned 18 and was not eligible to vote at the previous general election. However, he was committed to voting at the next general election. As all the participants were required to be millennials, their age was ascertained before commencement of the interview. This was defined as being born between 1981-2000 and was adopted from Furlong and Cartmel's (2012) research which used the same years to define millennials as an age cohort.

Moreover, as one of the research aims is about exploring how young people overcame barriers to participation, it was necessary that some of these participants came from social groups associated with low participation identified in the literature review. Participants were divided into three sub-categories based on the likelihood of their political participation due to their social group membership: Unexpected Participant (UP), Expected Participant (EP) and Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participant (NEUP). The literature reviewed in Chapter 3 had identified that those who had been to university or were white or came from middle and upper class backgrounds were more likely to participate in politics (EP), whereas those who had not attended university or were from an ethnic minority background or were from working-class backgrounds were less likely to participate in politics (UP). Therefore, each interviewee was categorised according to their demographics (see table 5.1 below). If they belonged to two or more of the corresponding demographic groups, then they would be classified accordingly. For example, a person who was university educated, white and with a professional job were classified as an EP. Those whose demographics did not fit neatly into the UP or EP category, were placed into the NEUP category. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was asked to self-report their age, gender, ethnicity, university attendance and occupation of the main-wage earner in the household (see: Appendix 1). As many of the interviewees still resided with parents and some had no occupation or were students, asking the occupation of the main-wage earner of the household provided a more accurate overview of their life-circumstances than asking the interviewee what their

occupation was. The occupational social grade was utilised to provide the interviewee's class. This was adopted because this is the same occupational classificatory system Ipsos MORI (2009) uses, which is the primary resource applied within this thesis to document turnout rates at elections.

Table 5.1 Participant categories

Participant category	Social group
Expected participant (EP) – two or demographics from adjacent column	University educated White A, B and C1 social group
Unexpected participant (UP) – two or demographics from adjacent column	No higher education Black, Asian or ethnic minority C2, D and E social group
Neither Expected or Unexpected Participant (NEUP)	A mixture of social group characteristics from unexpected and expected participant categories

Assigning the participants into these different categories allowed the investigation to understand how membership of different social groups mediates access to political participation. Consequently, the different experiences leading to political engagement and participation resulting from social group membership can be compared and contrasted. It provides a variety of participants within the section of population that is being investigated.

As Ritchie et al (2003: 83) maintain, this is necessary for qualitative research as the 'greater the diversity of characteristics or circumstances, the more opportunity there is to identify their different contributory elements or influences'.

This approach has also allowed the researcher to identify which participants were likely to experience barriers to participation. Hence, the category of UP is the most important element within this analytical framework. As illustrated in Chapter 3, demographics influence the likelihood of political participation. It also highlighted that traditionally marginalised groups are the least likely to have strong attachment to political institutions and engage with politics but are more likely to encounter barriers to political participation. Understanding why and how these inclinations develop and the barriers which create obstructions to political action are formed are the key questions driving the investigation of this thesis. Therefore, while the EP and NEUP categories are important for juxtaposing the experiences of political engagement and participation of the UPs, it is this latter category which is the primary consideration within this investigation. It is the political predispositions of the UPs and the barriers which confront them when they interact with the political sphere which this thesis has identified as requiring critical interrogation to expand our knowledge of youth political participation.

Creating and employing the analytical framework of UPs, EPs and NEUPs as a tool to analyse young people's political engagement and participation is an original development in academic research. Illuminating the political sphere through the political activities of a group has been a feature of previous research, however. For example, Bang (2010; 2011) has used the concept of 'Everyday Makers', Ekman and Amnå (2012) have proposed the notion of 'Standby Citizens' and Dalton (2008) has demarcated between 'Engaged Citizens' and 'Duty Citizens'. However, Bang's and Dalton's concepts refer to agents of all ages and provide insights into how people are creating and participating within new non-institutional political activities. Ekman and Amnå have used their theory of 'Standby Citizens' to investigate young people (though the concept is not specific to youth), but they have defined this group as those who are informed about politics but are not certain to participate in elections. They also exclude

any person from this category if they lack institutional trust or have a deficiency of social capital which inhibits their engagement with politics (Amnå and Ekman, 2014). Thus, these pre-existing groups were not useful for this study as they do not specifically address young people's political experiences and do not illuminate how forms of capital or distrust of the political system influence youth political participation.

Using this method to categorise the interviewees was not straightforward as the thesis encountered issues about using precise classifications in qualitative research (Silverman, 2017). One issue which arose was that grouping individuals into the NEUP category became dependent on their class group. If, for example, an interviewee was white and had attended university, but their occupational group was either C1 or C2, then they were placed into the NEUP group even though they had met the criteria to be classified as an EP.

The prominence of class in deciding the NEUP category was due to two aspects highlighted in the literature review. As we discussed 3.4, occupational groups do not always provide evidence of the wage a person receives – an individual in grade C2 may earn more than an individual in grade C1. Indeed, the occupational group a person holds does not provide a complete representation of the affluence or resources at that individual's disposal – for example, inherited money or ownership of shares may provide increased wealth that classifications dependent on class membership do not account for. As we discussed in Chapter 3, resources and wealth are important factors in the likelihood of a person choosing to become politically active. To minimise overlooking how affluence impacted on their political participation, the NEUPs category was created. Otherwise, for example, individuals who had little wealth or resources to call upon may have been misleadingly categorised as EPs.

The thesis should acknowledge, then, that there is some conflation between socioeconomic status and class. It was decided that disentangling the role of socioeconomic status and class would be very difficult to achieve in this study with precision. Many of the research participants were still residing with their parents and their access to economic capital was

dependent on their parents' financial resources. Discovering the occupation of the main wage earner in the household for these interviewees often proved difficult as the research participants would not know the precise name of the job role their parent or guardian was employed in, so often the researcher would need to ask multiple questions to correctly ascertain which class group the main wage earner should be placed into. Attempting to accurately identify the wider financial resources the interviewees had access to was evaluated as being too difficult to achieve; the research participant may not know all sources of income available to the main wage earner, may incorrectly guess the levels of wealth their family possesses or would be reluctant to divulge such information. It was decided that combining socioeconomic status and class was preferable to the ambiguities that would arise from trying to identify all the financial resources a research participant possessed. However, attention was paid to how the research participants described their socioeconomic status and interviewees were assigned new categories if descriptions of their life arose during the interviews which seemed to contradict the socioeconomic status suggested by their demographics.

Indeed, three of the interviewees - Henry, Victoria and Robert - were reassigned categories because of insights their discussions provided about their lives. According to Henry's demographics, he should have been classified as an UP. He had not attended university, was currently unemployed and his parents, who he lived with, were retired (placing them into occupational grade E). However, Henry's father was a retired antiques dealer with significant assets and the family lived in a large semi-rural house with their own tennis court. Henry, furthermore, discussed having significant resources to call upon during youthhood. It seemed to undermine the category of UP if a person was classified as such due to demographics which did not reflect their access to financial and cultural resources. Victoria and Robert, according to the classification schema, should be NEUPs, but were included as UPs. Both were attending university and were white, though they resided in the lower occupational grades. However, during the course of their interviews they detailed a disadvantaged upbringing, where there was little money or resources to call upon, and both described themselves as working-class. Again, their demographics did not reveal an accurate picture of their journey to political participation. The fact that they went to university was as unexpected as them becoming

politically active. Indeed, it seemed likely that the incidences in their lives that unexpectedly propelled them towards political participation were similar to those which encouraged their unexpected attendance at university.

These two caveats to the classification schema do raise issues of subjectivity about the research. If the researcher is altering the participant categories, whether based on the interviewees' discussions during data gathering or insights from the literature, it could be interpreted as undermining the scientific and objective foundation of the classification system. While there is some validity to this suggestion, it seemed more unscientific and inaccurate to be rigid about the participants' classifications rather than acknowledging that demographics only offers a partial illustration of people's social environments. For example, after Victoria and Robert described their upbringing and their lack of resources, it seemed invalid to suggest they were anything else but UPs. Indeed, rather than raising questions about the categorisation of participants in this study, these issues may highlight the problem with quantitative classifications which solely rely on numerical demographics, as they might not provide nuanced accounts of people's often complicated circumstances. As we discussed above, social life is complex and messy (Feilzer, 2010). Thus, being less precise about a classificatory system to improve the accuracy of how the thesis documented people's lives and conditions was gauged as the best decision to produce valid research. Therefore, the classificatory system used in this study could be described as a guide rather than a hard set of rules.

It is also important to acknowledge that due to the broad range of ages in the millennial generation utilised for this study that some research participants may not consider themselves young people anymore. As the thesis discussed in 1.4, cohort, period and life-cycle effects might lead to some of the interviewees defining themselves as adults and some as youths. This section also highlighted that social forces are a significant contributing factor towards whether an individual considers themselves having transitioned from youthhood to adulthood. Consequently, the research cannot be designed to give a scientific demarcation between being a youth or an adult based upon an independent variable, such as age, because

the feeling of reaching adulthood is largely a subjective classification (Margot, 2007; Moreno and Urraco, 2018). Furthermore, as it is the millennial generation's patterns of political engagement and participation which the thesis was focused upon, the large age-range was required to understand why older millennials had begun to eschew political activity from the 2001 General Election onwards. So, while we should acknowledge that cohort, period and life-cycle effects may influence the data provided between the research participants - particularly those at the extreme ends of the age-range - methods to overcome these issues would likely diminish the quality of the findings or place arbitrary categories on the interviewees which do not accurately reflect the influence of social forces.

4.6.3 Accessing participants

To gain access to participants, organisations whose members might fulfil the criteria for the study were contacted. These organisations included youth clubs, political parties, universities, colleges, the youth parliament and local government and were mainly located in the West Midlands, East Midlands, London, North-West, South-West and East of England. Adverts were also circulated at events where there were likely to be a number of politically engaged individuals present. To increase the visibility of the study, adverts were also placed on the website, 'Call for Participants' and distributed via various social media platforms. After some participants had been accessed and interviewed via these organisations, events and adverts, snowball sampling – where existing participants are used to gain access to other agents with the relevant characteristics (Patton, 2002) – was also adopted. The interviews were conducted over 18 months, from July 2017 until December 2018. Participants were offered entry into a prize draw for five £20 book tokens to encourage their involvement.

Gaining participants for this research caused the most complications during this study. A significant number of organisations were contacted to provide access to participants with the correct characteristics for the research aims. Many of the organisations were unhelpful or did not have the staff to facilitate requests for support. Some of these organisations seemed initially keen to support the project but were unresponsive when it came time to have

meetings to discuss the project or circulate adverts. Political parties were contacted in various parts of England and Wales but were almost uniformly unhelpful. However, there were organisations and individuals who were able to offer support, which was invaluable in accessing participants.

There were also some issues with potential participants initially agreeing to be interviewed but then failing to respond to emails to arrange a time, date and location to meet. This generally occurred after substantial correspondence, leading to a significant waste of time. However, it should be remembered that the participants were giving up their free time to support the project with little incentive and often expended time and money travelling to the interviews.

In total, 35 interview participants were gathered for this research. 13 were classified as UPs, nine were classified as EPs and 12 were classified as NEUPs. In terms of gender, 22 of the interviewees stated they were male and 14 specified that they were female. Only four of the research participants were from an ethnic minority background.

4.6.4 How the interviews were conducted

The location and time of the interviews were arranged at the convenience of the participant. They were giving up their time to support the project, so it was felt that they should be in control of these factors to minimise any inconvenience they may suffer. Interviews were generally located in coffee shops or public houses, though interviews also took place at Nottingham Trent University, the institution where the participant worked or the participant's home. All of these locations offered a relaxed environment for our discussions and were preferred as an informal atmosphere would help to reduce any power asymmetry between the interviewee and interviewer. Coffee shops were occasionally problematic as there was often back-ground noise, but any interfering sounds did not drastically impact on the quality of the data gathered. Each of the interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription. All

participants were provided via email with participation consent forms and interview questions prior to interview. They were also verbally talked through their rights as a participant face-to-face. Each participant was asked to read a hard copy of the consent form prior to the interview which was signed by the participant if they wished to continue with the process; all interviewees were happy to proceed, and none subsequently withdrew their data. All the interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, while the average time of the interviews was around 60 minutes.

An interview guide, which was sent to the participant before meeting, was used to loosely direct each interview (see: Appendix 2). This was created so that no important topics would be neglected but the areas for discussion were often tackled in different sequences driven by the preferences of the interviewee. Moreover, questions which were not contained in the interview guide were often asked by the researcher. This is because participants would often discuss new topics and new questions were needed to probe into these areas. For example, one interviewee mentioned that their local youth clubs had shut down before moving onto a different topic. This seemed of importance, so they were asked why had the youth clubs shut down? Was there a demand for the youth clubs? Did this influence their current and future political engagement? For some of the participants these questions would have been superfluous as youth clubs did not form an important part of their journey to political participation, but these additional ad hoc questions provided pertinent data for this investigation from that particular interviewee.

The interviews began with detailing the participant's demographics. Thereafter, the interview guide was not followed rigidly; the interviewees were provided with the freedom to take the interview in the direction they were most comfortable with. Intrusions into the discussion were kept to a minimum to allow the participant to discuss what they felt was important while maintaining eye-contact and other positive body language which demonstrated their views were being given attention (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

It is also important to note that creating objective environments within qualitative studies is significantly harder to maintain than is the case for quantitative research (Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2011). Underpinning this difficulty in interviews is the power relationship between researcher and participant. In particular, the researcher guides the discussion and the participant may be inclined to provide responses that the researcher wants, which the thesis terms desirability bias (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

This form of desirability bias was a significant factor to be aware of and manage within the interview process. The participants were aware of the study's aims before partaking and were sent the interview guide before the interview commenced. Consequently, there was a large possibility of desirability bias creeping into their responses. After consideration of desirability bias, it was felt that being honest about the aims of the study to build trust between interviewer and participant was a higher priority than hiding the objectives to control for any bias in responses. However, before each interview the researcher explained that having accurate data was more important to the study than providing responses which supported the hypothesis of this study. It was hoped that this would minimise any bias in the interviewees' accounts.

One of the main reasons that semi-structured interviews were chosen was to provide the interviewee with some control over the progression of the interview, allowing the participant the space to provide accurate responses and reducing the interviewer's regulation of the conversation. This also lessened the power relationship between interviewee and interviewer as the former was provided with the ability to manage the conversations.

The review of the literature in Chapter 3 also demonstrated that the power relationship may differ depending on the social group the interviewee occupies. Class, gender, ethnicity and educational levels, for example, influence each individual's habits, tastes and opinions and also guides how that person will judge other agents. As the research aimed to interview disadvantaged groups where the power relationship may be heightened, it was important to

consider the power relationship between researcher and interviewee within this study. As noted above, interviewees were asked to choose an environment which was relaxing and informal to help minimise the power relationship. Moreover, by allowing the research participant to choose the location of the interview, the researcher gave more power to the interviewee. However, creating a value-free environment devoid of social group characteristics is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve (Fujii, 2018). Nevertheless, as Brinkmann and Kvale (2015: 38) state, 'the point is not that power should necessarily be eliminated from research interviews, but rather that interviewers ought to reflect on the role of power in the production of interview knowledge.'

4.6.5 Qualitative data analysis

To make sense of the information collected during the interviews and begin the process of interpretation, the interviews will be subjected to coding. As research is generally about making comparisons in some respect, the data needs to be organised so that it can compared, contrasted and interpreted by the researcher in a manageable form (Gilbert, 2008). The interview data collected was thematically coded. This involved breaking the data down into categories of themes and subthemes so that they formed patterns of data which were then analysed by the researcher (Bryman, 2012).

Before commencing with coding, the data had to be transcribed. This was achieved using two different techniques. Initially, the recordings were uploaded to a program named 'Express Dictate'. This program allowed the speed of the audio data to be decreased or increased, hot keys to control the recordings and a text box to type the transcriptions. Interviews with 11 participants were transcribed verbatim using this method. Each hour of recording was taking between six and eight hours to transcribe, however. To increase the swiftness of transcriptions, the audio function on Google Docs was utilised. This required listening to the audio recordings via headphones and then verbally repeating verbatim the discussions into Google Docs with the audio typing function enabled. Interviews with 24 participants were transcribed in this manner. There was a marginal decrease in accuracy using this technique.

Nevertheless, the accuracy of the transcriptions was only slightly reduced within the second process, was suitable for initial coding and this technique was more time-efficient. To make certain that the interviewees' responses were being reported accurately, any quote included in the thesis was checked again on the original audio recording. In the main, all discussions were transcribed. However, very occasionally superfluous conversations were not included on the transcript.

The coding process was undertaken with the assistance of the qualitative data analysis program NVivo 12. Discussions were coded into over-arching themes and then sub-themes. For example, one over-arching theme was: does apathy or alienation better describe millennials' political disengagement? Thereafter, sub-themes of apathy, alienation or mixed responses were created to allow for ease of access to pertinent information. This also allowed for quickly calculating how many participants held a certain viewpoint. In the main, NVivo acted as an organising repository for the data, allowing for ease of access to evaluate and categorise the participants' responses.

4.6.6 Bourdieu's conceptual tools

To interpret the discussions of the interviewees and understand how barriers to political participation were manifested in their lives, the thesis has drawn upon some of Bourdieu's concepts. Bourdieu's concepts will enlighten our understanding of how relational social life influences our traits, opinions and pursuits (France and Threadgold, 2016). In this study, how young people became interested in politics and learnt to be political agents has been critically examined and evaluated. The literature has suggested that these processes are dependent on others and the opportunities to become politically involved are not evenly distributed. However, individuals are active in this process and make choices which lead to their political engagement or disengagement. Bourdieu provides the concepts to understand how social relations narrow or broaden young people's opportunities, thus combining individual choice with considerations of structures (Wacquant, 2005b). Therefore, to illuminate our understanding of how barriers to participation manifest themselves while acknowledging the

role of agency, this thesis has adopted Bourdieu's conceptual tools to interpret some of the data.

Bourdieu believed that our opinions, choices and acts were embedded in class relationships. Those who can access high levels of cultural, social and economic resources are dominant in society, while those who have low access to these forms of capital are dominated in society (Bourdieu, 1984). The access to these resources shapes the decisions of the individual and disposes them towards certain habits, opinions and patterns of behaviour. This is true for political engagement and political participation. The dominant are inclined towards political activity because they believe that they will be successful in their endeavours. The dominated, conversely, are predisposed to political passivity because they doubt they have the ability to be an effective political agent (Harrits, 2011). To understand how Bourdieu's concepts are relevant to this study, the rest of this section will unpack Bourdieu's concepts and demonstrate their relevance to political engagement and participation.

Bourdieu understood social practices as a form of structured agency. He provided the concept *habitus* to describe how human action was composed of free-will mediated by social structures (Wacquant, 2013). *Habitus* is both structured and structuring. It is structured by a person's preceding and current social environment and is structuring because it guides current and future human action (Maton, 2008). Therefore, *Habitus* is the dispositions which have been internalised and created through past experiences and which shape present and future behaviour. For Bourdieu (1977: 214, emphasis in original), *habitus* 'expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition*, *tendency*, *propensity* or *inclination*'. *Habitus*, then, describes how we behave and act. It conceptualises how our past and present social environments guide our decisions and provide inclinations towards political activity or political passivity.

Habitus is not the only influence in understanding human behaviour. To comprehend the behaviour and actions of agents, it is important to scrutinise the social space which they occurred in and map the relationships between actors within that social space. Bourdieu (1984) commonly referred to social space as *field*. He chose the term *field* to provide an understanding of how agents are differently situated in specific social contexts, how those agents interact and compete for the available resources in that social space and how those agents gain knowledge of how to behave and act in a particular *field* (Postone et al, 1993). He likened the *field* to a game, such as football, because the individuals in a social space have to learn the rules of that particular social space to prosper within it. Each game has its own set of rules and those with access to superior resources relevant to that game are more inclined to understand how to successfully compete to improve their position within that *field* (Thomson, 2008). This is also true of the political *field* (Bourdieu, 1991). Access to inferior resource produces a *habitus* which predisposes dominated agents to only perceive narrow opportunities for successful political action. They have not learnt the rules of the political game so accordingly perceive themselves, and are perceived by the dominant, as incapable political actors (Wacquant, 2005b).

Bourdieu refers to the resources that agents draw upon as capital. Capital comes in three forms: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to the financial resources a person can utilise, including money and assets. Social capital is the networks, contacts and relationships that an agent has at their disposal. Cultural capital refers to the cultural resources that an individual can call upon to distinguish themselves from others, often because these distinctions are considered to represent refined or exclusive traits. Cultural capital exists in three states: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state. Cultural capital most readily exists in the embodied state, which refers to the cultivation of certain habits and traits which an individual then internalises and embodies. The objectified state refers to the material items which may bestow forms of cultural capital on the holder, such as owning or perusing certain pieces of high-brow art or literature. The institutionalised state is the credentials a person holds for attendance at certain institutions, such as a certificate from a university (Bourdieu, 1984). These forms of capital can also be converted into one another. For example, leisure time is required to discuss

and become knowledgeable about politics within the family. Therefore, high levels of economic capital provide increased leisure time for the hereditary transmission of cultural capital, in this case the understanding and refinement of political knowledge (Bourdieu, 1991).

Symbolic capital provides an understanding of how certain actions, tastes and habits are recognised as superior, providing those who own large amounts of symbolic capital with a higher status relative to others holding lower amounts of symbolic capital. It has been discussed as distinct from economic, social and cultural when the forms of capital have been outlined (France and Threadgold, 2016). However, symbolic capital is a non-material resource which incorporates the other types of capital (Moore, 2008). The other forms of capital often derive their value from their symbolic recognition. Attendance at an opera (cultural), buying an expensive gift for another (economic) or a visible relationship with a person holding high status (social) all bestow symbolic capital on a person, but are also forms of the other three capitals (Bourdieu, 1990). Symbolic capital most often refers to the cultural prestige a person can garner from their class position (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, comprehending obscure political language and how the political system operates - usually transmitted to them as cultural capital by parents or educational establishments (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) - confer symbolic capital upon an individual. This provides others with the perception that they are a competent political actor and themselves with the belief that they can influence politics.

Forms of symbolic capital latently sustain economic inequalities through cultural representations. For example, cultural traits are used to delineate who is a competent political actor and who is not. Yet, these cultural traits do not include immanent qualities which predict the individual's suitability for political participation. In reality, symbolic distinctions are an arbitrary method of categorisation, which provide benefits to those able to flaunt their symbolic power (Schubert, 2008). However, dominated agents misrecognise the arbitrary character of symbolic capital and are consequently limited in their ability to understand symbolic capital as a technique of creating, sustaining and increasing hierarchies – an act which Bourdieu (1977: 166) terms 'symbolic violence'. The act of symbolic violence

allows the dominant within a *field* to maintain their ascendancy without recourse to physical force as it is seen as natural and is often accepted as legitimate by the dominated. Therefore, there is an obscure relationship between symbolic capital and economic capital which results in a social space where cultural stratification is less transparent than economic stratification (Moore, 2008).

Closely related to the theory of symbolic violence, are Bourdieu's concepts of *doxa and illusio*. *Doxa* is found in each *field* and refers to the 'common sense norms that go without saying that are the result of historical struggles – which are thought of by participants in the field as "natural" or "true"' (France and Threadgold, 2016: 624). Doxa is misrecognised because it not 'natural' or 'true'. The *doxic* norms of any given *field* are contingent on historically contested meanings which have been socially constructed. The *doxa* of each *field* shape the practice of each individual's *habitus* within that social space as agents internalise and reproduce the norms that are consonant with that *field*.

Illusio is the investment in the *doxic* norms of the *field* by an individual. Bourdieu (1990: 66, emphasis in original) describes *illusio* as 'the sense of investment in the game and the outcome, interest in the game, commitment to the presuppositions - *doxa* - of the game'. Agents internalise the *illusio* of the *field* as an integral component of their subjectivity which allows them to make sense of the world and create meanings within social spaces (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015). *Illusio* in a *field* does not mean that this is the choice of a deliberative rationality or ideology but the outcome 'of evaluations, decisions and actions that are realistic responses to one's place in the world' (France and Threadgold, 2016: 625). However, those with superior resources and understanding of the game will be more likely to gain *illusio* in that *field* because they are predisposed to have a *habitus* which presupposes they are able to prosper and tacitly comprehends how to prosper.

The various Bourdieusian concepts outlined in this section are certainly applicable to how the interviewees pathways within the political *field* can be understood. Citizens compete for

resources in the political *field* but their access to resources and position in that social space mediate their disposition towards the political game and the strength of their *illusio*. Those who are able to dominate symbolic and material capital have a tacit understanding that they *should* be involved in the political social space. As Bourdieu (1984: 399, emphasis in original) argues, '[t]his capacity is inseparable from a more or less strong feeling of being *competent*, in the full sense of the word, that is, socially recognized as entitled to deal with political affairs, to express an opinion about them or even modify their course'. Therefore, the dominant possess a *habitus* which inclines them towards political participation and provides them with the confidence that somebody like them has the aptitude to contribute. Conversely, those with fewer resources to call upon abstain from engaging from politics because their *habitus* creates the disposition that they are impotent and unable to influence the political *field* (Bourdieu, 1991). The hierarchical relationship between these groups is concealed behind symbolic violence, however, which means the political *field* appears to be an egalitarian social space. Furthermore, the consolidation of resources by those who are dominant mean that 'completely ordinary individuals are divested of the material and cultural instruments necessary for them to participate actively in politics, that is, above all, *leisure time* and *cultural capital*' (Bourdieu, 1991: 172, emphasis in original). To understand the political *field* and why people do or do not participate in it we must consider the resources available to people, their position in the *field* and the influence of these factors on their *habitus*. As Bourdieu (1991: 171, emphasis in original) explains, we should 'avoid *naturalizing* the social mechanisms which produce and reproduce the gap between politically "active" agents and politically "passive" agents [because] any analysis of the political struggle must be based on the social and economic determinants of the division of political labour.'

The concepts produced by Bourdieu that we have discussed in this section provide a particularly powerful lens through which to examine the social world. *Field* and *habitus* allow researchers to overcome the dualism within debates about structure versus agency by combining objective and subjective concepts of class and social status. The *field* acts as an objective and external constraint placed upon agents by their position in the social space. *Habitus* accumulates the experiences from social spaces and provides tacit knowledge about attitudes and behaviour (Wacquant, 2013).

When we include the forms of capital with *habitus* and *field* analysis it becomes clearer how structure and agency are fused. Individuals with superior forms of capital will have a *habitus* and occupy a location in the *field* which will provide an extended range of options which their *habitus* regards as achievable compared to those with inferior levels of capital. Nevertheless, those with inferior capital still can make choices and display reflexivity, even if this is enclosed by externally and internally produced constraints (Atkinson, 2010; 2013).

Symbolic violence, *doxa*, and *illusio* also adds to our understanding of how habitus, field and capital interact and explain how the trajectories of reflexive agents are shaped by their social environment. Forms of social distinction reproduce the inequality of the material world, but agents often misrecognise this difference as natural because of the influence of latent symbolic violence. Furthermore, *doxa* and *illusio* are integral in understanding the normative guidelines inherent within social spaces and why some seek to invest in these spaces and others do not. These theories build upon symbolic violence by describing how norms become embedded within social spaces and the process in which agents invest in these norms (France and Threadgold, 2016; Harrits, 2011).

Using these tools allows us to examine democratic politics and why some are inclined to engage with politics and others are not. Political practices are entwined with social conditions, and social group characteristics, such as class, gender or levels of education, influence the trajectory of an agent's current and future political participation. Political attitudes and activities are not completely ascribed according to a person's social position – agents do exhibit reflexivity - yet the choices and pursuits they regard as achievable are mediated by exogenous social structures and the internalisation of external barriers which reproduce social hierarchies and mould an individual's subjectivity. For instance, young people whose parents have little education may struggle to access the cultural capital to feel they are competent political agents who can influence the political system. To understand political participation through a Bourdieusian method, we must 'locate not only the political capacities

inscribed in formal structures but also the varied political proclivities and expectations of concrete agents and how they become to be endowed (or not) with the categories, skills and desires required to play the democratic game' (Wacquant, 2005a: 2).

4.7 Ethics

Conducting research which was ethical and protected the participants from harm was an important consideration within this project. Guidelines for ethical social research practice were sought from several sources (see: British Sociological Association, 2017; Bryman, 2012; Silverman, 2011). Ethical approval for this research was also gained from the School of Social Science College Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University (NTU) before commencement of any research. The research was conducted according to these guidelines and the ethical approval granted by NTU.

Participants were provided with an informed consent form (see: Appendix 3) before taking part in the interviews. They were emailed with a small outline of the research alongside an e-copy of the informed consent form they would be required to sign before taking part. The informed consent form provided them with a list of their rights as a participant, including their right to withdraw, their right to anonymity, the people who could access the data and how the data would be stored. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the process before or during the interview. Furthermore, they could withdraw their data from the study up to six weeks after the date of their interview. All participants were provided with aliases within the research and any information they provided during the interview which may identify them was not included in the text. Only the PhD supervisors and the researcher were able to access the data which was stored on a password-locked computer. All recordings of the participants were destroyed on completion of the data analysis and correspondence with the interviewees is to be destroyed on completion of the PhD thesis. The participants were verbally talked through their rights at the time of meeting and they were asked to read a hard copy of the informed consent form before the interview. They then signed the informed consent form to confirm they were aged 18 or above and willing to participate in the research.

No ethical challenges were encountered during the research. The participants were asked questions about their upbringing and how this influenced their future political participation, which could be considered a sensitive topic. Some interviewees were more open to discussing their personal circumstances and though they were asked to provide more detail about certain aspects of their recollections, none were pressurised to provide more information if they were unwilling. Each participant was asked to provide feedback on their interview and none reported any concerns, ethical or otherwise.

4.8 Conclusion

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews have been chosen as the preferred research method because it was assessed as the most effective method for meeting the research aims. A pragmatic approach, which emphasises choosing a research method on its suitability for the research aims rather than ideological priorities, underpinned the methodological decisions taken in this study. The depth and richness provided by interview data has allowed for a detailed and critical interrogation of millennials' patterns of political engagement and the barriers they may have faced to political participation. This methodological approach also allowed the thesis to develop theories and strategies to overcome those barriers while providing a voice to some of those marginalised in the political sphere.

This chapter also examined how the research methods should be assessed for validity. It highlighted the importance of craftsmanship, providing accurate and relevant information about the topic under investigation and pragmatic validity as the three most crucial aspects for such an evaluation. This chapter then provided evidence of how these considerations had been reflected and acted upon within the thesis.

This chapter has offered a broad explanation of the data collection, analysis and interpretation procedures used in the research. The discussion also provided a detailed

overview of the interview process and highlighted the difficulties which occurred during this process. For example, this chapter highlighted issues with accessing research participants, concerns about the precision of the categories used to classify the interviewees and methods used to limit desirability bias from the contributors to this investigation. This chapter also provided a detailed examination of Bourdieu's concepts, demonstrating their relevance to the research topics. Using Bourdieu's forms of capital allowed the thesis to identify the different resources which stratify agents. Moreover, concepts such as *illusio* and *doxa* provided useful ways to conceptualise the relationship between the research participants and the political system. Thereafter, it discussed the steps the thesis has taken to conduct ethical research and how this was integrated within the research process.

The discussions in this chapter provide important foundations on which to produce valid, accurate and insightful research. It also provided the researcher with relevant tools to collect, investigate and interpret the data gathered from the interviewees and meet the research aims. In the next three chapters, we will explore the data provided by the interviewees and examine how their experiences can provide more knowledge about their political behaviour, the barriers to political participation and strategies to overcome the barriers identified.

Chapter 5: What can be learnt about political participation and engagement from those active in politics?

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the political attitudes, behaviours and opinions of the participants who were interviewed for this study - information on their demographics can be accessed in Appendix 1. The aim of this chapter is to investigate what can we learn about young people's political engagement and participation from those who are active in politics. This chapter will predominantly be focused on meeting research aim 1, though some of the information evaluated in this chapter will be relevant to the second and third research aims, too. Therefore, this chapter will only adopt the Bourdieusian analytical tools and comparisons between the three categories of participants - Unexpected Participants (UPs), Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participant (NEUP) and Expected Participants (EPs) – in the last two sections of this chapter before the conclusion. Bourdieu's analytical devices and the categories of participants have been adopted to understand the barriers that millennials have encountered on their paths towards political engagement and participation, so they will become more relevant in Chapters 6 and, to a lesser extent, 7. The participant categories, as we discussed in Chapter 4, are formulated according to the resources each individual participant had at their disposal. It was hypothesised that differences in resources would shape the trajectories of people's political engagement and participation. It was expected that those with inferior resources (UPs) would encounter barriers which made their attempts to become involved with politics harder to achieve. Whereas those with superior resources (EPs) were anticipated to have smoother passages to political participation. These predictions are supported by the insights provided by the interviewees in this study. For the most part, UPs were more likely to encounter obstacles that hindered their path to political participation compared to EPs. In this chapter we will touch upon the different challenges the UPs, EPs and NEUPs faced in becoming politically active and compare how this affected each group. Nevertheless, a deeper examination of the contrasting experiences of the UPs, EPs and NEUPs will be developed in the next chapter which specifically focuses on barriers to participation.

Consequently, this chapter will provide attention to exploring millennials' political engagement and participation. It will seek to explore the broad range of components that contribute towards the participants political interest and acts, while providing us with a

deeper understanding of the interviewees' political repertoires. To meet the first research aim, Chapter 5 will begin by documenting the interviewees forms and levels of political participation and engagement. Subsequently, this chapter will analyse the reasons which motivate the participants to be involved in politics. Thereafter, we shall examine the influence the interviewees perceive they hold over the political system. Chapter 5 will then finish by detailing why the interviewees believe that other millennials do not participate in politics before it provides some concluding remarks.

5.2 Forms of political participation

Each of the participants within this study were required to have consistently voted in general elections since they were first eligible and demonstrate a commitment to voting in the future. Consequently, all the participants, except for one, had previously voted at every general election they were eligible for and indicated they were extremely likely to vote at general elections in the future[3]. Eight of the participants were currently members of political parties and five other interviewees had previously been members of political parties, but they were not at the time of the interview. Two of the participants, Fahad and Richard, had been candidates for their parties at local elections, though neither had accumulated enough votes to be elected. Some of those who were previously or currently members of political parties had done other activities for their parties, such as canvassing, attending party-aligned events and distributing leaflets.

While a small minority of the interviewees were very committed to local politics, the majority of the participants were often less inclined to participate in local elections. The most cited reason for abstaining from local politics was that local issues had a marginal impact on their lives and that local campaigns were not a prominent topic in their interactions with others. Philip's comments encapsulate this view:

[3] One participant did not meet this criterion – see 4.6.2 for more detail.

> ‘I've never looked into a local election because I don't really know much about it and how it would affect me. Whereas a general election effects the entire country’
>
> ‘Local politics isn’t really a topic of discussion for most people, I think’ (Philip, EP).

The relative lack of attention that local politics receives compared to national politics also seemed to dampen the relevance of local issues and many were unsure about how to access information about their local candidates. Some also suggested that they were turned off by local politics because their area was dominated by one political party with little prospect of change. Robert - who has been a member of two political parties, attended demonstrations, party meetings and pro-Brexit conferences and has always voted at national elections – suggested that the lack of political change in his local area made him prioritise other aspects of his life:

> ‘Yeah, I think last time I was on a shift at work. I could have gone and voted in the morning, but I wanted a lie-in. It seemed like that being a much larger improvement in the long term; not being tired for work. That vote wouldn't really count towards anything anyway, my local council it's never going to change anyway so there's no point’ (Robert, UP).[4]

To claim Robert was apathetic about local politics would be to miss the point. While preferring sleep over voting may seem like apathy, Robert’s life-biography is marked by significant and consistent forms of political participation. In this case, he was alienated from political participation because he felt he had little influence over the outcome. Indeed, all the interviewees who neglected local politics always voted in national elections and were often involved in other forms of alternative political action. To claim that all the non-participants in local politics were apathetic about local issues would be over-simplifying why they made those choices as their lack of interest originated in other concerns they have about local politics.

[4] Throughout the thesis, quotes from the interviewees will be reported verbatim so there will be sporadic grammatical errors within their accounts. However, on occasion words or terms will be inserted in square brackets into these quotes to clarify the interviewees’ statements.

The interviewees' commitment to political activity is also demonstrated by their alternative political activity. Most of the interviewees had participated in some form of alternative political action. Signing petitions was the most common alternative activity and only one participant stated they had not previously engaged in this activity. Boycotting a product was a less frequent political pursuit, though nearly half of the participants had boycotted a product at least once in their life. Among the participants, 11 had previously attended a demonstration or march – these ranged from anti-Brexit marches to counter-protests against the English Defence League and anti-abortion movements. Involvement in civic activities, such as engagement with charity work or volunteering for summer camps, was the least frequent non-electoral aligned political activity. Three of the interviewees, Matilda, Victoria and Joan, discussed their engagement with these activities and their dedication to continuing these pursuits in the future.

As discussed in 1.2, political behaviour is made up of two components, political participation and political engagement. Political participation are activities which are intended to influence the political system, other citizens and societal norms. Political engagement refers to creating greater personal knowledge of politics, particularly taking an interest in, and being informed about, politics (Pontes et al, 2018). As we can see, the interviewees in this study displayed a wide-range of activities that can be considered political participation, but some were likely to engage in a multiplicity of activities whereas others had more sporadic participatory behaviour. Each of the participants also discussed some engagement with politics but the frequency and commitment of their political engagement varied quite considerably. Each of the participants engaged with politics at some point, but a small minority of the interviewees were only likely to engage with politics when a general election was nearing. Most of the participants exhibited more consistent engagement and kept informed about political matters on a daily or weekly basis.

The mediums through which the participants gathered their political information were less varied, however. Each of the interviewees searched for information about politics online. A few used the internet to read political party manifestos, many used online resources to read

newspaper articles, but none would buy a newspaper and the few that read print copies of newspapers only did so because they were purchased by another member of their household. Social media was an important part of accessing politics for just over half of the participants, though a large minority were sceptical about the veracity and quality of the information available on social media sites, which lends support to Vromen et al's (2015) research which made a similar claim. For example, George felt social media is untrustworthy:

> 'Half of the stuff on there are so fake news. I just wouldn't trust it. I'm very sceptical about them all' (George, EP).

For other interviewees, social media is an important resource for gathering information, but the scepticism displayed by some of the interviewees demonstrates that millennials are constantly evaluating the quality of the information they are exposed to. This example is particularly revealing as millennials are strongly associated with the use of social media (Vromen et al, 2015; 2016), yet they are not blind to the possible manipulation of information they receive through this medium.

As we explored in Chapters 1 and 2 above, how we understand what politics is and what activities are considered political contribute to how we assess the proclivity for political participation amongst millennials. Unsurprisingly, given the wide-range of political activities they engage with, the interviewees were mostly in favour of a definition of political participation which is not limited to electoral politics, but instead encompasses alternative forms of political activity (McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013). Some of the participants provided nuanced descriptions of what they considered to be political participation. For example, some considered both formal and alternative activity as a form of political participation but stated that some activities were more important than others. Most of the participants felt that voting was the most important political activity due to its influence on the political organisations though some of these same individuals were keen to stress that activities such as demonstrating or civic involvement required more commitment and available time to engage with than voting. Most considered what this thesis has defined as political engagement, such as discussing politics and reading political information, as a form of political participation. A few of the participants also reflected on the influence alternative politics

provides. For example, Margaret was disappointed how little impact alternative politics can have on the direction of political parties:

> ‘I think it is sad how little demonstrations do for politics because you can get millions of people involved, like [protests against] the Iraq War, and it makes no difference. The amount of petitions I sign online; Brexit reversal, whatever - whether it's debated or not - it just doesn't really feel like it makes a huge amount of difference’ (Margaret, EP).

Conversely, Arthur suggested he felt that the attention alternative activities can bring to the wider public proves the benefit of non-electoral political activities:

> ‘If [a petition] got millions and millions of signatures and they still didn't pass the bill, that doesn't mean it didn't have an effect, because it clearly demonstrates a demand […]. I feel it's as much mentally changing the view of the country as well as just actually having a straight effect’ (Arthur, EP).

These considerations mirror the thoughts of many of the participants; alternative politics are forms of political participation and should be regarded as such by the political system. Moreover, the participants’ responses suggest that the political system should incorporate alternative politics into how they understand public opinion and formulate policy.

To summarise, the interviewees are all regular participants in general elections, a large minority are or have been members of political parties and nearly all have engaged with some form of alternative participation. A small minority only engage with political matters in the time leading up to a general election, but most stay informed about politics on a regular basis. There is no discernible pattern which differentiates the types of political participation which UPs, MEs and EPs engage with, the likelihood of their membership of a political party or where they gather their political information from.

However, this section has revealed some important findings. The first significant insight is that millennials who are committed to political participation can provide insights about millennials

who don't vote and allows us to gain perspectives on why non-voting millennials are rejecting institutional politics. Many of the participants in this study did not show an interest in local issues. Nevertheless, their lack of interest does not equal apathy. The reasons they provide for not engaging with local politics include the lack of information available, the subsequent lack of attention it receives in social networks those participants are exposed to or that their participation does not influence the outcome of elections. Thus, highly political millennials will abstain from forms of politics if they regard their participation as offering no benefit to themselves or the political system.

The second substantial finding is that, while the interviewees had contrasting views on the effectiveness of alternative political activities, most were not critical of the value of non-electoral participation. Instead, they were unsatisfied that these activities were ignored by political parties and politicians. The interviewees favoured methods which could increase alternative participation's influence within the political system. As Matthews and Limb (2003: 190) argued over 15 years ago, 'in order to take forward an agenda that attempts to engage with young people, there is a need to develop a full repertoire of participatory forms that challenge the conventions of adult political structures and which champion alternative means rooted in everyday life.' In the main, the millennials interviewed in this study seem to agree with this proposal but are still waiting for the political system to broaden its inclusivity and embrace non-institutional political participation.

5.3 Why do the participants engage with politics?

Interest in certain political issues was a common theme amongst the interviewees when they were asked why they participate in politics. The issues which the interviewees were interested in and sought to change through their participation were varied and wide-ranging, though not all the participants discussed specific political topics. A sizeable minority of the participants discussed post-material issues, such as protecting the environment, maintaining and increasing choices for women and LGBT rights. Discussions about material issues were slightly more prominent amongst the interviewees who mentioned specific issues. Austerity, public-

funding for the National Health Service and job security were some of the material concerns which the participants discussed. This supports Furlong and Cartmel's (2012) research, which found that many British millennials prioritise material concerns, such as unemployment, over post-material issues, such as the environment.

The most common reason provided by the interviewees for their political participation was a feeling that they were obliged to vote. There were certainly a couple of interviewees who did not feel bound by a responsibility to vote. For example, Malcom stated:

> 'No, I don't feel like I have a duty to vote. I feel like I vote for what's right. I vote for Corbyn because I think that he is right or heading in the right direction' (Malcom, UP).

However, the vast majority of interviewees discussed their motivation to vote in terms of obligation. For example, Emily and Edward commented:

> 'I think it was always seen as something […] you had a duty to do' (Emily, UP).

> '[…] because I have the right to vote I should do it' (Edward, UP).

The responses of the participants seem to undermine Dalton's (2008) claim of the diminishing significance of Citizen Duty amongst the youngest generation. While the focus of the questions and the thesis did not allow for the all the participants to be comprehensively categorised on a material/postmaterial spectrum, there were certainly interviewees who were drawn to forms of postmaterial politics but still discerned their participation as a duty they were obliged to carry out.

Whether a duty to vote applied to other millennials was a more contentious topic. A small majority of the interviewees found it remarkable that millennials, or any age cohort for that matter, would choose to abstain from voting. They were not convinced that abstention from politics would be successful in altering the dynamics of the political system. Instead, they felt non-voters became invisible to political representatives which reduced any effectiveness that

abstaining may bring. Stephen's and Philip's thoughts on the topic were indicative of this view:

> 'I don't think not voting is the key. I don't agree with people [who suggest] if no one votes the system falls. No, it doesn't it would just keep on going. Not voting is a political act but I would say its slightly pointless' (Stephen, NEUP).

> '[…] in the real world it's something people don't take very seriously. It's so much easier to write off not voting as being lethargic or not caring or that just not being a priority for you rather than you disliking [politics]' (Philip, EP).

In the main, the interviewees were concerned that abstaining from formal political involvement just concealed the dissatisfaction non-participants felt towards politics. They understood the frustration which others held about politics but didn't think it would register within the political system. Nearly all the participants in this study would prefer to see those who don't participate due to their apprehension towards the political system spoil their ballot. For example, Stephen commented:

> 'Why not just turn up and spoil your ballot [...]. That's less pointless than saying, "I'm not going to vote", if you are saying that people don't listen to you. If you don't turn up, they won't give you stuff' (Stephen, NEUP).

Those with this opinion believed that spoiling the ballot would gain more attention from political actors and distinguish 'engaged sceptics' (Henn et al, 2002: 187) from those who are apathetic.

In this section, the motivations for the interviewees' political participation has been explored. Surprisingly, given Dalton's (2008) theory that many young people now practice Engaged Citizenship, many of the interviewees explained their participation as a duty despite many of them displaying postmaterial attitudes. They felt obligated to vote and were often surprised when others did not share this belief. Many of the participants were also concerned that those who abstained from voting because they felt alienated from politics were not taking an effective course of action. The interviewees who subscribed to this view believed that

alienated youths were likely to be ignored by the political system if they did not vote. Instead, engaged sceptics were urged to take more overt action such as spoiling their ballots to register their disillusionment with politics and politicians.

5.4 Opinions of politicians

Whether the interviewees themselves were disillusioned with politicians varied quite considerably. A minority felt that our political representatives were unfairly stereotyped by the media, which increased our negative perception of them. Overall, the majority of interviewees felt that politicians were duplicitous and self-serving, and exhibited very little concern for people in different social circumstances. Nevertheless, a small faction within the interviewees who displayed negative feelings towards politicians provided caveats about the tendency to negatively stereotype the motives and behaviour of political representatives.

UPs were more likely to hold negative views about politicians while NEUPs and EPs were more likely to hold positive views about politicians, but this was not uniform within those categories. Some UPs defended politicians and a small majority of EPs held deeply critical positions towards politicians. The NEUPs and EPs were more likely to defend politicians and suggest that political representatives did not fit the stereotype of the selfish individual, looking to maximise advantages for their career. For example, Edgar and Lionel stated:

> 'Is the stigma of being a politician actually warranted? I think for the most part, no' (Edgar, NEUP).

> 'I think most politicians are trying to do things they feel are right' (Lionel, NEUP).

However, despite slightly more positive feelings towards politicians amongst the NEUP and EPs, their accounts often raised concerns about typecasting politicians rather than containing admiration or belief in our political representatives. The UPs were more likely to condemn the behaviour of politicians and describe them as different to the 'average' person. This was coupled with the suspicion that MPs were self-serving, who sought to enhance their own power not serve their constituents or the country. Eleanor's comments are indicative of the more negative view the UPs held towards politicians:

> ‘Greedy, self-serving, just about their career, what they can get, making connections, making good deals so they can line their own pockets and get more power’ (Eleanor, UP).

There was also the feeling amongst the majority of UPs that MPs were removed from normal people’s lives:

> ‘I think they're very far away from me. I find it very difficult to feel a connection or understanding between me and them. I don't know why but it feels very much like me and them. It doesn't feel like somebody for me or for us; it feels like a very separate lifestyle’ (Emily, UP).

Given the UPs lower *illusio* and the lack of symbolic power they have in the political *field*, it should be expected that they would be more critical of politicians. As Bourdieu (1991) explains, the dominant in the political *field*, such as EPs and political representatives, are both invested in the political game and presuppose their ability to achieve their objectives by utilising the power of other dominant actors within this social space. The UPs have less investment in the political *field* and are thus less likely to see political representatives as a potential ally in achieving their ends. Moreover, the UPs relative lack of symbolic capital makes them tacitly aware that an individual like them is unable to influence powerful political actors and creates a distinction between the dominant and the dominated in the political *field*.

There were also general criticisms of politicians which existed across the UPs, EPs and NEUPs categories. A majority of the interviewees believed that politicians were dishonest and unreliable, preferring to prioritise career advancement ahead of commitment to their ideals. Henry’s comments are indicative of this point of view:

> ‘Politicians are quite well paid, and they seem to flip between two opinions which happens often enough. They seem more like career politicians than having a specific opinion’.
>
> ‘I don’t generally trust politicians that much’ (Henry, NEUPs).

Some of the interviewees contrasted the lack of policies which help younger people and society at large with policies which seem to provide benefits to the most affluent or politicians themselves. Matilda's comments summarise this position:

> 'Yes, I think [politicians] think that we're alright how we are. That we're ok, but actually things are really difficult as a young person'.

> 'I can't stand [politicians] because they impact on so many people's lives, real people's lives. And the decisions that they make, certain politicians don't care about real people. I think that they keep the system the same because it is working for them' (Matilda, NEUPs).

Quite a few of the interviewees also felt that MPs appeared homogenous, due to their identical backgrounds, attendance at the same educational establishments and similar lifestyles. As Duncan explains:

> 'I think my main issue is they are all from the same background. They are all sort of Oxford or Cambridge, white upper class. You know, Labour Party and Conservative, it doesn't really make much difference. Obviously, there are a few candidates who don't fit that mould but generally they are well educated people' (Duncan, EP).

A minority of the participants in this study were also critical of politicians' behaviour in the House of Commons. For example, Edward stated:

> 'I guess seeing them in Parliament shouting and arguing and stuff, that doesn't give a very good example or influence on anybody because it just seems like [they are] arguing' (Edward, UP).

The quips, argumentative nature and general boisterousness which the interviewees had been exposed to when they viewed debates in the House of Commons tainted the suitability of current politicians in the eyes of many participants.

Nevertheless, there were certainly positive depictions of politicians in the interviewees' accounts. A small majority of the interviewees were impressed by aspects of Jeremy Corbyn's

style of politics, believing he offered a fresh alternative to the professionalised politicians that seemingly dominated Westminster politics. These interviewees praised his 'authentic' approach and focus on youth which they believed encouraged more young people to engage with politics. As Alexander explains:

> '[Jeremy Corbyn] engaged with young people. He was at the music festivals and stuff like that. […] I mean he wasn't a great personality - he was just another bloke - but his message was much more sincere than those that had come before him. They were just face politicians if you like and I think that [Corbyn] engaged young people a hell of a lot more than politicians had done previously' (Alexander, NEUP).

A minority of the interviewees felt negative representations of politicians was an oversimplification and it was up to individuals to discern which political representatives to trust and which to distrust. A very small proportion of interviewees were more positive and suggested that politicians were generally involved in politics due to a commitment to improve the country. Elizabeth, for example, held this view:

> 'I think [politicians] genuinely want to do what they think is right' (Elizabeth, UP).

We should also note that a few of the participants who were critical of MPs were more positive about local politicians. This was rather surprising given that many of the interviewees stated they were less interested in local politics. Those who explicated the distinction between local and national politicians depicted the former as being more open and less remote, and were seemingly motivated by a sense of public-duty. John was one of the interviewees who stated this position:

> '[Politicians] are better at a local level. It is easier to contact and influence them. They're more helpful'.
>
> 'There is a remoteness at the national level' (John, NEUPs).

It's possible that the more positive feelings about local politicians is because they are subject to less scrutiny than national politicians. It may also be because of the local representative's increased accessibility and the increased ease with which the interviewees could communicate with them compared to MPs.

The opinions about politicians which the interviewees expressed are clearly varied. The majority of the interviewees felt that politicians are ignorant of everyday concerns and are only interested in maximising their own power – reflecting findings from the literature (Bastedo, 2015; Henn et al, 2007; Sloam, 2013). This reputation may be deserved or due to hegemonic neoliberal values which claim that all political actors are only working in self-interest (Hay and Stoker, 2009) – it is beyond the scope of this research to evaluate this claim. Nevertheless, it should be concerning to current politicians that many of those who are highly engaged with politics are plainly discontent with their democratic representatives. However, there was more positive representations about local politicians and a small minority of the participants believed that MPs, on the whole, were driven by a desire to improve people's lives. The social group the participant occupied seemed to have a small influence on how they perceived politicians. The majority of UPs were more critical of politicians than was the case for EPs and NEUPs. This may be due to distinctions in symbolic capital and *illusio* between the dominant politicians and the dominated UPs. It may have been expected that the NEUPs and EPs would offer more support to politicians due to their shared higher resource access and strong *illusio* in the political *field*. Yet, most of the NEUPs and EPs who provided positive comments about politicians only did so tentatively. It seems that the lack of faith in politicians in contemporary society is not restricted to those with low resources. In the next section, however, the thesis will demonstrate how access to resources and social group position seems to influence an individual's *illusio* in the political field.

5.5 Why do some millennials not vote

The reasons the participants provided about why other millennials decided not to vote were wide-ranging. While the thesis will not document them all, it will discuss some of the most prevalent reasons provided by the interviewees and those discussed in the literature review. Apathy about politics had caused lower turnout at elections among young people according to a minority of the interviewees. However, many of these same interviewees suggested that this only applied to some of the non-participating millennials as some of those who abstain

could be described as alienated. The apathy thesis was explicated in two ways. Some felt that young people were simply concerned about other matters:

> ‘They are not interested in [politics]. They’re more interested in celebrities’ (Anne, EP).

Others, in similar vein to some forms of life-cycle theory (Kimberlee, 2002), felt that young people were apathetic because politics had not yet become relevant to them:

> ‘You are in a bit for bubble [as a young adult]. Again, my little sister who is one of my favourite people in the world, but she doesn't give a shit. She still lives at home and even though she has travelled with her job she's never really had to stand on her own two feet. Now she's buying a house at the moment maybe she'll be a bit more interested why she's paying stamp duty and how it affects her’ (Margaret, EP).

The apathy thesis formed a part of some explanations for low youth political participation. However, for most of those who mentioned apathy as a cause of low youth participation, it did not describe why all non-participating youths were abstaining:

> ‘No, I'm not going to lie there are some people who don't care about politics and are more interested in their Instagram, but I know people who have opinions on politics but don't vote. I don't know that many people who don't really care’ (Stephen, NEUP).

The individuals who were more likely to claim apathy as an explanation were more likely to be a NEUPs or EP. There were NEUPs and EPs who did not express this view, but it was predominantly those with superior resources who were more likely to provide an explanation of apathy. It could be suggested that, due to the NEUPs and EPs greater access to forms of capital and their more advantageous position in the *field*, they were more likely to have a strong *illusio* in the political sphere. Their acceptance of the norms and investment within the political social space disposed their *habitus* to believe that they could thrive within the *field* and consequently they could not recognise why others were unable to invest in political action. If we examine the responses of the UPs, then this proposition gains further support.

When explaining youth abstention, the majority of UPs provided views that emphasised alienation over apathy. They believed that are aspects of the political system which repel

young people away from political participation. For example, Robert believed that a lack of change and youth-focused polices alienated youth from political participation:

> 'I think the average young person […] never sees a change […]. "It's not working for me, why would I go out and vote". Then they see someone like Corbyn, for example, where it is sort of a difference from the known establishment and a difference in ideas and the media treating him differently. Then they attach themselves to that because they are wanting some change which young people don't really have at the moment' (Robert, UP).

Similarly, Elizabeth stressed the disconnection young people felt because they are ignored by the political system:

> 'No, I don't think it's laziness. There's no real appeal. I can see why young people don't get involved because there is no real direct appeal to young people. Until you hit that, like, voting age there's no kind of active attempt trying to get young people involved' (Elizabeth, UP).

In general, the UPs outlined the barriers that young people encountered when deciding to participate in politics or not. Calculations about whether politics would bring any benefits to someone like *them* were more prevalent in the UPs accounts. This point of view was expressed by some EPs and NEUPs but there were certainly a few members of these two groups who seemed disposed to believe that everyone could influence politics if they chose to and emphasised individual deficiency when explaining those who did not participate.

We should also consider that most of the interviewees were not surprised that people made a political decision not to vote. As we have seen, there were certainly a small minority of interviewees who felt that those who didn't vote were apathetic. In 5.3, we examined how the majority of the interviewees disagreed about the effectiveness of political abstention, but those individuals did not regard this reasoning as a bogus attempt by their fellow millennials to cloak apathetic attitudes. Moreover, some of the participants discussed their friends who are interested in politics but decline to participate. Alfred, for instance, discussed how some of his peers could be described as engaged sceptics:

> ‘I would've said that a lot of my friends don't feel they can go and vote […]. It's not that they don't want to engage it's because they don't feel they've enough of a basis to engage’ (Alfred, UP).

In the main, alienation from the political system was treated as a reasonable explanation for why other millennials did not vote – particularly amongst the UPs - even if there was concern that this course of action would not bring any tangible benefits to the abstainers. The interviewees who discussed friends who choose this option did not doubt the motives of their peers. The significant amount of the interviewees who were exposed to this reasoning through their social networks provides partial support for the idea that many abstainers are alienated from the political system as opposed to being apathetic about democratic decisions.

There were other explanations for the lack of political participation by youth which lent support to the anti-apathy thesis. As we discussed in 5.4 some interviewees regard politicians as a distant elite. This is augmented by the feeling that young people were considered less important by a political system which favours other social groups. For William, young people often go unnoticed by the political system:

> ‘Yes, I would say they've been ignored. To appeal to young people, I would say you have to directly appeal to their interests’ (William, EP).

While Alexander didn’t think young people are completely overlooked by the political system, he suggested that other groups are prioritised within politics:

> ‘No, not ignored but I think they’ve been made not as important because politicians realised - and this what the Tory government do incredibly well - that less kids come out and vote than pensioners’ (Alexander, NEUPs).

There was a feeling among some of the interviewees that politics wasn’t relevant to young people because they were side-lined by an inattentive political system operated by politicians unable to empathise with the problems today’s young people experience.

Furthermore, a large minority of the interviewees discussed the similarity between the political parties. Richard felt that young people had become more engaged during the 2017 General Election because of the perceived policy differences between the two main parties, a factor missing from previous elections millennials were eligible for:

> '[The 2017 General] [E]lection was different to the last election. Miliband versus David Cameron, relatively speaking, were very similar. Why bother voting if you have someone who is not different' (Richard, NEUPs).

Similarly, Robert believed that the homogeneity of policies amongst the major parties failed to motivate younger people to vote as their participation would lead to little change:

> '[Political parties] don't really invigorate […] young people who want mass social change. They are all very similar. There wasn't much to decipher between them. It's usually the same policy worded slightly differently' (Robert, UP).

The overall impression from these interviewees was that political parties has increasingly moved to a centrist position which sought to maximise their voter base but excluded those who failed to gain little from the status quo. This was thought to increase political disengagement amongst young people as they often wanted more radical political options and felt that their political participation was unnecessary as little would change from their involvement.

Quite a few of the interviewees also expressed concerns that the complicated nature of politics made participation a daunting task. Rachel believed that the complexity of politics could make participation seem overwhelming:

> 'It can be very confusing, there's a lot of talk that goes over your head. It's hard to know what to think sometimes' (Rachel, NEUP).

Some of the participants also discussed how understanding how the political system worked was confusing for some. For example, the ideologies of the parties, how the House of Commons' operates, and the type of voting system used may seem complicated to people who had not been previously taught about them. Not understanding how politics operates or

the terms used to describe democratic arrangements was thought by the interviewees to repel youth political interest.

The discussions about youth abstention recounted in this section affords us some perception about whether young people are apathetic about, or alienated from, politics. Very few participants believed that all youth who did not participate were purely apathetic and not many more thought youths abstained because all of them were alienated. Most thought that a combination of both positions was the most accurate description of youth abstention. However, the notion that some youths were alienated from politics seemed a reasonable explanation to the majority of interviewees. They were not of the belief that youth who claimed that they were alienated were being dishonest and attempting to hide apathetic attitudes. The anti-apathy school, whom champion alienation as an explanation for youth political disengagement, frame this position by examining why levels of youth voting have fallen from so dramatically in recent years. None suggest that youth participation could be 100 percent (Bastedo, 2015; Busse et al, 2015; Cammaerts et al, 2014; Henn and Foard, 2014a). Indeed, many of the interviewees mentioned having friends who could be described as apathetic and some who could be described as alienated. Moreover, the majority of the interviewees felt that alienation was a reasonable explanation in the divergence of turnout at elections between older and younger cohorts. If many of the participants know others who can be described as alienated or believe their fellow millennials are not apathetic about politics, then we should provide these views with some credence.

We can also draw some tentative conclusions about how social position influences an individual's political *illusio*. EPs have superior forms of capital and *field* position which provides a *habitus* which presupposes the advantage political participation can provide and classifies political participation as something they should do and that their participation will be successful. This is provided by acceptance of the social space's *doxa* and a strong *illusio* in those norms. Many of the EPs did not recognise the weaker *illusio* that those with inferior resources embodied and depicted lack of participation as an individual failing. The NEUPs and UPs had inferior resources which resulted in a weaker *illusio*. For the NEUPs and UPs, even

though they did participate in politics, the barriers to participation were more visible, allowing them to reflect upon the factors which led to some youth declining to participate in politics. As the next chapter will elucidate, social position and access to resources mediates the confidence a person has in engaging with politics and the belief that someone like them has the ability to influence politics. Therefore, it should be expected that UPs are more aware of barriers to political action and engagement - particularly why some individuals could be alienated from democratic arrangements - as their *habitus* is more cautious about their potential to successfully participate in politics.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on achieving the first research aim of the thesis – namely, exploring what the politically engaged can explain about young people's political engagement and participation? It has sought to outline the political behaviour and attitudes of the interviewees which simultaneously provides more insights about some of the topics discussed in the literature review and the political repertoires of millennials as a group. The interviewees were all committed to voting, but many had also taken part in other formal and alternative political activities. Around a third of the interviewees had been a member of a political party at some point in their lives. Boycotting, signing petitions and demonstrating also formed some of the interviewees' political repertoires. Nearly all of the interviewees considered these non-institutional political activities as legitimate forms of political participation. A slight majority felt that alternative forms of politics already carried some influence over people's opinions and thus the political system. However, a minority of interviewees believed that these forms of activities were often ignored by the political system. They believed that increasing the relevance of alternative politics within political debates would be positive for younger generations (Matthews and Limb, 2003).

Some academics (Dalton, 2008; McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013; Melo and Stockemer, 2014) have argued that young people prefer alternative politics and that youth's declining presence in formal politics are off-set by their increasing participation in unorthodox political activities.

Yet, the significant regularity with which many of the interviewees practice non-electoral political activities offers partial backing to the findings of Henn et al (2018). Their analysis suggests that younger generations who vote are apt to participate in electoral politics and are more inclined towards non-institutional practices than those who don't vote. While the data gathered for this thesis does not include those who don't vote to assess this comparison, it does advocate that younger generations are likely to engage with both formal and alternative participation rather than millennials choosing *either* institutional or non-institutional practices.

The interviewees also discussed the factors which motivated them to participate in politics. For most, a sense of obligation drove their political participation which was surprising as a large minority of participants expressed postmaterial attitudes. This suggests that duty is still an important component within millennials' attachment to the political system, contrary to Dalton's (2008) claim that youth are increasingly attached to engaged forms of citizenship. There were certainly interviewees who discussed the pleasure they gained from being involved in politics, but a duty to vote was the prime motivation for the majority of the interviewees. The participants were uniform in believing that voting was important, and most did not believe that non-participation was an effective form of registering dissatisfaction with the political system. Many of the interviewees understood why younger people abstained at elections but believed that this allowed the non-participants to be labelled as apathetic or lazy. There was a wide-spread call for those who felt alienated from politics to spoil their ballot as this would register their disenchantment with the political system but avoid claims that they were apathetic.

The participants in this study were also asked about their opinions of politicians. There were mixed feelings about politicians among the participants, but a slight majority were dissatisfied with their political representatives. The main criticism of politicians was that they tended to ignore young people, were motivated by self-interest and were removed from the experiences of young people (Bastedo, 2015; Henn and Foard, 2014a). One politician who many of the interviewees were complimentary about was Jeremy Corbyn. They admired his

'authenticity' and believed that he had made noticeable attempts to communicate and energise youth (Whiteley et al, 2019). This was not just among those who supported Corbyn's politics, quite a few who were ideologically opposed to his socialist views believed that he had been instrumental in improving youth political participation during the build-up to the 2017 General Election.

This section has also highlighted other concerns that millennials have about contemporary democracy. Despite the interviewees demonstrating a high commitment to formal political participation, many highlighted areas of concern with the political system (Gordon and Taft, 2011). Many of the interviewees suggested that they were overlooked within political discussions and that policies that would benefit them were not part of mainstream political discussions (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012; Sloam, 2013). This feeling was intensified by the belief that political parties have gravitated towards a centrist position which excluded marginalised groups, such as the young (Busse et al, 2015; Holmes and Manning, 2013; Manning and Holmes, 2013). The interviewees were also critical of the abstruse language which many political discussions were shrouded in and felt this often made political participation unappealing to those uninitiated in complex political terms and theories (Henn and Foard, 2014a). These findings provide partial support for the anti-apathy school. In spite of the interviewees' high political engagement, a majority could still identify features of the political system which often deter young people from becoming involved in politics.

Some other insights gained from interviewees also seem to substantiate aspects of the anti-apathy thesis. It was documented that quite a few of the interviewees did not participate in local politics. The interviewees reasons for not engaging with local politics differed but they revolved around the notion that local politics was not relevant to them. Accordingly, the research which suggests that millennials are more motivated by local politics and would be galvanised by devolution towards regional or local politics (O'Toole, 2003; Sloam, 2012b) finds little support in this study. However, this finding does lend credibility to the claims of the anti-apathy school. In Chapter 2, the thesis detailed how critics of the anti-apathy position suggest that low levels of political interest and participation amount to apathy (Phelps, 2012; Fox,

2015). This point of view becomes harder to sustain when we consider the behaviour and attitudes of the interviewees in this study. Many of the interviewees exhibit significantly high levels of political interest and participation and all are committed to voting at general elections. It seems difficult to suggest that they are in any way apathetic about politics (Cammaerts et al, 2014; Henn and Foard, 2014a; Quintelier, 2007), so there must be other reasons which drive their lack of interest and participation in local politics. Therefore, it appears reasonable to suggest that if the interviewees in this study do not engage with local issues because they find it irrelevant to their lives, then this may be a tenable explanation for why other, supposedly apathetic, millennials do not engage with politics or participate at general elections. Furthermore, the claim that some young people who do not vote are alienated gained wide-spread support among the interviewees. Many had friends who were interested in the decisions that affect their lives but did not participate in politics because they believed the political system did not engender positive change and it was not open to their views. When viewed from this perspective, the apathy argument begins to appear to lack a deep understanding of the motives of non-voting millennials (Almlund, 2018).

This chapter also began to detail how access to forms of capital and *field* position combined to encourage or discourage agents to participate in politics. This was observable during the interviewees' descriptions of politicians, as the UPs were more likely to hold negative views about politicians compared to the EPs and NEUPs. The concepts of *doxa* and *illusio* provide explanations for this finding. Those with higher resources, such as the EPs, identify with the *doxa* of the political *field* and so maintain a higher *illusio* in this social space (Harrits, 2013). They are subsequently less critical of politicians because they and their political representatives both possess a strong *illusio* in the political *field*. Yet, this shared investment in the *doxa* of the *field* is founded upon politicians and the dominants' shared higher access to symbolic capital and their supremacy within the political social space. The UPs do not enjoy a strong *illusio* in the *field* because their limited access to resources has made them feel like deficient political actors and appear insignificant to politicians (Harrits, 2011). Moreover, as we discussed in Chapter 3, disadvantaged groups are deprioritised within political outcomes, weakening the *illusio* of those who feel ignored by their political representatives.

Consequently, they are more suspicious of politicians and less likely to feel that they and their representatives share the same objectives or concerns.

Likewise, UPs were far more likely to describe why millennials were alienated from politics while those who preferred the apathy explanation tended to be EPs. It could therefore be argued that the EPs were more likely to internalise the *doxic* norms of the political *field* and misrecognise why the participation of others in the field was hindered by external factors. It was also generally the case that EPs had far greater levels of internal and external efficacy (Johnstonbaugh, 2018). The EPs believed that they had the aptitude to influence the political system and were more confident that the political system would be respond to their preferences. The UPs, conversely, were more likely to believe that their participation was inconsequential and that it would be ignored by the political system (Harrits, 2011). Thus, it seemed that the EPs had a far stronger *illusio* in the political *field*. Their superior resources produced a *habitus* which presupposed that their participation would be successful and that someone like them would be acknowledged by the political system.

This chapter has partially met the first research aim by demonstrating that those active in politics can provide information about young people's political engagement and participation. However, as the thesis outlined in the introduction, meeting research aim 1 also requires this analytical framework to provide relevant and original data about the barriers to political participation and how these could be overcome. So, evaluating how effectively research aim 1 has been met will be considered after we have interrogated these topics in the next two chapters. Chapter 5 has also begun to provide information on the contrasting experiences of the UPs, EPs and NEUPs, revealing how barriers are erected amongst disadvantaged youths, partially meeting research aim 2. In the next chapter we will discuss the diverse journeys different social groups experience when becoming politically active and provide more significant information with which to meet research aim 2.

Chapter 6: The barriers to political engagement and participation

6.1 Introduction

The objective of Chapter 6 is to understand the processes and influences which create barriers to millennials' political engagement and participation, thus achieving research aim 2. In the methodology, it was noted that Bourdieu (1984; 1991) believed that material and symbolic resources could explain the propensity of agents to become active or passive in the political *field*. Those who abstained from political participation were lacking in these resources and consequently did not have the time to engage nor the cultural capital that disposed them towards political participation. Those who were passive in the political *field* did not feel that they had the competence to understand politics and their low efficacy mitigated against the belief that they could influence the political *field*. Indeed, their inferior capital, weak *illusio*

and poor position in the *field* informed a *habitus* that inclined them towards political passivity, as it did not include successful political participation as an achievable option. Therefore, to understand the barriers to politics the participants of this study experienced, we must analyse how the resources and social position of each Unexpected Participant (UP), Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participant (NEUP) and Expected Participant (EP) influenced that individual's *habitus*. In particular, how did the UPs develop the proclivity to become politically active and did their experiences incline them towards political passivity?

To answer these questions this chapter will predominantly focus on how the interviewees became initially interested in politics and their belief that they could modify the political system and whether they felt the political system was open to their participation. It will investigate the role of political socialisation in creating an interest in politics. Thereafter, we will turn our attention to investigating how the barriers to political participation manifest themselves while the UPs traverse and compete within the political *field*. The conclusion of this chapter will focus on the importance cultural capital has in creating and sustaining political engagement and participation.

6.2. Political socialisation introduction

The opening section of this chapter will investigate the influence of political socialisation in creating the cultural capital required to become an active political agent. The family, peer-groups and educational establishments all contribute, though to varying degrees, to the transmission of cultural capital. As this section will demonstrate, the cultural capital harvested from these locations provided the means for most of the interviewees to become interested in politics. However, the cultural capital available to the interviewees was not evenly distributed. The UPs were unlikely to have access to large amounts of cultural capital which impacted on their inclination to become politically engaged. It will become clearer as the section progresses that for dominated social groups, barriers are erected during the process of political socialisation which makes political engagement harder to achieve for them compared to dominant social groups.

6.2.1 Political socialisation and the family

The family was the source of political socialisation that the interviewees predominantly discussed. In many cases, the family's interest or involvement in politics encouraged the interviewees to become aware of politics and provided the confidence to engage in political conversations and participation (Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Jennings et al, 2009). How the family provided political socialisation varied between the participants, however, with some gaining overt encouragement and others acquiring socialisation from the family through more subtle exposure to politics. Parents were the principal actors in stimulating political interest, but siblings and uncles also provided a gateway to political participation for some of the interviewees.

It was noticeable amongst the conversations about family political socialisation that parents often provided an environment where politics seemed a natural topic of discussion without overt attempts to compel the participants towards an interest in politics (Ekström, 2016). The interviewees were often situated in a political milieu which provided subtle cues to take an interest in politics. For example, quite a few of the participants mentioned that politically-aligned television programmes were a consistent fixture in the household when they were growing up. Stephen, for example, remembered that his mother would watch political comedies with him, and this piqued his curiosity about politics:

> 'When I was growing up, I used to watch a lot of political comedy shows. […] they were on in the house. My mum used to watch "Have I Got News for You" and that sort of thing. Also, because they were very comic you wanted to watch them because they're quite funny' (Stephen, NEUP).

Lionel also remembered that the news would often be on when he was younger:

> 'Yeah, the news and stuff like that. In the car, on the radio sometimes, but mostly TV at home. My dad would rant about [political news] quite a lot' (Lionel, NEUP).

Watching or listening to media sources which focused on politics provided an initial gateway for some of the interviewees to enquire about politics. By engaging with politically-aligned media the parents were signalling their interest in politics to their children, who would then take in interest in politics as this seemed important to their parents. As Stephen's comment above illustrates, this didn't have to be political shows which were serious in tone. Political satirical programmes also provided initial foundations of interest which the interviewee would then build upon by discussing politics with their family or consuming politics through more serious mediums. This was the case for Stephen:

> 'When I was getting older, when I was 10, 11, I started watching "Have I Got News for You" and things like that. You get to know a lot of politicians, you start to form an opinion on them and when you get older you start reading the proper news.' (Stephen, NEUP).

The exposure to politics at a formative age provided Stephen with both curiosity about politics and some basic tools to further investigate what politics meant to him.

Discussions with parents was the most common form of political socialisation for the interviewees (Jennings et al, 2009). This provided similar introductory cues to politics as media sources. Donald remembered that his mother's irritation with news stories would lead her to commenting on politics:

> '[…] my mum got annoyed about things that had gone on, and she would say stuff, comment on stuff that's happened in the news. That's where it's probably a bit of a blurred line. If you're talking about, if you're getting riled up about something that's happened, and there's an injustice in that, and someone's failed to hold someone to account, that's normally a political thing, but you're not necessarily mentioning a political party when you're doing it. You're talking about the news. Yes, it's not that I've been told to vote a certain way, but it was a topic of discussion' (Donald, UP).

The conversations which encouraged political interest did not have to necessarily revolve around politics. Some of the interviewees recounted how discussions with their parents about factors that influenced their lives encouraged an interest in democracy and politics. Sofia,

who was born in Romania, remembers conversations she had with her father about Romanian history encouraging a broader interest in politics:

> ‘When I was studying history as well, I had to know about the Romanian history if I had questions about what the political system was or what means that so I usually had to discuss with him, but I wasn't talking about the politics in that time. We were talking more about the history of politics in Romania. The talks helped my interest about democracy’ (Sofia, NEUP).

The encouragement from parents to discuss politics was a familiar feature of most of the interviewees when they recollected the influences that encouraged participation.

Most did not feel that political opinions were forced upon them by their parents. Instead, a culture was created where interest in politics was formed. The interviewees’ interest in politics was stimulated by their parent’s interest in politics (Gidengil et al, 2016). As politics seemed important to their parents, the interviewees were socialised into feeling that politics was an important issue. The willingness for parents to include their children in political discussions or activities seemed an important factor in political socialisation (Warren and Wicks, 2011). Rather than politics being discussed around them, the interviewees discussed how they were involved in political discussions. Providing space for the interviewees to be inquisitive allowed them to explore what politics meant to them and provided them with confidence to independently explore politics. Margaret’s and Mary’s comments encapsulate how political socialisation occurs through exposure to politics and the openness of parents to include their children in political discussions:

> ‘I was jealous of my mum and dad going and voting. It seemed really important. I thought it's was a really interesting process. As a child there’s so many things that adults get to do you don't get to do, so you think they're interesting when you get older [...]. They'd explain to you that it's a very important thing that can change who runs our country and how we live our lives and all the rest of it. I think my parents are quite good in explaining that is what it's about’ (Margaret, EP).

> ‘People are generally influenced by who they're around, especially your parents, especially when you're younger. They’re trying to get us to think about the world and think about our country and how it was changing. How it moved on. I think that definitely made [my sister and I] think about voting and how we wanted to vote? If we wanted to vote? If we should vote. It always seemed that we would vote and that we should vote. It was pretty much inevitable that we would I suppose’ (Mary, EP).

These accounts highlight the importance of parents developing a strong *illusio* within their offspring’s *habitus*. Margaret’s and Mary’s comments establish how parents provide knowledge about politics, but they also demonstrate how their parents transferred a confidence to influence politics. Both Margaret and Mary, who were classified as EPs, seemed self-assured that they had a good understanding about politics, but they displayed the confidence that they could influence politics and that the views of someone like them would be listened to and acted upon. Thus, they had a strong political *illusio* which seemed, at least in part, to have been transmitted from their parents. Equally, however, a weak *illusio* can be transferred via the family during the formative years.

For Thomas, a lack of political socialisation formed by the family could inhibit future political participation. He suggested that this may occur because some people feel excluded from the political system:

> ‘[…] for some people if the family is not interested, then that would be a barrier [to political participation].’

> ‘If they’ve been on the short end of the stick, they might think, you know, nothing is going to change so why even bother, why bother doing anything. They're just going to be apathetic and not even care [about politics]’ (Thomas, UP).

Moreover, the quality of political socialisation also inhibits future political participation. For example, Emily stated that the political socialisation she received during her youth formed a barrier to her future political participation. Emily’s parents would occasionally discuss politics, but she felt that their lack of education hindered her ability to fully grasp the complexities of the political system. They were unable to fully elucidate aspects of politics, such as the role

of economics in social life and how this could be influenced by participating in political action. Moreover, the lack of money the family was able to access also influenced her ability to research politics upon her own initiative. As Emily explains:

> ‘My parents aren't educated. We're not in the very poor bracket but in the working-class bracket’.
>
> ‘They weren't educated to form their own opinions. Both my parents left school when they were 15, [they] have no higher education. Economically and generally, the government or the system or how the country works isn't something they know about. [It] definitely influenced [my knowledge about politics]. We didn’t have a lot of money, we only got a computer five years ago, even in terms of that kind of thing, that wasn't available for me to have researched [politics] even if I wanted to at home’ (Emily, UP).

Emily’s account of her political socialisation further demonstrates how the family influences the development of a political *illusio*. As discussed below in 6.3.2, Emily, despite engaging in a wide range of political activities, displays a lack of confidence in her political knowledge and is tentative about contributing towards political discussions. She traces her uncertainty about competing in the political *field* to a dearth of political information she gained from her family in her formative years. Therefore, she was unable to invest in the political game to the same extent as those who had a family which nurtured an understanding of the intricacies of politics, leaving her with a weaker *illusio* in comparison. The significance of resources is also a key part of Emily’s reflections. She did not gain the hereditary transmission of cultural capital that other NEUPs and EPs gained from their family as her parents had little formal education (Ødegård and Berglund, 2008). Furthermore, the lack of economic capital within the household diminished her opportunities to conduct research about politics. Emily’s interpretation of the political socialisation she received provides support for the expectation that the lower resources of the UPs weaken their prospects to become interested, and consequently involved, in politics compared to the NEUPs and EPs who can access a more extensive range of resources. Her comments suggest that a scarcity of resources in the formative years makes it harder for an individual to develop a strong *illusio* and leads to an uncertainty about their ability to influence others within the political *field*.

As we can see, the cultural capital provided by the family encourages or discourages an interest in politics. When the older members of a family engaged with politics it transmitted an interest in politics to the younger members. This may not have initially resulted from direct conversations between children and older members of the family. Having an environment where political information was prevalent seems to stimulate a preliminary interest in politics. Thereafter, when the younger members have gained an initial interest in politics, more direct conversations between children and older members were likely to occur which galvanised and consolidated political engagement. For those like Emily, though, the poor quality of political knowledge gained from her parents erected obstacles to future political participation and seemed to influence her confidence in the political *field* in later life. Therefore, the family is a prime site of political socialisation as it diffuses the cultural capital that supports or hinders political interest. For those who come from a family with high resources, it transfers the political interest from those already active in politics to those who were yet to become active in politics. For those from a family with low resources, a diminished quantity or quality of political conversations appears to hinder future political participation – an argument that shall be developed in 6.2.4. However, before examining how resources interact with political socialisation, we shall explore how peer groups provide the impetus to become involved in politics.

6.2.2 Political socialisation and peer-groups

For most of the interviewees, political discussions with friends did not provide an initial stimulus to become interested in politics. For these interviewees, political discussions with friends became more important as they grew older but were less likely to occur during their initial formative years. For a few of the interviewees, however, having peers who discussed politics offered a gateway to politics.

For some of those interviewees whose parents did not discuss politics, their peer-groups provided the social networks which galvanised an interest in politics and led to future political participation. Richard's experiences illuminate the significance the influence friend's attitudes and behaviour can have on a person's political participation. Richard is currently a member

of the Liberal Democrats and is highly engaged within the organisation, taking part in canvassing and standing as a candidate for local elections. The following exchange reveals the lack of political socialisation he received from his parents:

> ‘Did your parents talk about politics when you were young?’ (Interviewer).
>
> ‘Never, I'd struggle to tell you what their political ideology was’ (Richard, NEUP).
>
> ‘Did they ever discuss it around general elections?’ (Interviewer).
>
> ‘Yes, but only once I joined the [Liberal Democratic] party’ (Richard, NEUP).
>
> ‘But never when you were younger?’ (Interviewer).
>
> ‘Not once’ (Richard, NEUP).

Richard’s current enthusiasm for politics was instead established by discussions with a friend:

> ‘I've got a friend who is quite into politics. We talk about politics a lot, me and him. I probably wouldn't have joined if he wasn't part of his party and he wasn’t talking about it. If we didn't talk about it, I wouldn't have considered joining if that makes sense. It's not my personality to get involved in politics really’ (Richard, NEUP).

Similarly, Thomas did not feel he received any political socialisation from his family:

> ‘When I was younger, I hadn’t really discussed it as such with them because a lot of my family seem to think nothing really changes, nothing happens’ (Thomas, UP).

For Thomas, it was a friend who introduced politics as topic of interest:

> ‘I think [politics] was something that I thought I needed to be interested in. Some of my friends talked about it a lot. My one mate, who has been interested in it as long as I can remember, he had spoken to me loads about it. It did get me a little interested’ (Thomas, UP).

As Richard’s and Thomas’ recollections demonstrate, political interest among friends stimulated their interest in politics and, in Richard’s case, encouraged him to get more deeply involved in party politics.

For a small minority of the participants, politics was a topic they had been exposed to through their parents, yet it was their friends' interest that was crucial in galvanising their interest (Quintelier, 2015). Arthur was brought up in a household where politics was a sporadic subject for discussion and his parents were open to political discussions if he initiated conversations about it. Nevertheless, he believed that peer groups were more influential when explaining how he became interested in politics:

> 'I feel it spreads. Like it would spread from person to person. If one person got interested in politics, the next two people that talk to them might think, "That's kind of cool, I'll vote" […]. I suppose from a root, it could be from someone's family. If my parents were like, "Can you get into politics? Can you do this? Can you go look at the manifesto?", I probably wouldn't have. Because I would be like, "Oh, my parents want me to do that. I don't want to do that". The fact my friends were actively like, "Well, I actually believe the Green Party's policies are superior". Or, "I believe the Conservatives" it made me want to get my own opinion' (Arthur, EP).

Interestingly, Arthur acknowledges that the family could be the 'root' of his political interest. Indeed, Arthur went on to say:

> 'I'm sure people do get inspired by their family, but I certainly found that my friends inspired me the most. They were all quite politically active' (Arthur, EP).

This lends some support to the notion that family is the location where political socialisation most commonly occurs (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015; Šerek and Umemura, 2015). Arthur felt that his friends were more inspirational, but he still recognised the importance of family in creating an initial political interest.

Peer groups were recognised by many of the participants as a site for exploring politics, but for most of the participants it stimulated an already existing interest (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015). Peer-group discussions were more important as sites where the interviewees could experiment with politics by contrasting their opinions with others of similar age and political

experience. Indeed, it seems for many of the interviewees that peer-groups were a location where conflicting political opinions were more likely to occur as parents would often appear to provide information about politics rather than delve into conflicts about policy or ideology (Ekström, 2016; Ekström and Östman, 2013). Therefore, peer-group political discussions frequently provided a complimentary aspect of political socialisation, where those in their formative years would be exposed to a wider array of political opinions. Social capital, then, can provide additional means of creating political interest. Broad networks of affiliations provide an individual with exposure to new interests and ideas, in this case political participation. As was illustrated in the last subsection, the quality of social networks is important, too. If an individual's social contacts have relatively low cultural capital, then they may not receive any benefits from their social capital. Therefore, social capital can be exchanged for cultural capital. This can lead to a greater interest in politics and a greater proclivity for political participation for those with extensive social networks high in cultural capital. For a small minority of the interviewees, it was educational institutions, not the family or peer-groups, where social networks were formed and became the main location for their political socialisation.

6.2.3 Political socialisation and educational institutions

Educational establishments were an important factor in creating political interest for a small amount of the participants. They explained that taking part in lessons which discussed democracy or politics provided them with information that helped them navigate the complexities surrounding politics and gave them a grounding in how ideologies worked. These lessons also allowed some of them to think differently about the world and provided them with the confidence to attempt to influence their environment. Secondary schools were occasionally credited with increasing the interviewees' political knowledge, but it was predominantly at sixth form colleges that their interest in politics was stimulated. The interviewees also discussed how the environment at sixth form colleges and universities stimulated political interest. Meeting new people from diverse backgrounds and with a wide-range of opinions allowed the interviewees to engage with perspectives about politics they had not previously encountered. In most cases, it was the peer groups formed at educational

establishments, rather than the education provided by the institution, which propelled the interviewees towards an interest in politics.

Learning about politics through lessons at educational institutions was remarked upon by nearly all of the interviewees. The majority of participants were critical of the lack of education about politics they received. For a minority, however, their educational establishments had been an important aspect of their political socialisation. These participants believed that learning about politics through their studies helped garner their curiosity about politics and provided them with the tools to understand how democratic arrangements operated and a confidence to investigate politics in more detail. Duncan comes from an affluent family where politics was a regular point of conversation. He was aware that both his parents voted, and he described his father as being 'intense' about politics. However, when asked about what motivated his eventual political participation, he believed that lessons at his sixth form college were probably the prime factor:

> 'To be honest I can't pinpoint one area. I think I remember when I was 15 or 14, I thought politics was very boring and I kind of thought why would anyone partake in that, quite honestly. I can't say why. I think maybe it was starting a sociology course that was quite important.'
>
> 'I think that kind of started my political interest' (Duncan, EP).

William also felt that lessons about politics were the most important ingredient in his political socialisation. Similarly to Duncan, William came from a prosperous background and his parents were politically engaged, but, for him, it was formal education about politics and peers who were politically engaged which created this interest:

> 'I would say college really. Doing politics at college, learning about different ideologies and people of different backgrounds who would argue different standpoints. My friends were all very into politics before I was. To hear them talking about it and being interested in it, it definitely affected me as well, I would say' (William, EP).

For Duncan and William, lessons about politics were considered the prime sites for political socialisation. We should consider, however, that both participants chose to do lessons aligned to politics. It could be argued that because they came from politically-orientated families, they were more likely to choose such subjects compared to someone who had no introduction to politics from their family.

Education about politics at secondary school was also a common topic of discussion among the participants, but it was the lack of education about politics at secondary school which was most commented upon. Many of the interviewees had received some form of education about democracy and citizenship but the quantity and quality of these lessons were often criticised by the interviewees. John, for instance, was sceptical about the value of these lessons and highlighted the value of extra-curricular political activities he received at his sixth form college:

> ‘They had citizenship, but citizenship was basically a ragbag of everything else. That wasn't the main subject. You had environmentalism, you had religious studies and then politics was in that, but I can never remember being sat down and told that the blue people believe in this and the red believe in that. I don't remember having elections for anything at school, not even pretend elections for the school councillor, like the head boy. I do remember we did it at sixth form. I moved schools so my first school I don't remember anything like that. In sixth form, we definitely had an election every year’ (John, NEUP).

Reflecting criticisms from previous studies in this area (Kisby, 2017; Kisby and Sloam, 2012; 2014), lessons which promoted political participation were seen by many of the participants as an afterthought. Teachers were not specialists in the area and there seemed little encouragement to take these lessons seriously. Moreover, very little time was spent learning about democracy or politics as these lessons were combined with a range of topics, such as sex education or drug awareness. As Thomas explains, democratic arrangements were not explored in any detail:

> ‘I think we might have had one lesson in citizenship. Basically, how old do you have to be to vote, who are the different parties. That was it, there was nothing else. It was 10 minutes and that was it’ (Thomas, UP).

The interviewees were uniformly positive about the potential for secondary schools to promote political participation, a point we will explore further in Chapter 7, yet nearly all were critical about the political education they received.

One notable exception to this trend was Mary whose school had made significant efforts to increase political engagement. Mary was the only participant who had gone to a feepaying school. Similarly to the other participants who had attended non-feepaying schools, she had received only a few formal lessons about democracy and this subject was combined with other topics concerning social issues. Nevertheless, Mary’s school instigated extra-curricular activities which encouraged their students to participate in politics:

> ‘Every general election, we had a mock election at our school […]. People would form parties, you’d have a party leader, you'd have your accountant. They won’t actually do anything really. You just stand, you'd go around and hand out leaflets like, “Look, vote for our party”. Then there'd be a debate at school, and we’d get one of the MPs to come in’ (Mary, EP).

The mock elections held at Mary’s school were helpful in introducing the students to democracy and provided insights about how it operated. Not all students created ‘realistic’ manifesto pledges. Mary herself took a light-hearted approach to the elections:

> ‘We had a stuffed toy cat and things, that was our prime minister. Also, we tried to see if we could make people vote for the ridiculous stuff. We lost, I was so annoyed. I was like, “Uh, so close”. We had very amusing ideas about how we should run the country or school’ (Mary EP).

However, even though some students took a less serious approach to the elections it seemed to Mary that it increased the potential for future political engagement:

> ‘I think it definitely made people more interested. A lot of people turned out to hear [our local MP] talk. A lot of people, I was really surprised. It was about half the school, I think. Before that, in the first one, I wasn't involved in a party, but it was going on around us the first time it happened at school, there was definitely a lot of interest, and people started to read the actual policies even if they weren't anywhere near the 18 age. I think it definitely made a lot of interest at school’ (Mary, EP).

The combination of having mock elections and hearing an MP encouraged Mary and her colleagues to find out more about politics (Hoskins et al, 2017). By involving the students in mock elections, the young people were provided with the opportunity to understand what politics was on their own terms. Mary’s light-hearted approach to the mock election allowed her to express herself but also encouraged her to investigate politics more deeply. As Mary explained, her fellow students began looking into political policies even though they were not near the eligible age to vote. Her comments support the claim that most young people are ready to become politically engaged but often need a stimulus to recognise how politics is relevant to their lives (Duke et al, 2009; Eckstein et al, 2012). This stimulus comes from exposure to cultural capital. Mary’s attendance at a fee-paying school provided her with extra cultural capital relative to those in non fee-paying schools. However, Mary’s school provided additional cultural capital in the political *field* by providing opportunities for their students to become familiar with political action and develop the disposition that they could be political agents.

6.2.4 Alternative sources of political socialisation

Four of the interviewees suggested that their primary political socialisation did not arise from either the family, peers or educational institutions. It is important to analyse the experiences of these four interviewees as they were UPs. They did not possess the access to resources that the other participants were able to draw upon when becoming politically socialised. The deficit in the forms of capital they had compared to the other participants meant they did not have the influences which encouraged them towards political participation. Consequently, they had to find other locations to stimulate their *illusio* in the political *field*. Yet, despite their

relative lack of resources and (initially) weak *illusio,* all four of these participants were highly engaged with politics and participated in many formal and alternative forms of political action.

Victoria is now at university studying politics, she has participated in Gay Pride marches, demonstrations, boot-camps for the disadvantaged and regularly votes. Victoria explained how these characteristics are a surprising development in her life. Victoria grew up in a financially disadvantaged household located in a poor area. When she was a teenager she did not envisage going to university and did not engage with formal politics or have any encouragement to do so. Indeed, she had to overcome significant barriers, both internal and external, to become politically active and attend higher education. Victoria describes aspects of her environment during her formative years in the following terms:

> ‘I grew up with one parent that did work and one parent that didn't at all. Most of my family didn't work growing up. We lived in a really backward council estate in Derby’ (Victoria, UP).

For Victoria, there was a distinct lack of economic and cultural capital available for her to utilise. Nevertheless, despite describing her council estate as ‘backward’ she was proud of the community she grew up in. It had high levels of social solidarity and a community ethos. However, this social cohesion was undermined by the closure of public areas and youth clubs which stunted the chance of forming broader social networks:

> ‘The area was poor, but it wasn't bad. It felt like a really old community. Everyone would talk to each other, we all knew everyone in the area, your doors wouldn't have to be closed. They'd be literally left open and stuff and it was just very nice until I started to see a change when the park got knocked down.’
>
> ‘From then it was like then the area got a really bad name. Not just because it was poor, but because we had nothing to do. They started closing all the libraries. The library closed down that we had in our little area. Completely shut down. That one park, we had two parks, one of them was completely knocked down and cemented

over. Then there was another one that had been partially knocked down, the youth clubs had closed down.'

'[…] they struggled with funding and stuff and ended up working with young people that were involved in gangs and violence and stuff like that. Any other young people weren't really allowed to go' (Victoria, UP).

As we can see, Victoria grew up in a location where there was a decreasing chance to access social and cultural capital. Cuts in public investment meant that the young people had little opportunity to access cultural capital outside of the home or school and did not have the space to interact with friends without being considered a public nuisance.

Despite a lack of resources, Victoria's descriptions of school denote a person who was interested in political action. She organised a sit-down protest at school about having sport teams segregated by gender and campaigned to introduce halal meat into her school because a large number of her colleagues were Muslim. However, she did not understand her actions as political until she began studying politics at university:

'Then I started to realise that actually as a younger person, I might not have known what politics was, but I definitely was political. I would technically, in the technical political word, I would protest at school about stuff, I would campaign at school about stuff. I just never knew that that's what I was doing. They told me that I was a bad child' (Victoria, UP).

The motivation to take part in political action did not come from Victoria's parents, school or peers, however. Indeed, she felt that typical sites of political socialisation inclined her towards political passivity:

'I always ask a lot of questions. When I was younger, I used to ask a lot of questions, be super-inquisitive, and I'd always get told not to be by my parents, by the rest of my family, by my teachers. They were very unencouraging and still are unencouraging in that area. Whenever I'd have a question about something it wasn't like I was going to get an answer anytime soon' (Victoria, UP).

Victoria did not receive cues from her social networks which propelled her towards formal politics. In fact, she was actively discouraged from taking an interest in politics. She was aware that her parents voted but each time she wanted to discuss politically-aligned topics they told her that it wasn't important. Perhaps Victoria is inherently political, and it was inevitable that she would find a gateway into politics regardless of her social environment. However, she believed that being exposed to forms of cultural and social capital, and a heightened awareness of economic deprivation provided her with the disposition to engage with formal politics.

Victoria located the stimulation to engage with formal politics when she went on a trip to Brazil. On this trip, she broadened her social capital and began to meet more people who were interested in formal politics and became involved in their discussions. She witnessed a protest supporting the introduction of female-only transport and was asked if she wanted join in. Victoria was also exposed to levels of poverty that made her ponder how this could occur. Therefore, Victoria was able to cultivate forms of capital that had been previously missing in her life. The wider social networks she formed with those who were interested in politics not only increased her social capital, it also allowed her to increase her cultural capital. The conversations Victoria had with her new acquaintances allowed her to explore what politics was and provided her with the confidence to develop a strong *illusio* in politics. She began to see the importance of political action but, most importantly, she began to regard politics as something she could influence. Her strengthened *illusio* led to her to engage with politics:

> 'When I came back and that was my main initial thing that made me realise, if you want to change things like this, even for people in your own country let alone others, you need to understand how politics work' (Victoria, UP).

Victoria was able to overcome the barriers that initially restricted her political engagement and participation. She was fortunate that she had the opportunity to go to Brazil, yet it was her increased access to resources, a strengthened *illusio*, and a habitus with improved efficacy which galvanised her political participation.

The other three interviewees who did not feel that their political socialisation came from traditional locations had similar backgrounds to Victoria and, though they hadn't gone to another country, their stimulations for becoming involved in politics were similar to Victoria's. These three participants, Elizabeth, Robert and Mark, all came from households where there was little encouragement to vote. Mark's mother did not vote and did not discuss politics. Robert's parents did vote and would occasionally watch the news, but he felt that they made little effort to talk about politics. Elizabeth probably had an upbringing that most readily encouraged political participation among the four participants discussed in this sub-section. Her mother voted and they would sometimes discuss politics, however, Elizabeth believed that she didn't receive much encouragement at home to participate in politics. All three of these interviewees had inferior access to capital. They all described themselves as working-class and their families as poor. Mark and Elizabeth also stated that they were raised in economically deprived areas.

For these three participants, it was their financial conditions and their interest in knowing why the economic system operated in the way that did which drove their political interest. In particular, they had encountered some of the long-term economic effects of the financial crisis of 2007/8. Robert believed his motivation to participate in politics was mainly motivated by his father losing his job:

> 'I started getting interested in politics just after the recession because during that [time] my dad […] lost [his business]. He was unemployed for 7 years.'
>
> 'Throughout those years it was quite a tough time economically. I don't think we went on holiday for a long time and stuff like that.'
>
> 'I think that was what got me intrigued. I remember that I was walking through town. You often see - they're almost like Jehovah Witnesses in Coventry - the Socialist Party. They stand out at their stall. They will be there every Saturday on the stall for a good solid five hours, standing there in the cold rain. They are very dedicated to be fair to

them. That sort of caught my eye, so that got me interested because of that lived experience' (Robert, UP).

Robert was aged 16 when he began to participate in activities coordinated by the Socialist Party. He discussed how the encouragement he received from the Socialist party helped nurture his initial interest in understanding his 'lived experience'. He became more aware of how politics operated and began to believe that his participation in politics could have a tangible influence on his life.

For Mark and Elizabeth, it was the impact of austerity on public services and the worsening socio-economic conditions of those who they encountered which stimulated their interest in politics. Mark, similarly to Robert, was motivated to take more interest in politics by attending a talk at a youth club. The speaker discussed the impact of austerity and linked this to decisions taken by the government. Mark described this as his political awakening:

'I was spell-bound by this guy. I wanted to find out more [about politics]' (Mark, UP).

Elizabeth made the decision to join civic organisations and participate in charity events which helped tackle some of the worst effects of austerity before joining the Green party. For both Mark and Elizabeth, being aware of economic insecurity created an interest in why this was occurring, but they both required access to social and cultural capital to help direct their curiosity. Social capital was needed to meet people who could provide information about politics and the information they gained provided them with cultural capital. The availability of youth clubs and civic organisations provided Mark and Elizabeth with the resources to become aware of politics and delivered reasons for investing in politics.

6.2.5 Political socialisation conclusion

According to most of the interviewees, the family was the site where political socialisation most commonly occurred. This support previous research investigating political socialisation (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015; Šerek and Umemura, 2015). Parents did not often make overt attempts to convert their children to become interested in politics. Instead, parents would

discuss politics together or with a friend. Or they may consume political news. The participants were encouraged to become involved in politics because they would over-hear a member of their family conversing about politics or commenting on the news. They would then know that their parents were interested in that topic and would begin to reflect on why that was. Parents being open to direct conversations with their children was an important part of the latter's political socialisation, nevertheless. The willingness of parents to engage their children in conversations seemed crucial in supplementing the initial interest the interviewees had taken in politics (Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Jennings et al, 2009). This allowed the participants to become versed in politics without being concerned about making a mistake or showing a lack of knowledge.

Peers and educational establishments also provided political socialisation for a minority of the participants. Most of the interviewees who believed that either of these locations was the prime site of their political socialisation had some introduction to politics from their family. This suggests that the family is most important factor in creating political interest, though it is not always sufficient to stimulate further interest without additional socialisation from other locations. Peer-groups were important for political socialisation because they often exposed the interviewees to a wider-range of political opinions than their family would provide (Ekström, 2016). Educational establishments had a varied impact on political socialisation. Most of the interviewees were critical of the political education they received at secondary school. Most felt it was an afterthought and stated that politics was rarely touched upon (Kisby, 2017). Sixth form colleges, conversely, seemed to provide an environment that encouraged political interest. This was often because of the extra-curricular activities the colleges offered and the encouragement they provided to students to talk about politics instead of mandatory classes in politics. The increased diversity amongst the students at sixth form colleges and universities also seemed to increase the likelihood of political participation because students would be exposed to new ideas and meet people from different backgrounds.

Therefore, there is clear support for Bourdieu's claim that levels of cultural capital broaden or narrow the potential of future political participation. All the interviewees needed some location where cultural capital could be transmitted to them, so they could learn about politics and feel that they were competent political actors. But, for a few of the UPs, the cultural capital necessary for political socialisation was not available in the family, nor was it readily available through peers or at educational establishments. In each of these cases, the participants lacked economic capital, which demonstrates how cultural capital often relies on access to economic capital. To overcome their lack of cultural capital, these interviewees turned to their social capital, despite their inability to cultivate large amounts of this resource. The social capital they were exposed to allowed them to access the cultural capital which stimulates political engagement and participation. Therefore, EPs access to political participation is easier than for UPs. For some in the latter group, their deficiency of resources meant that they lacked a stimulus to become interested in politics. For the EPs, conversely, their higher resources created more opportunities for preliminary political interest.

Initial access to cultural capital and the subsequent political interest it creates does not mean that future political involvement is egalitarian, however. Access to cultural capital, often mediated by access to social and economic capital, continues to exert an influence on a person's political engagement and participation as they continue to compete within the political *field*. As we shall discuss in the subsequent section, inferior cultural capital continues to erect barriers to the disadvantaged's political participation after they have become initially interested in politics.

6.3 Barriers to political participation

This section will continue the argument that the forms of capital mediate the likelihood of political participation. It will argue that inferior access to cultural capital, and the subsequent diminished symbolic power, inclines the UPs towards political disengagement. The lack of leisure time required to cultivate cultural capital partially contributes towards political alienation. Moreover, lower access to cultural capital disposes some UPs to feel that they are

not eligible to contribute to political discussion and creates feelings of inadequacy when competing in the political *field*. In the main, the UPs' comments revealed that there was a distinction between the dominant and the dominated in the political *field* which created the feeling that they were not competent political actors. The general insight gained from the interviewees' comments discussed below was that social group membership influenced the availability of cultural capital and that those who could only access small amounts of cultural capital were less inclined to become engaged with politics.

6.3.1 Barriers to political participation: leisure time

Bourdieu (1991) suggested that inferior cultural capital and an absence of leisure time would increase the likelihood of political disengagement. The evidence from the participants in this study lends credence to both claims, though only two of the interviewees directly discussed the lack of leisure time as a barrier to participation. As we shall see, the lack of cultural capital was a more prominent feature of the interviewees' discussions.

The participants who suggested that leisure time was an important consideration when understanding why a person is politically engaged or not discussed the impact of working long hours on the inclination to become involved in politics. This was important for political socialisation because if parents were working long hours then they would not be in the household providing cues for their offspring to become politically active. The absence of political discussions or consumption of news would make it less likely for youths to become initially interested in politics. If the young person had established an initial interest in politics, then their parent may be unavailable to have political interactions which nurtured their political development. Mark, for example, remembered that his mother was rarely available to converse about politics:

> 'My mum worked a lot of hours when I was growing up. Especially after I was at high school.'

> ‘She didn’t have regular hours, she’d be out a lot of evenings and weekends. And she was knackered when she was at home. Nah, I didn’t really have political discussions with my mum’ (Mark, UP).

Charles had similar experiences to Mark, however, it was Charles himself who worked long and irregular hours. He felt that this was detrimental to his political participation:

> ‘When I was working really anti-social hours I did not keep up as much as I do now. That was economically motivated, so I had no choice. I had no money, I had to work, I had to take whatever hours were given to me and they were often shit and that was just how it was. […] I had less spare time, I was less organised.’
>
> ‘I think the funny thing about working anti-social hours, working late nights, early mornings, it really screws with your head. A lot of people don’t understand that it’s not healthy. You're not all there most of the time. So, I think that was kind of a barrier just because it was lower on my priority list. When you’ve got no money and all you’re thinking about is money, you’re worried about where the next pay-check is coming from, constantly monitoring it, it takes a lot of your time and energy. I think that when I was less [financially] comfortable, I was less interested in politics. As I became more comfortable, I had more time to pursue other things, you know, other interests’ (Charles, UP).

Another insight that Charles provides is the lack of attention politics may garner if a person is concerned about their financial situation. Charles was obviously stressed by a lack of financial security. When he did have leisure time, he prioritised ways to improve his finances or was distracted by the anxiety of his perilous economic position. As we can see, leisure time, which provides the temporal space to take an interest in politics, is mediated by economic capital. For Charles and Mark’s mother, the necessity of working relegated the importance of politics. The irregular hours they both experienced was an important factor in their inattention toward politics. Moreover, as Charles explained, what free time is left is often taken up by attention to finances, which left little space to ponder the dynamics of politics or discuss politics with others.

6.3.2 Barriers to political participation: the complexity of politics

The complexity of politics also erected barriers to political engagement and participation. Cultural capital seemed an important component within the interviewee's views about the complexity of politics. They did not feel they and others like them had the authority or competency to contribute to political matters. A large proportion of the UPs and NEUP provided examples of barriers to participation which could be traced to inferior cultural capital. It was noticeable that a large proportion of the UPs and NEUP felt trepidation about discussing politics or expressing an opinion about politics. As Laurison (2015: 926) explains, the disposition to feel authorised or not authorised to contribute to political discussions has its origins in the individual's class position and a *habitus* which reproduces that class position:

> 'In [the Bourdieusian] approach, income and its correlates (such as education and occupation) facilitate greater political participation not just through contributing to people's technical ability to understand and engage with politics, but also through molding their subjective sense of their place in the world so that they feel both entitled and expected to have political opinions, and to express those in daily life, in surveys, and through voting and other forms of political engagement.'

Those with lower resources often felt they were not entitled to discuss politics. They believed that they did not have the symbolic capital to be taken seriously within political conversations. Emily has been a member of a political party, participated in a wide-range of alternative political activities and regularly votes, but felt disinclined to become involved in political discussions:

> 'A lot of the time I feel like I don't know enough, I'm not intellectual enough, I don't know enough about the economy. So, it kind of puts me off even having a conversation about it because I feel like I don't understand enough' (Emily, UP).

Edward felt that politics was confusing and believed that the lack of clarity made political participation a burden and erected barriers to people becoming politically active:

> 'Because I have the right to vote I should do it. I don't think it's enjoyable because it's not. It's all a bit confusing and I think that's why some people don't vote because they don't know who to vote for, so they don't get involved at all' (Edward, UP).

The inferior cultural capital Emily and Edward were able to access was tacitly reproduced via their *habitus* and made them apprehensive about engaging with politics. Their subjectivity disposed them towards political disengagement because they did not feel qualified or authorised to make meaningful contributions to political discourse (Laurison, 2015).

How politicians communicate and how political issues are articulated was discussed by some of the UPs as a barrier to political participation. These interviewees believed that people were often unsure how to interpret and understand political issues, restricting the potential of them becoming politically active. Alfred's comments are indicative of this position:

> 'I think definitely, it could well be because they just don't know what it is they have to do or what it is that they're voting for, and just not knowing about something is, I think, a reason for any person to be worried about [participating]' (Alfred, UP).

The feeling amongst the participants who suggested that the complexity inherent to politics was off-putting for young people was that politics could be simplified. There was also a feeling among some that the complexity was used to create a mystique around politics which repelled less educated people from participating. Victoria's comments are emblematic of this view:

> 'I don't feel the need, or I don't see the need and understand why politics has to have so much jargon.'
>
> 'It makes you sound confusing to people and makes them feel that they shouldn't be involved. I don't think it's needed' (Victoria, UP).

For Bourdieu (1984; 1991), this mystique is produced within political discussions to provide symbolic capital for those who can comprehend esoteric language. Those who can grasp the nuances of political conversation produce a symbolic capital for themselves which distinguishes them as dominant within the political social space and competent to other players in the political *field*. Their political power (or political capital) draws itself from other forms of capital, particularly cultural capital, as their ability to engage with cryptic language is recognised by other dominant actors and allows the dominant to consolidate or increase their

superior position in the *field*. Therefore, political capital draws upon and reproduces social, cultural and economic capital.

This subsection has further demonstrated how the political *field* operates to include and exclude individuals depending on their access to forms of capital. Those with superior forms of capital are able to unravel the complexity of political discussions, while those with inferior resources may struggle to decipher political matters. Having parents who discussed politics (social capital), being educated in an environment which replicates the language of politics (cultural capital) and having the financial power to access the time needed to build up the knowledge of how politicians communicate (economic capital), for example, are precursors for a person understanding political communications and possessing a disposition that their involvement will be successful. Symbolic capital is particularly important in understanding how the complexity of politics stratifies agents within the political *field*. Those who are able to provide evidence of their understanding of political discussions can advertise their suitability to take part in the game. Moreover, dominant actors within the political *field* recognise the competence of other dominant agents. This means that a hierarchy is created between the dominant, who are recognised as influential in that social space, and the dominated, whose lack of symbolic power consigns them to the periphery of political interactions.

6.3.3 Barriers to political participation: cultural and economic distinction

Cultural and economic distinctions are also a crucial factor when understanding the barriers to political participation. A majority of the UPs discussed direct links between a person's class position and that individual's belief that they were entitled to participate in politics. Elizabeth was of the opinion that those from the working-class did not feel their opinions were given serious consideration in political discussions:

> 'There's no one there saying you can't vote because you're working class […]. It's more, "I'm not going to get involved because I don't think it matters, I don't think I matter"' (Elizabeth, UP).

Eleanor believed that those with higher social status and embodied and institutionalised cultural capital attempted to exclude her from political conversations because her symbolic capital was inferior to their symbolic capital.

> ‘If you are from a poorer background you’re less engaged, have less education. I feel like you can understand [politics], but you don't feel like you can match up to them. It's insecurity as well as the lack of education’.

> ‘I have had conversations with, for instance, my boss or people in high positions and immediately there is a class issue. I definitely feel like they think my opinion isn’t as valid as theirs’ or isn't as worthy because they come from a better background, [they are] higher educated. Whatever they think, I definitely feel like that they believe what I say doesn't really hold any weight’ (Eleanor, UP).

The ability of many of the UPs to engage with politics was undermined by the symbolic violence many of them experienced. For Bourdieu, symbolic capital masquerades as a natural feature of social life, yet it conceals a process of stratification where individuals are placed into hierarchical ranks due to their tastes, habits and attitudes (Schubert, 2008). The ability to discuss politics is often understood by the dominant in the political *field* as an option available to all. However, for the UPs, who are dominated in the political *field*, their lack of mastery over symbolic capital precluded their political engagement (Harrits, 2011). They felt judged by their class position and believed they were unable to articulate their political opinions without it being diminished by their lower status relative to others in the political *field*. This was the case for many of the UPs, who, despite high-levels of political participation, still displayed anxiety about expressing their political opinions.

Furthermore, the cultural distinction between classes can also lead to the dominated actively excluding themselves from political activities. Some of those who described themselves as working-class were reflexively aware of the differences in tastes and attitudes between them and those in highest classes. The UPs, who expressed these opinions, believed that those who were dominant in social spaces were ‘posh’ and removed from the experiences of those in

the lower classes. As Victoria's comments below demonstrate, the distinctions between the classes were apparent during her formative years:

> 'When I was a teenager, probably when I was 13, 14 almost, we had this group of people, and I specifically remember we would laugh at people and joke and stuff and say like, "these posh people or these rich people are involved in this and doing this around politics or within the political system"'.
>
> 'We just thought it was ridiculous but really it's because we didn't know and we just weren't included. We mocked them because we weren't included. We didn't have a choice to be included. It was not that we didn't want to. I just think it was about the separation' (Victoria, UP).

Victoria's explanations of cultural and economic distinctions illustrate the exclusion those from the lower classes feel from politics. They regard politicians as an elite group who seek to dismiss those who do not come from a privileged background. Victoria was aware she was different to the dominant in the political *field* and sought to reconcile herself to this by mocking those who were in a superior social position. It could be argued that her *habitus* attempted to resolve her feelings of exclusion with the tacit suggestion that she chose to be excluded.

Cultural distinctions also manifested themselves when Robert was attending political functions. Robert, who describes himself as working-class, was formerly a member of the Socialist party and is currently a member of the Conservative party. He discussed how he felt more comfortable attending Socialist party events due to perceived class differences between himself and other Conservative party members:

> 'I was less daunted going to the Socialist [event] because I knew there would be more working-class people and people I relate to. And we'd go to a Wetherspoons afterwards.'
>
> 'And then when I went to the Tory [event]. I was definitely the only working-class person there. For example, one person, they talked about water shortages at one

point. He must have been a bit sort of off his head, he was like, “yeah, when it comes to water shortages, we should just rake the water prices up high and then *we* won't suffer” and I was thinking “who are *we*? What are you on about?” You had everyone in the room turn around, not so much because they're thinking “who are *we*?” They’re more like, “we can't treat *them* like that, it’s not very nice to treat *them* like that”, like them…’ (Robert, UP).

‘Them?’ (Interviewer).

‘Yeah, I was sort of thinking, like, I felt very sort of awkward in that setting’ (Robert, UP).

Despite Robert’s high commitment to political participation, he perceived class differences between himself and other members of the Conservative party. At the Socialist party event he knew that the other attendees would have similar outlooks to himself and would share the same cultural habits. However, he was aware that he was different to the other members at the Conservative party event which made him apprehensive about attending. Not only did he see himself as different to the other attendees, the comments from another Conservative member, and the responses to that intervention from other members who were present, suggested to Robert that the Conservative party members saw themselves differently to those in the lower classes. As we can see, this made Robert uncomfortable about engaging with politics through that forum.

From the views of the interviewees outlined in this subsection, the contribution of cultural and economic distinctions to guiding potential political participation becomes clearer. In many cases, the UPs discussed how they felt insecure about participating in political debates and did not feel that their opinions were important. Some UPs also felt that their views were not given consideration because they resided in a lower class. Cultural traits and affluence seemed to delineate whose political views can be considered as valid (Wacquant, 2005a). This demonstrates the active part symbolic violence plays within the process of economic and cultural distinction. The actual content of the UPs’ opinions is overlooked and is instead evaluated by the credentials or cultural characteristics of the disseminator. Thus, the political

views of the dominated in the political *field* are assessed by arbitrary standards of cultural distinction. This suggests that class is a barrier to political participation as those with higher resources seek to exclude or diminish the political activity of those with lower resources. The UPs often seemed to be aware of such distinctions, if only tacitly, and moderated their political participation accordingly. In other words, their *habitus* implicitly suggested that 'I don't think I matter' in political interactions and activities.

6.3.4 Barriers to participation: political influence

Internalised confidence, due to class position, when competing in the political *field* was also apparent when the interviewees discussed their political efficacy. The influence which the interviewees believed they possessed over the political system was illustrative of the divergences in the efficacy of the UPs, NEUP and EPs. The internal and external efficacy of the EPs was noticeably higher than for most of those who were categorized as UPs and NEUP. The EPs acceptance of norms involved in the political social space (*doxa*), their investment in the political *field* (*illusio*) and their superior capital has shaped a *habitus* which inclines them towards confidence in affecting the outcomes of politics. They are disposed to believe that a person like them *can* influence the political *field* and that the political social space *will* respond to their actions within it. The range of options available to influence politics seemed broader and realistically achievable to the EPs. Conversely, the NEUP and UPs were more unsure about how to influence politics and, in particular, whether the political *field* would be receptive to someone like them.

The shortage of efficacy among UPs and NEUPs is demonstrated by the lack of recognition they feel from politicians and their isolation from the formal political system. Jane, for example, stated:

> 'Who am I? They don't care about me' (Jane, NEUP).

Thomas expressed similar feelings and was particularly sceptical about influencing the political *field* through institutional routes of participation:

> ‘Not unless I had engaged in rallies and, you know, marches or started a petition. I think it's quite difficult for you to change the politicians’ way of thinking just with a vote. If it's just a vote they wouldn't really know who you are or anything about you. [You are] just another number’ (Thomas, UP).

Victoria felt that the remoteness of Westminster made attempts to influence politics unrealistic, though she did believe that a person like her could impact local politics:

> ‘The local ones more so but general elections and voting for them, writing to those MPs I don't think so. Not really’ (Victoria, UP).

This was the general feeling amongst many of the UPs and the NEUPs. The political system was, for people like them, a remote and unresponsive institution occupied by politicians who were generally unconcerned about their opinions. Edgar also believed that economic capital and recognition of symbolic capital could constrain or expand a person’s ability to influence politics:

> ‘No, not even remotely do I think I can influence my MP or my local councillor. Even if I started a small political party that would have zero influence. It would have to have a financial backer like the two major parties. Maybe if I was in an elevated position in society’ (Edgar, NEUPs).

Alfred also discussed how social capital mediated a person’s ability to shape politics:

> ‘I think that one person, unless they have a lot of contacts, cannot do very much’ (Alfred, UP).

The comments by Alfred and Edgar demonstrate the reflexivity of millennials. They are certainly aware that they are disadvantaged by factors beyond their control, predominantly their inferior access to resources. This inclined many of the UPs and NEUPs towards pessimistic evaluations of their potential to alter the dynamics of politics and whether the political system would be receptive to their input.

If we analyse some of the comments of the EPs, however, they often expressed a strong presupposition that they have the power to influence politics and bring attention to their own political priorities. For William, political participation offered the potential for transforming society:

> ‘Well, politics is the driving force behind everything really. It decides where money goes, […] something simple like a pothole getting filled in the road or something big like declaring war on another country, and politics drives it. You've got to know why it's driving it, what can I do to change it because I don't agree with something that's happened’ (William, EP).

Arthur held similar feelings to William. He felt empowered by political participation and demonstrated high external and internal efficacy when participating in politics:

> ‘I just like having my views heard, definitely. When I vote, I like to see my views represented in parliament. That's essentially why you vote. Yes, I like having the power to change the country’ (Arthur, EP).

The EPs strong *illusio* in the political *field* suggests they are disposed to believe that someone like them can influence the social space they are in which Bourdieu suggests originated in their access to superior forms of capital. Arthur was self-assured when asked about his influence over the political *field*:

> Yes, I think I could. If I really wanted to. Obviously, I can vote and I can sign a petition, but I feel on a larger scale - if I was so passionate about a certain issue - I definitely think I could [influence the political system] (Arthur, EP).

Similarly, Anne displayed the belief that she was capable of influencing politics if she chose to:

> ‘Yeah, if I had a following. Or if I was in a position to do so. If I wanted to campaign on an issue then I probably could’ (Anne, EP).

The efficacy of some of the EPs also appears to have been inculcated during their formative years, creating a strong *illusio* through a *habitus* which calculates their aims as attainable. For example, when Margaret was asked if she could influence politics she commented:

> ‘I think so. I suppose when I was younger, I thought I might be a councillor or something like that and kind of infiltrate the heart of it. I do think that individuals can make a difference’ (Margaret, EP).

The superior forms of capital the EPs could call upon seemed to create a *habitus* which produced confidence in their political practices. This is supported by some comments from the EPs, not all of whom were oblivious to the enhanced power they garnered from resources others may not be able to harvest.

Indeed, previous studies have shown that some individuals with higher resources perceive their relative advantage over others (France and Haddon, 2014; Walsh et al, 2018). This was also true for a few EPs in this study who outlined how their privileged position had provided them with greater influence compared to those with inferior *field* position and forms of capital:

> ‘I think I can. I'm in quite a lucky position where I can get involved in a lot of groups that will lobby the parties and I think there's certain things which politicians will be more receptive upon.’

> ‘If I was to write and say, “I'm a law student at university and I would like a conversation about this”. I mean it might not happen, but […] they would be more likely to come back and have a conversation [with me] than someone saying, “I'm working at a shop”’ (Joan, EP).

These two comments from Joan display her awareness that social and cultural capital have provided her with extra tools which increase the likelihood of her views being taken seriously

It seems apparent from the responses of the interviewees in this subsection that an individual’s resources and position in the *field* produce a *habitus* which inclines people to be optimistic or pessimistic about their potential to influence the political system. EPs, who hold superior forms of capital, gain advantages within the political *field* from their ability to access and cultivate cultural, social and economic capital. They display more confidence in their ability to shape politics and they expect that their opinions will be acted upon by political

actors. NEUPs and UPs, on the other hand, are more circumspect in their dealings with political institutions. They display lower internal efficacy and are unsure about the political system's openness to their views. The social positions of the participants seem to provide a structured and structuring experience for millennials when they navigate the political *field*. Yet, neither all the dominant or all the dominated are utterly unaware of the influence structures have on their trajectory with the political social space. This is analogous to the conclusions Walsh et al (2018: 231) drew from their research, which suggested:

> 'that some young people possess a keen sense of established power relations and an understanding of how to engage with those relations, yet still feel "outside" […] of many of the social and political structures that influence their everyday lives. These young people's futures as citizens are hopeful but also uncertain.'

The data from the study in this thesis suggests that those who are most likely to feel 'outside' of political institutions are the NEUPs and UPs, whose inferior resources mean access to the political system is harder to achieve and more difficult to envisage compared to EPs with superior resources.

6.3.5 Barriers to political participation: gender

The vast majority of the interviewees did not feel that gender created barriers to political participation. No male believed that their gender impacted on their ability to participate. Likewise, the majority of the females were sceptical that gender had a detrimental effect on their likelihood of participation. It should be noted that most of the females who were interviewed expressed an openness to feminism, so their scepticism about the influence of gender on political participation was not due to a general hostility towards theories of gender inequality.

Three of the female participants, however, did outline experiences of sexism within their political participation. These interviewees explained that they believed that their opinions were not treated equally to their male counterparts. As we discussed in the last subsection, many of those from the lower classes were anxious about expressing political opinions as they lacked symbolic capital. The interviewees who discussed sexism illuminated a similar

experience that was gender-based rather than class-based. These three females believed that they were required to provide greater evidence for their opinions than was expected from males. Eleanor, for example, stated that males were viewed as more rational and less emotional than females:

> 'I think men tend to see the women as running on emotion and men running on intelligence. There still is a feeling that [a female's] intellect does not hold the same weight as a man's intellect' (Eleanor, UP).

Anne, who is studying politics at university, believed that her male colleagues would not listen to her viewpoints and treated her with less respect because of her gender:

> 'For example, in seminars explaining your opinion. When you say your opinion, a lot of the males in my cohort would try and over-voice my opinion and sort of shout me down. Not actually politely, not actually say their opinion, [they would] just dismiss my opinion' (Anne, EP).

Elizabeth, who is very active in civic organisations and her local Green party, encountered similarly sexist attitudes about her political opinions. She also suggested that her ability was implicitly questioned as some males had suggested that her prominence in party events was due to positive discrimination, not her inherent ability.

In 3.8 we reviewed the differences between the political participation of males and females. While turnout at elections between the genders was nearly identical at the 2017 General Election, females continue to report lower political interest and knowledge than their male counterparts (Hansard, 2019) and women have a tendency to underestimate their political knowledge (Hansard, 2017). The sexism described by three of the female interviewees provides some tentative explanations for this. Males seem to have greater symbolic capital in political discussions than females due to their gender. Males' viewpoints were regarded with greater gravitas than females, so the latter often feel compelled to provide more evidence for their political views than they feel is the case for males. It could be argued, then, that females are subject to symbolic violence as the *doxa* of the political *field* presents men as more

'naturally' political. Women therefore take less interest in politics and underestimate their political knowledge because they have internalised the gendered norms of the political *field*.

6.3.6 Barriers to political participation: ethnicity

The four ethnic minorities who were interviewed did not feel that race or racism had inhibited their political engagement or participation. Saanvi documented racism in other spheres of her life, particularly at school, but she did not believe that ethnicity had negatively influenced her potential political activity. However, she did believe that her ethnicity may prove to be a barrier if she attempted to become more heavily involved in politics:

> 'In my high school, I always was one of two brown people, out of a 1,000, and so, although there were many times when I got racial abuse and things, it just made me, not so much stronger, but I couldn't imagine myself not living in a white dominated place.'
>
> 'If I was more politically involved, then I think I would have had to work a lot harder because I haven't gone past the level that I am. I don't think it affects me massively, but I think [racism] would be there' (Saanvi, UP).

Fahad, who is very active within his local Liberal Democrat party, had not encountered discrimination in his political participation, but he speculated that it may become a factor if ethnic minorities wished to advance within political parties.

> 'So, access [to politics] is pretty open you think?' (Interviewer).
>
> 'More than it has been. There are obviously still institutional barriers' (Fahad, UP).
>
> 'In what ways? Being a politician or to go and vote?' (Interviewer).
>
> 'Not for voting. Going to a high level, being selected as a PCC or something like that. I'd say it's less than it has been [previously]' (Fahad, UP).

Therefore, while race and ethnicity had not created barriers for any of the participants in their current political activities, half of the ethnic minorities interviewed believed that racial

discrimination could erect barriers when attempting to gain positions of influence within political institutions.

6.3.8 Barriers to political participation: conclusion

Class-based inferior cultural capital had notable effects on many of the UPs' inclination to become involved in politics. A lack of cultural capital made many of the participants apprehensive about political participation (Laurison, 2015). They doubted their intellect was competent enough to engage in political conversations, they often found politics confusing and did not believe that they could influence the political system. Their cultural capital did not have the symbolic power that those in superior positions within the political *field* were able to cultivate. Those with superior resources are able to symbolically flaunt their cultural capital, impressing on others in the political *field* that they are capable political actors. Those with inferior resources, who are in constant competition with others in the political *field*, negatively contrast their symbolic power with the dominant. This shapes a *habitus* which inclines the dominated towards political disengagement as it tacitly classifies their political ability as inferior to the dominant in the political *field* (Harrits, 2011).

Similarly, gender seems to exert some influence over cultural capital in the political *field*. A small minority of the females in this study felt that their opinions were disregarded or required greater evidence compared to men. Politics has historically been dominated by men and while there have been significant improvements in gender equality within politics over time, the political *field* seems to contain residual gender imbalances. Some of the females in this study stated that they were anxious to engage with political discussions. Similarly to class, gender shapes *habitus*, so the dominated in the *field* - in this case females - are inclined towards doubting their political competency and regard the political *field* as favouring dominant groups.

Consequently, the barriers to political participation can be understood as both internal and external. On the one hand, access to resources and *field* position provide objective barriers from external sources. On the other hand, the *habitus* internally reproduces the external structures in the subjective consciousness of the individual. As the interviewee, Elizabeth, suggested, no individual overtly hinders the dominated from participating, instead the *habitus* evaluates choices as achievable or unachievable, shaping the trajectory of each individual (Wacquant, 2005a; 2005b). Those who encounter external barriers reproduce those obstacles in their decisions to be politically engaged or not. As those with inferior resources believe that someone like them cannot influence politics and are confronted by a political system that won't respond to their needs, they are inclined and guided towards political passivity.

The UPs in this study were able to overcome both the external and internal barriers to political participation through various means. Yet, many were still reflexively aware that class had some influence over their likelihood of engaging with politics. In most cases, this awareness was acknowledged implicitly; for example, those who were anxious about contributing to political discussions. In a few cases, however, this awareness came from explicit events. Robert and Eleanor, for example, discussed how the dominant in the *field* made overt distinctions between themselves and the dominated. Accordingly, it is important to note that while the forms of capital often operate covertly, agents can still become aware of the hierarchy in the political *field*, which may allow them to strategise methods to overcome their disadvantage.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated some of the barriers which hinder and obstruct political participation. The investigation of how barriers were manifested began with an analysis of political socialisation. As Persson (2015) reminds us, those from affluent families are more likely to have more extensive social networks, more nurturing political environments, better education and higher rates of participation in political activities. He suggests that these

attributes are driven by preadult socialisation, where access to higher resources allows a smooth transition to gaining the abilities necessary to engage with politics. Therefore, we should expect to see that EPs have families that have cultivated political interest and UPs who have not enjoyed a home environment which fosters political engagement.

Overall, this was true for the interviewees. The family was important for generating political engagement for most of the interviewees (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015). Parental discussions (Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Jennings et al, 2009), shared political activities (Warren and Wicks, 2011) and witnessing parental political participation (Gidengil et al, 2016) were mentioned by some the interviewees as socialising factors which piqued their political interest. Thus, interviewees began to regard politics as relevant because it was relevant to the older, influential members of the family.

The differences in home environments between the UPs and EPs highlighted the importance of the transmission of cultural capital from parents to their offspring (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). The EPs were far more likely than the UPs to have home environments which provided the cultural resources to feel entitled to have a political opinion and provide the belief that they could influence the political *field* (Manganelli et al, 2014). They learnt how to be competent political actors, or at least perceive themselves to be component political actors, through exposure to politics in the home. These dominant agents subsequently displayed more internal and external efficacy because they had internalised the disposition that they possessed the ability to affect the political system and that the political system would respond to their involvement (Harrits, 2011). This may be because their superior cultural capital shaped a *habitus* which regarded political interventions as achievable. Conversely, many of the UPs did not receive much in the way of political socialisation at home. For some, their parents lack of education and political knowledge hindered their ability to comprehend politics or feel confident about political engagement (Condon and Holleque, 2013). Moreover, the lack of economic capital hindered their ability to research politics independently. For these UPs, they had to find other locations to stimulate an interest in politics and provide knowledge about politics (Johnstonbaugh, 2018). Even though the participants in this study

were successful in finding other areas to provide political socialisation, they still seemed to have developed a *habitus* which mitigated against confidence in the political sphere. Therefore, the UPs often displayed lower levels of political efficacy than the EPs.

Educational establishments and peer-groups also formed important locations for a minority of the interviewees. However, these locations seemed to mostly supplement the political socialisation engendered by the family (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015). Nevertheless, for a small number of UPs and NEUPs, friends provided an introduction to politics which they had not gained at home. Peer-groups seemed to extend the range of opinions available to the interviewees as they encountered people with different backgrounds and beliefs to their family (Ekström, 2016; Ekström and Östman, 2013). Educational establishments were often castigated for their lack of attention to increasing political engagement and participation (Keating and Janmaat, 2014; Kisby, 2017). Yet for a small majority, particularly when they began attending sixth form colleges, political interest was promoted by their educational institution and galvanised political engagement. We should also note that, when done efficiently and with purpose, educational establishments can provide a major source of political socialisation. As Mary's comments demonstrated, she and many of her colleagues were keen participants in extra-curricular political activities and their inclination to engage with politics seemed strengthened due their participation in these school-aligned events (Print, 2007). As mentioned above, parents' guide their children towards networks with similar cultural resources (Šerek and Umemura, 2015). Therefore, the EPs, with higher levels of cultural capital and family-induced political socialisation, should be guided towards friends and institutions which engender high levels of political socialisation. It was difficult to confirm or deny this within this study. However, the fact that it was only UPs who required alternative sites for their political socialisation seems to lend partial support to this claim.

For four of the UPs, finding alternative sites of political socialisation allowed them to overcome the barriers to political participation that had been erected in their path. It was notable that these individuals all described themselves as working-class and that they grew-up in poor households. However, their subsequent decision to become involved in politics did

not spontaneously manifest itself in vacuum (Condon and Holleque, 2013). They all had to access the cultural capital required for eventual political engagement and participation, which was lacking in their social networks. Each of these participants used social contacts to access the cultural capital that had hitherto been absent in their lives (Harrits, 2011). In three of these cases the access to cultural capital occurred by happenstance; either through a trip abroad or through exposure to those who could inform them about politics. However, these participants were all previously aware that they were poor and had witnessed the effects of austerity. It seems that their economic marginalisation both hindered their ability to access politics but simultaneously invigorated an interest in politics (Farrugia, 2013). The fact that the only interviewees to require alternative sources of political socialisation were UPs also highlights the obstacles those with fewer resources face when competing in the political *field*. They did not have the cultural capital arising from social and economic capital which inclined them towards political interest, so they had to find substitute locations to fulfil their political socialisation – a barrier which the EPs did not encounter (Johnstonbaugh, 2018). Thus, a lack of the forms of capital creates barriers to political socialisation and, consequently, future political participation.

The possession of symbolic capital seemed an important component when analysing how the interviewees' traversed the political *field*. Youths from disadvantaged social groups often lack political efficacy and report that they find politics confusing (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Combining the responses of the interviewees with Bourdieu's concepts allow us to interpret why that is. The UPs were more likely to report that they found politics bewildering and believed that abstruse language made politics unappealing. Likewise, many of the UPs were not confident that someone like them could influence the political system (Manganelli et al, 2014). This appears to be due to the distinction between the symbolic forms of cultural capital dominant and dominated agents hold. The lack of cultural capital inclined the UPs towards political passivity. Because the dominant in the political field had mastery over symbolic power, the dominated see themselves as incapable of influencing politics (Bourdieu, 2000). Indeed, when some of the UPs engaged in political discussions or attended political events the distinction between the dominant and dominated became more visible to them. They were marginalised in political conversations and felt apprehensive about engaging with those

with superior forms of capital. Consequently, they became alienated from the political system and sustained a weaker *illusio* towards politics as they saw themselves as different to those who appeared as competent political actors (Harrits, 2011). Symbolic violence meant that the hierarchy in the political field was cloaked by a faux-egalitarianism (Wacquant, 2005a; 2005b). Therefore, some of the UPs were inclined to believe that while someone like them did not have the ability to become involved in politics, it was because they did not have the skills to be capable political agents rather than due to the influence of structures (Laurison, 2015). However, the interviewees all displayed a good understanding of politics. Indeed, the UPs who were likely to demonstrate anxiety over their participation were usually those with high levels of political involvement. This suggests that it was their inferior field position which created this apprehension rather than any actual inherent incompetence. A circumstance that was concealed by symbolic violence in the political *field*.

Economic capital also exerted an influence over the likelihood of political participation. A very small number of the participants suggested that their lack of economic capital diminished the leisure time needed to cultivate the cultural capital required to foster political interest (Bourdieu, 1991). This occurred during the formative years when the family was unavailable to discuss politics or arose when an interviewee was unable to take an interest in politics due to the necessity of working long and anti-social hours. Indeed, one participant, Charles, mentioned how his insecure financial position continuously focused his objectives on securing more economic capital, distracting him from possible political engagement. However, even in these accounts, economic capital is a proxy for cultural capital as the participants inferior economic capital did not provide the leisure time to harvest the cultural capital required for political engagement.

Gender and ethnicity seemed to be less influential than class and access to resources when identifying the barriers to political participation. None of the BME participants interviewed believed that their ethnicity impacted their ability to become politically active, though some suggested that this demographic may hinder their ability to ascend to higher positions within political institutions. Three female interviewees did feel that their gender had affected their

ability to become political agents. They suggested that their opinions were not given the same weight as male's opinions and believed that they had to provide more evidence for their views than would be the case if they were male. However, 32 of the interviewees, both male and female, stated that their gender had no discernible impact on their ability to become politically active.

This chapter was primarily focused on meeting research aim 2 – which is to understand the processes and influences which create barriers to millennials' political engagement and participation. This chapter has demonstrated how barriers to participation have been erected to political participation and are more likely to be erected for those who are disadvantaged by their lack of resources. The barriers the thesis has highlighted in this chapter probably do not indicate the full range of barriers to political participation; a qualitative study can only provide limited information about the breadth of social phenomena. Nevertheless, the thesis has provided relevant information about the processes and influences which create barriers to participation. This validates the claim that young people are not a homogenous group which requires academics to delineate between the various journeys' youth make to become politically active. Resources and demographics have a significant impact on these pathways. Those with less resources often find it harder to find locations for political socialisation and encounter various obstacles to becoming active in the political sphere.

The importance of demographics to understanding rates of political participation evidences why the UP category is the defining element within the analytical framework adopted in this study. Those in the UP category were more likely to face barriers to their political participation. They were less likely to find sources that nurtured their political knowledge and interest, more likely to find politics overwhelming or believe that they were not suited to democratic engagement and would often feel marginalised in political conversations or activities compared to EPs or NEUPs. This was often linked to the UPs' disadvantaged socioeconomic position compared to the EPs and NEUPs. Therefore, the analytical model used in this thesis and the prominence provided to the experiences of UPs within it, has provided the thesis with a deeper understanding of the obstacles to political participation and how

these barriers are often discriminately felt by those who are disadvantaged. In the next chapter, we will review and evaluate methods which could overcome the barriers to political participation identified in this chapter.

Chapter 7: Overcoming barriers to political participation

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the thesis will critically review some of the most prominent methods suggested within the literature to overcome political disengagement and will focus on meeting research aim 3. This will include evaluating whether these suggestions will have an impact on the barriers to participation outlined in Chapter 6. Each section within this chapter will begin by outlining the interviewees' assessments of prominent solutions which aim to encourage young people's participation in formal politics. These insights from the interviewees will then be combined with evaluations from the literature to critically interrogate the suitability of various proposals to increase young people's political participation with a specific focus on how they would support disadvantaged social groups to become politically active. These solutions include electoral administrative reforms, such as introducing compulsory voting, lowering the voting age and changing the voting system used in British general elections. We will also discuss whether education could increase political engagement before we detail how the political system and politicians can smooth the passage to political participation. Thereafter, we will explore how political interest and efficacy can be increased for marginalised youths. In the conclusion, the thesis will outline a package of reforms which could support disadvantaged youths in overcoming barriers to political participation.

There are two important considerations to note before we begin this analysis. Firstly, the young people interviewed for this study are likely to be more politically engaged than the average millennial and are certainly more involved in political action than the disengaged and disadvantaged youth which the thesis seeks to encourage towards political participation. Moreover, the interviewees were unlikely to be well-versed in the different strengths and weaknesses of each solution discussed during the interviews. They are also unlikely to have significant knowledge of the various academic literature that investigates these topics. Therefore, the research participants' insights can only provide us with a partial understanding of how successful proposed solutions to political engagement could be in overcoming barriers to political participation. Therefore, the interviewees' comments on these proposals should be viewed as further evidence against which we can evaluate the suitability of solutions to political disengagement. They do not provide definitive explanations about how successful solutions to political disengagement could be when considered in isolation. To overcome the interviewees' lack of knowledge and limited perspective, this thesis has combined the interviewees' evaluations with assessments from the literature. This approach allowed the thesis to highlight and investigate millennials' perspectives on solutions to political disengagement while acknowledging some of the limitations to their views.

Secondly, it was anticipated before data collection that the interviewees' preferred solutions would be related to the analytical categories Unexpected Participant (UP), Expected Participant (EP), and Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participant (NEUP) created for the thesis' investigation. For example, it was supposed that the UPs would favour different solutions to political disengagement than the EPs as their life experiences and their journeys to becoming politically engaged were relatively distinct. As we shall see below, however, there was wide-spread agreement amongst the interviewees about the suitability of common solutions to political disengagement and when these opinions diverged, they did not seem to be related to the categories the research participants had been placed into for this study. From analysing the data, it did seem that more UPs considered that proposals designed to increase political interest more important than was the case for EPs and NEUPs, but this was not a particularly significant trend as a majority of the two latter categories also discussed the importance of increasing political interest.

7.2. Electoral administrative reforms

Each of the participants were asked whether administrative reforms to the electoral system would be likely to increase the participation of young people. They were specifically questioned about the adequacy of the First-Past-the-Post (FPP) voting system, compulsory voting and lowering the voting age. Compulsory voting and lowering the voting age were not introduced by the participants into the conversations and were only discussed when the interviewees were asked about whether their introduction would be positive or not. Their lack of prominence in the discussions suggest that these administrative reforms were not regarded as crucial issues for the interviewees. Indeed, most participants provided negative responses about the suggestion of introducing either modification to the electoral system or believed that focusing on technical alterations to the political system misinterpreted why large proportions of young people were politically disengaged. However, the FPP voting system was introduced by many of the interviewees before they were asked to discuss it, which suggests that the voting system is an important issue for many millennials. These issues are considered in more detail in the sections 7.2.1 to 7.2.3.

7.2.1 Administrative reforms: FFP voting system

The majority of the interviewees were disappointed with the FPP system. Those who were in constituencies dominated by one party spoke about the disincentives this voting system provided. They believed that they received less attention from politicians because political representatives avoided campaigning in safe seats. They were also critical that the FPP voting system penalised small parties. Quite a few of the interviewees discussed the fact that UKIP received 13 percent of all votes cast in the 2015 General Election but gained only one MP. Moreover, a sizeable minority of participants suggested that the current voting system encouraged people to not vote, as unless they voted for one of the dominant political parties their vote would be meaningless. Indeed, some interviewees provided examples that they knew people who did not vote for this reason. Richard's remarks encapsulate this view:

> ‘It is not very representative, and it disillusions some people. I have some friends who don't vote because it is just wasting their vote because it's definitely going to go one way’ (Richard, NEUP).

For these interviewees, using some form of Proportional Representation (PR) was a preferred method for deciding the outcome of elections.

A small minority of participants were open to PR but were concerned about the loss of contact with local MPs and the increased likelihood of coalitions. These concerns were shared by the slightly larger minority who were opposed to PR voting. As Philip explains:

> ‘I do believe in strong government. I do like the aspect of having a local connection with your MP; there's that one person you can go to’.
>
> ‘I do think there's an argument for PR, but I'm not particularly convinced by it’ (Philip, EP).

Many who favoured keeping the FPP system acknowledged its deficiencies but preferred the increased possibility of majority governments that the current system provides rather than an increased likelihood of coalitions which PR would be more likely to encourage. Indeed, even among the participants who were believed that PR was an inherently fairer and better system there was disagreement about whether changing to PR would encourage many more young people to vote. As Rachel explains:

> ‘I’m not sure the voting system really has an influence on whether [young people] vote or not’ (Rachel, NEUPs).

For those who doubted adopting PR would increase youth turnout, there were more fundamental issues which disconnected young people from politics, such as the lack of stimulation encouraging young people to become interested in politics.

Given the wide-spread agreement among the interviewees that PR is a preferable system, it is perhaps surprising that so little of the literature on youth political disengagement discusses the effects of FPP on youth turnout. This may be because it is unknown what effects such a change would have on youth political participation and, when surveyed, young people have been relatively unenthusiastic about modifying the voting system (Electoral Commission,

2002). Whether PR would benefit younger voters is questionable. Berry (2012) suggests that as young people are currently concentrated in marginal seats, it is doubtful whether many additional youth votes would become more significant under PR. In other words, due to the high concentration of youth in marginal seats, dispensing with the FPP voting system is likely to reduce young people' political power as they are currently influential in key constituencies targeted by those parties wishing to govern. Accordingly, not many more youth voters would have increased contact with their local MPs because their political power would be reduced in a PR voting system.

PR systems do seem to encourage greater turnout amongst all age groups (Blais and Aarts, 2006). Fischer et al (2008) found that under plurality systems (which includes FPP), those with an existing low motivation to vote find that plurality systems provide further disincentives to vote because their participation may not achieve any results. Thus, marginalised social groups are more likely to vote under PR systems. Yet, Pardos-Prado et al's (2014) research provided contrary findings. Their investigation suggests that PR boosts the participation of the better educated or politically engaged, while diminishing the participation of those with fewer educational qualifications or those who are politically disengaged. They suggest that the better educated and politically engaged individuals grasp the incentives PR systems provide. Whereas the increased complexity of PR systems adds further obstacles to political comprehension among the politically disengaged and those with lower educational levels.

While moving to PR was popular with the interviewees, it is debatable whether it would have any influence on youth turnout. Young people have previously been sceptical about whether they would be more likely to vote if a proportional system was adopted. Furthermore, it is possible that because they are politically engaged, the interviewees are motivated by the incentive PR produces which would not be obvious to those who are disengaged. It is also conceivable that a move to PR would weaken young people's power within UK elections as their high concentration in marginal seats currently leads to more attention from political parties. Moving to PR may also damage the likelihood of voting amongst those with lower educational qualifications and those already politically disengaged. If this is true, then moves

to PR would increase the democratic deficit between marginalised groups and those who are older, with better qualifications and occupy the higher classes.

7.2.2 Administrative reforms: lowering the voting age

On the whole, the interviewees did not believe that lowering the voting age would increase youth turnout at elections. They suggested that those who advocated technical reforms of the electoral system were missing the root causes for political passivity. Quite a few participants believed that changing to some form of PR would boost turnout rates among millennials, but only a small minority believed that lowering the voting age to 16 would enhance political participation. For example, Stephen believed that 16 year olds are as likely as older citizens to have an interest in politics and George believed that providing younger people with the responsibility of voting would increase their interest in politics:

> ‘My little brother is 16. He's very involved in politics, but he can't vote. I think there's a lot of 16 and 17 year olds who have lots of opinions about politics and they have more interest than a lot of 21 year olds, 22 year olds but they just can't vote. I think I'd be in favour of lowering the voting age’ (Stephen, NEUPs).

> ‘I think yes, it would increase interest because if you're 16 you take more interest and you feel like your vote matters and you can change what's going to happen in the country’ (George, EP).

A larger minority of interviewees were open to the idea of lowering the voting age, but they believed that it would not be a panacea for increasing turnout. They argued that millennials had been turned-off politics by the political system. For most of those participants, lowering the voting age would not solve these issues and would not create greater interest in institutional politics. Elizabeth’s views were representative of this position:

> ‘I don't think lowering the voting age is as important as getting people involved in it, trying to educate people about politics’ (Elizabeth, UP).

For the majority of the interviewees lowering the voting age would lead to large swathes of young people who are not interested in politics making uninformed decisions. As Anne explains:

> ‘I don't want it. Not until we get a good enough political education about the [political] system’
>
> ‘There is a risk of loads more people wasting votes’ (Anne, EP).

What seemed clear from the interviewees’ responses was that they believed that lowering the voting age would only make a marginal difference to political engagement and participation.

It has been suggested that reducing the age one has to be before they can vote alongside other reforms would increase youth political participation (Henn and Oldfield, 2016; Mycock and Tonge, 2014; Stoker, 2014). Lowering the voting age may provide evidence to young people that their views are valued, encouraging them to participate (Henn and Oldfield, 2016). Lowering the voting age might also lead young people to regard voting as important at younger age, leading to stronger political interest during the key formative years of political socialisation. Thus, the habit of voting could be enacted at an earlier age (Franklin, 2004; Mycock and Tonge, 2014). Berry (2012) agrees that lowering the voting age may encourage more young people to vote, but his research demonstrates that it would have a negligible influence on the voting power of youth as a bloc. The age of the median voter would not be reduced by a significant amount under any of his calculations, so young people may still be ignored by the political system.

While lowering the voting age is popular among many academics and sections of the political class (Berry, 2012), it was less popular with our interviewees. Some were certainly in favour, but many who were inclined to agree with this proposal did not see it as a solution to increase youth participation and a minority were against this proposal. The literature makes valid assessments about how this might improve young people’s political participation yet lowering

the voting age does not tackle the fundamental reasons youth are turned off politics. However, some academics have recognised this and have suggested it will only be successful if combined with other efforts to reform the political system.

7.2.3 Administrative reforms: compulsory voting

The suggestion that compulsory voting would be a positive method for increasing participation was met with near universal condemnation from the participants. The interviewees agreed that it would lead to higher levels of participation but were sceptical that it would increase engagement. Some discussed the incompatibility of democracy and coerced involvement, suggesting that it was too great an imposition on personal liberty. Some were also concerned that those who were forced to participate but did not engage with politics would be likely to replicate the voting preferences of friends and family as they had not engaged with politics to form their own opinion. Moreover, many participants stressed that compulsory voting would not tackle the underlying issues that cause political abstention. The comments from Alexander and Edward encapsulate these views:

> 'I think people should have the choice to vote. I strongly believe that everyone should vote, I don't think everyone should be made to vote. There's a difference you know. Everyone should have the option. Everyone shouldn't be sanctioned if they don't. This is a matter of choice. If you start sanctioning people for not voting and that's almost going all the way around, getting into bastard territory. No, I think it'd increase turnout but not for the right reasons, and I think it would embitter a lot of people towards the whole process' (Alexander, NEUPs).

> 'If large a chunk of people are making an uneducated vote, that could be detrimental to the country in a different way because obviously people would just latch on to who their parents voted for or what their friends vote for' (Edward, UP).

The hostility which the politically engaged interviewees displayed towards compulsory voting suggests that disengaged youth may be even less receptive to the idea.

The suggestion to introduce compulsory voting is founded upon valid reasoning. It has been argued that creating a mandatory voting system would increase youth turnout and decrease the power older cohorts have over the political system (Birch and Lodge, 2015). It would also reduce the voting inequality across other variables, such as education and class (Birch et al, 2013; Stockemer and Scruggs, 2012). Birch and Lodge (2015), who recommend the introduction of compulsory voting alongside other reforms encouraging youth participation, suggest that voting should be mandatory for first-time voters. They argue that it would empower youth because political elites would be forced to consider young people's views. Furthermore, as voting is habitual (Cutts et al, 2009; Dinas, 2012), insisting that first-time voters attend the polling station will instil the habit of voting, leading to increased participation amongst adults as they grow older (Birch and Lodge, 2015). Much of the literature shares the antipathy the interviewees hold towards compulsory voting, however. Primarily, this is founded upon the suggestion that such a move does not treat the underlying reasons for youth disengagement (Henn and Foard, 2014c; Electoral Commission, 2002). Indeed, Henn and Oldfield's (2016) research demonstrates that disengaged young people are significantly opposed to compulsory voting. Saunders (2010) has also argued that compulsory voting impinges on individual liberty meaning such a reform actually decreases democracy rather than increases it. Thus, introducing mandatory voting laws could exacerbate existing political resentment and disengagement rather than solving it.

While the reasoning behind compulsory voting contains merit – particularly reducing voting inequality between dominant and dominated social groups – its detractors make persuasive arguments against it. Compelling young people to vote does not solve the wide-spread disenchantment many feel about politics and suggests that it is young people, not the political system, that requires reform (Henn and Foard, 2014c). Judging by the responses of the interviewees, the literature opposed to compulsory voting is correct. Such a move misses the causes driving youth political disengagement. Moreover, if those who are engaged in politics feel trepidation about mandatory voting, then it seems logical to suspect that the disengaged would be even more resistant to its implementation.

7.3 Citizenship education

Increasing political participation and interest through education at secondary schools received nearly uniform endorsement by the interviewees. As we discussed in 6.2.3, most had discussed how the education they received about politics at school was deficient. But if the quality and quantity of political education were to be improved, then they believed that youth disengagement could be remedied by increasing young people's exposure to politics at a younger age. Henry's comments are indicative of this view:

> 'Maybe just introduce politics at school, make it interesting in school et cetera. Just introduce them to politics at a younger age, encourage discussion because I think that it is all a big snowball effect. It starts off, then friends discuss it at a younger age, and everyone is influenced by it and become more interested in politics' (Henry, UP).

The participants believed that if political socialisation was not prevalent at home, then schools would be the best location to introduce young people to politics. As Jane explains:

> 'I don't want to put any more pressure on schools because they have a lot going on but if you don't have somebody grounding you in [political] knowledge at home, you need to get it from somewhere else' (Jane, NEUP).

For those interviewees recommending increased citizenship education at schools, these lessons need to galvanise the belief among students that political engagement is relevant to their lives in an interesting and stimulating manner. They were keen to point out that telling young people they should vote would be counter-productive. This suggests that if young people were educated about why voting is important and its relevance to them, then non-engaged youth would be more likely to positively respond to education about politics.

Increasing and improving citizenship education has been a central component in proposals seeking to increase political disengagement amongst young people (House of Lords, 2018; Mycock and Tonge, 2014; QCA, 2002; YCC, 2009). Citizenship education provides political knowledge to students, but it also offers the opportunity for students to hone their political knowledge and improve their internal political efficacy through interactions with others (Kisby

and Sloam, 2012; Whiteley, 2014). Discussions about politics in the class room (Eichhorn, 2018) and extra-curricular politically-aligned activities in educational establishments (Print, 2007), such as mock elections, can also improve political interest.

However, there are limits to the effect citizenship education can have on increasing political participation. Educational institutes only provide marginal levels of political socialisation (Quintelier, 2015). They also seem to reproduce existing social hierarchies (Nieuwelink et al, 2019; Beaumont, 2011). Those with a low SES status are unlikely to benefit from citizenship classes (van Deth et al, 2011) and, due to the voluntary nature of extra-curricular political activities, only those with high resources and an existing interest in politics will benefit from democratic events in schools (Hoskins et al, 2017). While evidence suggests that citizenship classes in the UK have, at best, been only partially successful at improving political engagement amongst students (Keating and Janmaat, 2016; Whiteley, 2014).

The limited success of citizenship classes in the UK may be down to the incorrect priorities within political education, however. Citizenship education has been constructed around neoliberal notions of success and competitive advantages when seeking employment rather than emphasising democratic values such as cooperation and participation (Kisby, 2017). As Kisby (2017: 17) explains, '[i]t is hard to avoid the conclusion that for various British politicians, and others, the idea is not that young people should learn how to bring about social and political change, but rather that they should be compliant.' The incorrect philosophy underpinning citizenship classes has been compounded by the uneven and voluntary delivery of political education in schools due to changes in government policy (Whiteley, 2014; House of Lords, 2018), a lack of specialist teachers (Keating and Kerr, 2013) and uninspiring teaching methods (Kisby and Sloam, 2009). Thus, citizenship education may have been hitherto unsuccessful due to the delivery and objectives of these classes.

The responses of the interviewees reflect much of the literature which describes the reality and potential of citizenship education. A large majority of interviewees stated that their citizenship education had been poorly organised and delivered. For example, Charles stated:

> 'I don't think you are really taught it that well in school. Politics is definitely an afterthought' (Charles, UP).

Yet, most of the interviewees' believed that there was a large amount of potential within citizenship education to increase youth political engagement. David's response encapsulates this belief:

> 'I think schools could be the best place to get people in politics. Though it needs to be done in the right way' (David, NEUP).

Nevertheless, the reach of educational establishments is limited and is not as effective at political socialisation as families and peers (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015; Quintelier, 2015). It may also not remove or reduce barriers to political participation for the social groups who are most in need of political stimulation. Hierarchies before entering educational systems are reflected after sustained attendance, so those who will benefit from citizenship education are those with higher resources and who are already inclined towards political participation. This point was mentioned by George:

> 'I think [citizenship education] was for the people who were politically charged already, not for people who didn't really take any interest. It helped people who were converted already. It helped them take even more of an interest, not convert [politically disengaged] people' (George, EP).

The transmission of cultural capital from parents to their offspring means that those who are likely to be successful within school and enjoy reciprocal exchanges with teachers are those with high cultural resources (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Therefore, citizenship education will only be successful at encouraging political engagement if it is able to create an inclusive and egalitarian environment for learning politics. Otherwise it may serve to increase inequality of political engagement between dominant and dominated social groups.

7.4 Political interest, knowledge and efficacy

For the majority of the participants, creating an interest in politics amongst youth was perhaps the most important consideration when attempting to encourage young people to participate in politics. This seemed a more crucial undertaking amongst the UPs because, as discussed in the previous chapter, they were less likely to be able to access sources which galvanised an interest in politics. Nevertheless, the importance of creating political interest was mentioned by the majority of EPs and NEUPs too. Political interest is a precursor to political knowledge and efficacy (Russo and Stattin, 2017), features which are all required for future political participation (Eckstein et al, 2012). This is particularly important for disadvantaged young people as they are less likely to traverse environments where political interest is stimulated (Diemer, 2012; Johnstonbaugh, 2018; Persson, 2015). Accordingly, creating interest in politics among young people is required if political participation is to become more widespread among marginalised youths. Elizabeth's and Matilda's comments encapsulate this position:

> 'I think that's the fundamental thing behind it, it's about getting young people interested in [politics]' (Elizabeth, UP).

> 'I think it's striking someone's interest in the first place. If you can get interested in politics, you will stay interested in politics for a while' (Matilda, NEUP).

This requires us to examine how we create the political interest that stimulates political participation, and how we build upon this to create political knowledge and efficacy.

The importance of creating political interest, knowledge and efficacy is why a large amount of academics and the interviewees in this study have positioned civic education as crucial to alleviating young people's political disenchantment. It is conduit of political socialisation that can be most readily accessed by the state. However, there are manifest issues with solely relying on educational establishments to increase youth political participation. As we discussed in 7.3, schools only have a limited influence on political socialisation and may privilege affluent children over those with few resources to call upon. We also outlined that

if the delivery and aims of citizenship education were organised more effectively it would likely negate the undesirable aspects of citizenship education.

Nevertheless, if we recognise that political socialisation is a key feature of increasing political participation, then we should explore how other socialisation conduits can be utilised to improve youth political participation (Keating and Janmaat, 2016). As parents may be the primary socialisation agents (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015), more attention should be focused on creating political interests among adults. The disenchantment about politics is not restricted to young people, older cohorts have become increasingly disillusioned with the political system (Hay, 2007; Hansard, 2019). If more adults are interested in politics, it is likely that this will filter down to their children (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). Moreover, having parents who are politically engaged will increase the political knowledge and the efficacy of their offspring (Jennings et al, 2009; Lauglo, 2011). It is clear that finding ways to increase political socialisation via the family would be difficult to implement which may be why it is rarely touched upon in the literature (Keating and Janmaat, 2016). Governments are understandably cautious about intruding on the private sphere and compelling adults to be interested in politics or forcing them to teach their children to be interested in politics would likely be counter-productive, if not impossible. Both adults and children need to see political participation as a desirable pursuit or any reforms to increase political activities are likely to be unsuccessful – hence, why compulsory voting is such a problematic suggestion. However, it is important to stress that maximising the potential locations of political socialisation is important to overcoming young people's political disengagement – and if parents are the main source of political socialisation, then developing strategies to increase political engagement across all cohorts is of paramount importance.

We should also remember the experiences that four of the interviewees recounted in 6.2.4. Because they did not receive much socialisation from their family, they required voluntary groups, political parties, youth clubs and improved social networks to stimulate their political interest. Therefore, increasing the opportunities for youth to access these organisations or increase their social networks may lead to increased political engagement amongst youth.

The austerity enacted since 2010 in the UK has led to significant cuts of youth services (YMCA, 2018). This has diminished the locations available to increase political interest, knowledge and efficacy among youth outside of the family and school. Reversing these cuts and spending more on youth services would certainly offer more opportunities for young people to become aware of political issues and how political participation could benefit them.

Increasing political interest, knowledge and efficacy are perhaps the most important aspects for maximising youth political participation. It was certainly the most prominent reason provided by the interviewees and gains support from large swathes of the literature discussed above. It also seemed the most important factor when the journeys to political participation of the UPs, NEUPs and EPs were compared. It was noticeable that the UPs had a deficit of these attributes and this seemed to be the largest barrier to their future political participation. Consequently, efforts to increase these political skills are required if disadvantaged groups are to be encouraged towards political participation. Therefore, maximising the potential of political socialisation conduits and increasing the opportunity for youth to access these locations should be one of the primary aims of any strategy seeking to encourage young people to engage with, and participate in, politics.

7.5 Politicians and the political system

The interviewees also suggested that the political system and politicians needed to adapt to make political participation more appealing to young people. Many of the interviewees stated that more attempts to involve youth in politics would lead to an increase in youth participation. Matilda's comments summarise this view:

> 'If young people were allowed to contribute towards politics, then that would help [improve political participation].'
>
> 'I think there should just be a section [in parliament] for young people so they can bring their issues forward' (Matilda, NEUPs).

A minority believed that currently policies tended to favour older groups, which meant young people felt ignored in political discussions and did not regard political participation as a viable means to bring positive change to their lives. As Joan explains:

> 'A lot of politics is targeted at older people. I think it is one of those things where if more older people vote, decisions and politics are directed towards them.'
>
> 'It does give across the message that politics is not for young people' (Joan, EP).

Therefore, if the voices of young people were represented in political discussions, it would go some way to addressing the disconnect between youth and politics. Consequently, young people may regard politics as more relevant to them because other young people were prominent contributors to political narratives. It was felt that there would also be more youth-centred policies as young people's greater presence in political discussions would likely increase attention about the issues that contemporary youth face.

As we discussed in 5.4, a large proportion of the interviewees - who were predominantly UPs - were dissatisfied with the behaviour of politicians. MPs were subject to a significant degree of criticism because they were seen as remote, untrustworthy and prone to maximising their own advantage to the detriment of the wider public. Local politicians were more positively regarded by the interviewees because they believed that local representatives were accessible and open to conversations with those they represent. Therefore, MPs should try and make themselves more available to young people. For some of the interviewees, this meant politicians need to engage with young people. As Philip states:

> 'In my opinion, politicians are not going out on a limb and talking to young people on the issues. They are not really appealing to them' (Philip, EP).

Recent efforts by politicians to communicate with the public via social media were discussed in positive terms by the interviewees. However, some participants believed that politicians should make more effort to engage with young people and youth groups through face-to-face contact. These participants were concerned that only those who were already politically engaged would communicate via social media. If politicians made direct contact with youth-

groups and young people, then they would be more likely to reach those who were not yet politically active.

As the literature demonstrates, young people feel ignored by the political system (Cammaerts et al, 2014; Henn and Foard, 2014a). It suggests that young people's political preferences have transformed but the political system has failed to incorporate these new values and habits into how politics is practised (Andersson, 2017; Dalton, 2008; McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013). Therefore, governments should support grassroot political participation (Manning, 2013) via school councils, youth clubs and youth councils (Sloam, 2007). Overhauling and decentralising the political system to give a voice to young people within political party structures (Mycock and Tonge, 2014; Rainsford, 2014) and policy creation (Stoker, 2014), while forming a body to monitor the impact of these policies (YCC, 2009), would also promote youth participation. However, if these reforms are tokenistic and do not provide youth with real power to shape political polices, they will not decrease political disenchantment (Matthews and Limb, 2003). If these measures are instead designed to encourage democratic norms and allow young people to fulfil their desire for active citizenship, then they can help mend the divide between youth and politics. It is likely that policies and government planning would become more youth-centred. Accordingly, youth would feel valued as political agents, encouraging them to interact with political institutions.

Furthermore, youth are repelled from political participation by their feelings towards politicians. Young people feel that politicians are inaccessible (Bastedo, 2015), fail to communicate in terms that they understand (Mycock and Tonge, 2014), are ignorant of youth issues and prioritise their own self-interest rather than the public good (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Hence, direct communication between politicians and young people needs to be encouraged and enacted by our political representatives. This could be enacted via social media, via party structures or visits to schools (Mycock and Tonge, 2012; Kisby and Sloam, 2012; Sloam, 2007). Such reforms may contribute towards youth reconsidering the value of democratic participation. Young people want to feel respected and have the issues that affect them given the same consideration as other groups (Cammaerts et al, 2014). If politicians can

form more meaningful interactions with young people and provide evidence that they are truly listening to their viewpoints, then youth might begin to believe that political participation is a realistic and worthwhile activity for creating change in their lives.

Creating a more youth-centred approach to political participation is both popular within the literature and amongst the majority of the interviewees. The political system appears to prioritise other age groups and politicians seem to eschew contact with young people. Thus, youth who feel ignored by the political system respond by ignoring politics. As we discussed in Chapter 5, many of the interviewees spoke positively about the direct communication offered by Jeremy Corbyn and the policies which tackled youth issues within the Labour manifesto during the 2017 General Election. As the thesis outlined in 1.5 above, there was surge in youth interest in politics during the 2017 election. Moreover, many of the interviewees confirmed that their friends had been encouraged to engage with politics because it seemed relevant to their lives and they felt that their participation could make a difference. These findings suggest that reforms to the political system and improving communication between young people and politicians could make a significant difference to young people's political engagement and participation. Young people are ready to engage with politics and will do so if they are allowed a voice within political discussions and feel their opinion is given consideration by the political system and politicians.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the thesis has evaluated a range of techniques which may overcome barriers to political participation and help to increase youth political activity. This assessment has been drawn from a combination of the literature and discussions with the research participants. It has demonstrated that administrative reforms of the political system may not tackle the root causes of youth political disengagement and possibly exacerbate the disenchantment young people feel towards politics or increase the likelihood that disadvantaged youth will not become politically active. For the interviewees, creating an interest in politics among youth and reforming the political system to include youth voices seem the most important factors

to consider when overcoming barriers to participation. Many of the interviewees suggested that citizenship education could stimulate an interest in politics among those who were disengaged. However, it was noted that this may benefit those who are already inclined towards political action rather than galvanising political interest for those who politically passive. Some of the interviewees suggested that politicians needed to make more effort to engage with young people and that social policies should be more youth-centred. Moreover, a small majority of the participants believed that young people should be included in the creation of policies. These changes, according to the interviewees, may lead to youth viewing politics as more relevant to their lives and believing that they can influence the political process.

This chapter began with the objective of identifying methods to overcome the barriers to political engagement and participation. This has been partially met through the evaluations conducted in this chapter. However, in the conclusion the thesis will make recommendations which may overcome some of the barriers to political participation which will provide more detail on how solutions to barriers to political participation can delivered. These recommendations have been developed from the discussions from this chapter, but also the insights provided in Chapter 6 which highlighted the difficulties those with access to relatively few resources encounter when attempting to engage with politics.

Conclusion

Introduction

The aims of this thesis sought to discover what we can learn about youth political engagement and participation from those active in politics, whether this method can help us understand the barriers to political participation and identify how we can overcome those barriers to participation. The first part of the conclusion will evaluate how effectively those research aims were met and will provide some recommendations about how to overcome barriers to political participation. The second part of the conclusion will outline the original contributions to knowledge this thesis has provided and discuss the limitations of the research this thesis conducted.

Assessing the research aims

Research aim 1: Explore what the politically engaged can explain about young people's political engagement and participation

This study has been created with the intention of understanding if and how the politically active could shed light on political participation and, in particular, the experiences of the politically disengaged. Implicit within the first research aim are three different objectives. We will discuss each of these three objectives in turn and detail if and how they have been met.

Firstly, as the analytical framework of using politically active research participants to expand our understanding of political participation is an original approach, we should ask is this method effective at providing insightful data about political participation? The results from each of the data analysis chapters confirm that this is a useful approach. It has allowed us to evaluate findings from the literature, investigate the relationship between the politically engaged and politicians and, as we will discuss in the next section, assess the differential journeys the dominant and dominated experience when becoming political actors.

Secondly, if this approach can provide useful and relevant information, what information does it tell us? The answer to this question is a significant amount. Some of this information relates to barriers to political participation and how to overcome these barriers, so will be discussed alongside those research aims below. Before those discussions, we will outline some further data this approach has provided.

One of the insights gained through this approach concerned the relevance of local politics to millennials and their motivations to become politically active. The interviewees were all active in politics, and while some only voted, the majority engaged with a vast array of political activities from political party membership and attending politically-aligned conferences to demonstrating and signing petitions. It was quite surprising, then, that the majority of the interviewees were motivated to vote by feelings of duty and eschewed local politics. In Chapter 2 we outlined theories suggesting that increasing amounts of young people demonstrated new political participatory norms (Dalton, 2008). Instead of being motivated by a sense of duty, according to Dalton's model, this segment of young people preferred to be active within the political process which meant they pursued non-institutional forms of politics instead of engaging with politics though traditional channels. This claim from Dalton found little support in this thesis. While many of the interviewees engaged in alternative political activities, most of them were still motivated by a sense of duty. Similarly, in Chapter 1 we recounted the suggestion that the distant and centralised organisation of political parties was viewed negatively by young people, so they preferred localised political participation (Sloam, 2007). Again, this suggestion does not correspond with the interviewees' views. Many did not engage with local politics, citing reasons such as lack of relevance, little peer-discussion and a dearth of relevant information.

The interviewees are engaged with formal politics so this may explain why their experiences are at odds with suggestions from the literature, but, as we shall outline below, many displayed critical attitudes towards the political system. As many of the participants have

concerns about the political system and many were involved in alternative political action, it would be expected - if these theories are correct - that feelings of duty would not be the prime motivation to engage with politics, while more of the interviewees would be engaged with local politics. As this was not the case, these theories may need more scrutiny to test their applicability to youth political participation in future research.

In Chapter 2, we detailed why young people felt alienated from the political system. One of the prime reasons for their alienation was that they distrusted politicians and believed that our representatives were motivated by self-advancement instead of a belief in improving society (Bastedo, 2015; Henn and Foard, 2014a). A slim majority of the interviewees displayed similar sentiments about politicians and believed that the behaviour of politicians led to disengagement amongst some people. A large minority believed that this was an unfair characterisation of politicians and while they suggested that some politicians were untrustworthy it would be prejudicial to stereotype every politician in the same way. We should also note that a majority of the interviewees spoke positively about the impact Jeremy Corbyn had on youth political engagement. It suggests that youth are willing to trust politicians if they believe politicians are willing to engage with young people's opinions (Cammaerts et al, 2014).

Two important insights arose from these discussions with the interviewees. Firstly, it was surprising that such a significant proportion of politically engaged individuals were so critical of politicians. It may be expected that those who participate in formal political action would hold higher opinions of their political representatives. This should be concerning to politicians as they are seen as a hinderance to, rather than facilitators of, the public good. Secondly, the Unexpected Participants (UPs) were more likely to provide negative accounts of politicians. As we discussed in 5.4, this may have occurred because the Expected Participants (EPs) and politicians share the same investment (*illusio*) in the norms (*doxa*) of the political sphere due to their respective high access to cultural forms of symbolic capital. Conversely, the UPs were possibly more critical of politicians because their lack of shared objectives and capital created the impression that their representatives were not working in their interests, and they

perceived that politicians often overlooked the plight of disadvantaged groups (Harrits, 2011; 2013).

During the literature review, the thesis provided extensive analysis of whether young people who are politically passive could be described as apathetic (Fox, 2015; Phelps, 2012) or alienated (Henn and Foard, 2014a; McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013) from politics. The findings from the discussions with the interviewees lent partial support to the claim that young people are alienated from the political system. Many of the interviewees did not engage with local politics because it did not feel relevant to them or participation in local politics did not yield any positive changes in their lives. If a group of politically engaged individuals explained their non-participation in local politics in these terms, it seems that this may be a reasonable explanation for why other millennials do not partake in general elections.

Furthermore, many of the interviewees, particularly the UPs, also identified reasons which makes political participation seem an undesirable endeavour. Reflecting examples provided by the literature surrounding youth alienation, the interviewees noted that politics was often couched in esoteric language and complex arrangements (Henn and Foard, 2014a), that they did not feel optimistic about their ability to influence the political system (Chareka and Sears, 2006) and felt excluded from political discussions (Almlund, 2018). A minority of the interviewees also provided examples about friends who were interested in the decisions that influence their lives, but for a variety of reasons, did not see political participation as an act which would engender change and consequently avoided formal political action. These insights suggest that claiming all youth who do not vote are apathetic about politics is misguided. The data in this study seems to support the claim that some youth find aspects of politics unappealing and that they subsequently choose not to engage with the political system when they believe that their participation is irrelevant.

In this study, we have interrogated the validity of theories which suggest that young people are alienated from politics, what motivates the interviewees to participate in politics and how

engaged youths feel towards politicians. Furthermore, as will be discussed in relation to the other two research aims, we have been able to explain how barriers to participation are erected, how some have overcome these barriers and strategies for improving youth political participation. Due to the research aims, this study has been focused on specific aspects of political activity. Future research could expand what areas are investigated through the lens of engaged political agents. However, this thesis has provided rich data and relevant information which tells us more about millennials' political participation.

The third question which the first research aim sought to answer was, what can we learn about the politically disengaged from those who are active in politics? In the next two sections we will discuss this in detail. Nevertheless, as Chapters 6 and 7 have already illustrated, we can learn a significant amount about the politically passive from the insights provided by the politically active.

Research aim 2: Understand the processes and influences which create barriers to millennials' political engagement and participation

In Chapter 3 we examined and evaluated how a variety of social groups are less likely to be involved in politics. These are groups who are typically marginalised in other social *fields*, such as the working-class, the less educated and females. The literature review also highlighted that class and access to resources was perhaps the most important factor within understanding how structures influence political participation. For example, while those who have attended higher education are more likely to engage with politics than those who have not attended higher education, it may be that education is acting as a proxy for affluence and class. This is because those who are likely to attend university are also more likely to be drawn from the middle and upper classes. Across each of the social groups analysed in Chapter 3, similar results were found; wealth and class seemed to stratify political engagement and participation within those social groups. Accordingly, the thesis evaluated class as the most important variable when examining barriers to disengagement, though interviewees were specifically asked about the other variables, too. The findings from the interviews concurred

with the results from the literature, nevertheless, suggesting that class was the most prominent barrier to participation.

As detailed in 3.3, the formative years are important for nurturing political interest, knowledge and efficacy (Duke et al, 2009; Eckstein et al, 2012) and those who cannot access political socialisation conduits face barriers to becoming politically active later in life (Russo and Stattin, 2017). The family, peers, educational establishments, the media and civic and voluntary organisations all produce political socialisation (Quintelier, 2015), but the family is likely to be the primary conduit for encouraging future political engagement and participation (Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2015; Šerek and Umemura, 2015).

The interviewees' responses seemed to support the notion that the family was the most important conduit for accessing interest in politics, though some also discussed how peers and educational institutes provided foundations for their later political activity. The family environment, and parents in particular, contributed to stimulating an interest in politics. Conversations between family members and the interviewee, witnessing a parent engaging in a political activity and watching or listening to politically-aligned media sources were all highlighted as creating the political interest and knowledge necessary for later political engagement. This location also provided the interviewee with the space to test their political knowledge and deliberate about political matters, which furnished the interviewees with the political efficacy to feel confident in political interactions with others (Ekström, 2016).

Peer groups either supplemented or, in a few cases, fulfilled the same aspects of political socialisation as the family. Educational establishments were less influential than peers or the family in producing political socialisation amongst the interviewees. A small minority suggested that lessons or activities provided the spark for their political engagement, though most interviewees suggested that their citizenship lessons were poorly constructed and were not an important factor in their political socialisation.

Access to political socialisation was not equally distributed amongst the interviewees, however, and was less accessible to the UPs because of their restricted access to resources. As the literature suggested, the cultural capital gained from affluent families provides their offspring with a greater inclination to engage with politics (Johnstonbaugh, 2018; Ødegård and Berglund, 2008) and feel more confident when they do so (Diemer, 2012; Persson, 2015). Conversely, those from families with less resources are predisposed to evaluate political participation as a pursuit to be avoided (Condon and Holleque, 2013). For example, Emily felt that the lack of political socialisation she received at home stunted her confidence in the political sphere. She believed her parent's lack of education meant they were unable to impart the knowledge about the political system required to develop the self-belief to be a political actor. Moreover, the lack of financial resources available to her family meant she was unable to develop her political knowledge. Four of the UPs, who all discussed their disadvantaged financial situations, also explained how they did not receive political socialisation from the family, which meant that their political socialisation was drawn from other social networks. Barriers had been erected to these participants' potential political engagement as they did not gain primary political socialisation from the family, nor did they receive it from the peers or educational establishments. These barriers were compounded by experiences which inclined them away from political participation. For example, Victoria was labelled a troublemaker for organising demonstrations at her school, her curiosity was stifled by teachers and parents. Meanwhile, youth clubs, which may have guided her towards political engagement, had been closed.

Access to resources also exerted an influence on the interviewees' journey to political participation in other forms. Though only discussed by two interviewees, their insights example how economic capital impact on the leisure time required to become a political agent. Due to his mum's irregular working hours, Mark rarely had the opportunity to experience political socialisation. Likewise, Charles felt that his inclination for political engagement was reduced as he worked irregular hours and the little spare time permitted to him was devoted to considering how to enhance his income.

Cultural and economic distinctions created external and internal barriers for the UPs, too. They felt a disconnect between themselves and politicians as it appeared to some of the interviewees that their political representatives existed in a different world marked by privilege and a lack of empathy. When the UPs entered into political conversations or attended political events, they were conscious of their inferior cultural capital and felt anxiety about their participation. Indeed, they felt that they were judged by others with higher symbolic capital and were marginalised in political interactions because of these distinctions. This shaped a *habitus* which directed them towards political passivity as they did not believe that somebody like them had the skills or aptitude to be a competent political actor.

This anxiety was a notable feature amongst the UPs during discussions of the complexity of politics and whether they could influence the political system. As the literature review detailed, the complexity of politics contributed towards the feeling of alienation amongst some young people (Henn and Foard, 2014a). Many of the UPs did not feel entitled to voice their political preferences and the complexity of politics made them feel that they had nothing to contribute to political conversations, suggesting that the complexity of politics predominantly disadvantages marginalised social groups (Laurison, 2015). Some of the UPs stated that they did not have the self-perceived knowledge to understand politics, while some also felt that the lack of clarity from politicians discouraged political engagement. They negatively contrasted themselves to others who could grasp the intricacies of politics - which likely resulted from the dominant's superior cultural capital. Consequently, the UPs were inclined towards political disengagement as their *habitus* shaped their belief that they were not capable political agents. This was similar to how some of the UPs spoke about their perceived ability to influence the political system. They did not feel that their concerns merited attention and they saw themselves as isolated individuals who lacked the power to bring change through the political system. Conversely, the EPs were more likely to display a confidence that someone like them could influence politics. They believed that they would be listened to by the political system and felt assured that they could galvanise others to support them if they intended to enact change via democratic mechanisms.

Gender and ethnicity had less impact on potential political participation according to the interviewees in this study. No interviewee from an ethnic minority background believed that their race or ethnicity had created barriers to their political participation. However, two of the BME interviewees did discuss how they believed that ethnicity would negatively affect their chances of ascending to higher roles within political parties or government. A large majority of the females and all the males interviewed stated that their gender did not create barriers to political participation. Only three of the female interviewees believed that their gender had influenced their pathways to political participation. One of these interviewees suggested that males still tended to consider themselves as rational agents, while they perceived females as being driven by emotional responses not suitable for political exchanges. Each of these three interviewees suggested that they were either marginalised from political interactions due to their gender or were required to provide more evidence for their claims compared to males.

Academic discussions about youth political disengagement have tended to treat young people as a homogenous group (Henn and Foard, 2014a) and depicted the solutions to increasing their participation as applicable to all young people. The data and interpretations presented in this study suggest that this is a mistake. Young people experience differential journeys to political engagement, face a disparity in obstacles when attempting to participate in politics and exhibit divergent relationships to the political system. This study has illuminated how social group membership, particularly class and access to resources, drive these contrasting pathways to political participation.

These findings support the choice to demarcate the research participants into three categories dependent on their demographics and the prominence of the UP group within this framework to understanding the barriers to political participation. By contrasting the differences in pathways to becoming politically active between the three groups, the thesis was able to highlight how those with fewer resources face more challenges to becoming

politically active than those with higher resources and understand why are some are dominant and some are dominated in the political sphere. The UPs were often hindered in the journey to becoming politically active that was not apparent in the experiences of the EPs and NEUPs and these were often traced to a lack of economic, social and cultural capital. Thus, the UP category allowed the thesis to understand why the disadvantaged found political engagement and participation more difficult, how this varied from those with higher access to resources and demonstrated that the opportunity to participate in politics is not evenly distributed amongst each social group.

This approach also allowed the thesis to illustrate how the barriers were experienced by the UPs. These barriers have been both external and internal, though the latter is driven by exogenous factors even if they are experienced internally via an individual's *habitus*. External barriers include marginalisation in political interactions, a lack of leisure time to become informed about politics and lacking the financial means to research politics. Principally, however, these barriers are erected internally. The lack of socialisation encouraging politics is an important factor in forming internal barriers. Those who have little access to political socialisation conduits find it difficult to develop the political interest, knowledge and efficacy to create the self-belief that they are competent political actors. The UPs negatively contrasted themselves to those who appeared capable in the political sphere and were therefore often disposed towards political passivity. This contributed to feelings of anxiety and a lack of confidence when some of the UPs traversed the political *field*, suggesting to them that they are unable to contribute to politics or influence the political system.

As the interviewees are all engaged in politics and demonstrated a good understanding of political matters, it is likely that these feelings are only heightened for disengaged youths' uninitiated in the political sphere. Thus, finding ways to overcome barriers to participation should be central to strategies to increase youth participation more broadly. Otherwise, marginalised groups are unlikely to benefit from them. As internal barriers seem the most prevalent aspect of the interviewees' accounts, developing plans to tackle internal barriers is the focus of this study. The findings of this investigation suggest that improving access to

political interest, knowledge and efficacy, chiefly in the formative years, would be the most beneficial method. As the UPs are engaged with politics but faced barriers to participation, it is arguable that there is a need to develop strategies from their insights and experiences which may mitigate or circumvent barriers to participation.

Research aim 3: Identify methods to overcome the barriers to political engagement and participation

Young people have a vast amount of political potential. The literature has demonstrated the widespread possession of political opinions among youth, from preadolescence (Haug, 2017; van Deth et al, 2011) to young adulthood (Cammaerts et al, 2014; Chareka and Sears, 2006). Most young people support democratic arrangements (Stoker, 2014) and many would prefer to be actively involved in politics (Sloam and Henn, 2019). It is important, then, to identify the external barriers stopping them from being politically active and suggesting methods for them to overcome these barriers. The recommendations for overcoming barriers to political participation have been drawn both from evidence from the literature and insights provided by the research participants. They primarily arose from interpretations made from the data gathered from the research participants. For example, no interviewee explicitly stated that money should be invested in youth clubs or politically-aligned organisations in poor areas, however, some UPs with access to little resources discussed how they obtained the stimulation to engage with politics due their attendance at these groups. Therefore, the thesis identified increasing access to youth clubs in disadvantaged areas as one method to increase the representation of disadvantaged youths in politics.

The overwhelming impression the interviewees provided when they discussed overcoming barriers to participation was that politics needed to become more relevant to young people. Most of the interviewees believed that youth turnout at elections could be greatly improved by encouraging interactions between young people and the political system and providing more information about politics to those attending secondary schools. In the main, the interviewees believed that many young people who failed to engage with politics did not

develop an interest in politics because it did not seem pertinent to their lives or offer any potential for change. These participants seemed confident that efforts to include young people in politics and demonstrating why politics had a substantial impact on young people's lives would increase youth political engagement.

The interviewees were not convinced that administrative modifications to the political system were priorities. While many favoured changing the voting system to PR and some were open to lowering the voting age, there was no support for compulsory voting. Enforcing mandatory voting, for the interviewees, seemed to conflict with liberal notions of voluntary political participation; furthermore, forcing disengaged youth to participate would enhance their negative view of the political process. Changing to a PR voting system was the most popular administrative change, as the FFP voting system seemed to disincentivise voting in safe-seats. Yet, a sizable minority of interviewees were opposed to reforming the voting system. Lowering the voting age received some enthusiastic endorsement from a small minority of interviewees, but for most it was either a modification which would lead to youths voting in uninformed ways or a reform which missed the point of youth disengagement. It was this latter point that underpinned the general feeling arising from the interviewees. If young people were not voting because they did not believe that politics was relevant to their lives, then these reforms would not tackle the crucial issues underpinning youth political disengagement. Indeed, administrative changes would only appeal to those already engaged in politics. Young people would perhaps vote in slightly larger numbers, but the unappealing factors of the political system would still exist and would continue to diminish a significant amount of young people's interest in formal politics.

Researchers have also highlighted issues with administrative reforms to the political system, suggesting, in particular, that technical modifications of the political system do not tackle the core underlying issues influencing youth political disengagement (Henn and Oldfield, 2016; Mycock and Tonge, 2014). The literature also highlights how moving to PR could increase the inequality of political participation. Moves to PR have been found to increase the complexity of politics, providing incentives to the politically engaged to participate. However, it may also

increase the confusion about voting and diminish the turnout amongst the less educated and those who feel less confident about politics (Pardos-Prado et al, 2014). Compulsory voting would likely overcome inequality of political participation among different social groups as each individual would be required to vote (Birch and Lodge, 2015) but, similarly to the views of the interviewees, academics have suggested that compulsion would further alienate young people from politics (Berry, 2012; Henn and Foard, 2014c; Saunders, 2011). Lowering the voting age has been mooted as a positive method for increasing youth political participation. While it may not greatly increase the voting power of the youth cohort (Berry, 2012), it would signal to young people that they were an important segment of society whose political views are respected (Berry, 2014). If such a reform was adopted alongside more effective citizenship education, then it could increase the political socialisation of young people at a younger age and encourage the habit of voting (Gardiner, 2016b; Henn and Foard, 2014c).

Creating a more youth-centred approach and improving communication between politicians and young people was favoured by the interviewees and enjoys wide-spread support within the literature (Cammaerts et al, 2014; Henn and Oldfield, 2016; Rainsford, 2014; Sloam, 2014; Stoker, 2014). The increase in youth political engagement and participation around the 2016 EU Referendum and 2017 General Election suggests that if British youth feel their views are taken seriously by the political system and that their involvement can have a meaningful impact on the outcome of the election, they will participate in politics. Young people have suggested that the remoteness of political parties and the meagre influence they have on the political process alienates them from politics (Bastedo, 2015; Busse et al, 2015; Henn and Foard, 2014a). Providing opportunities for young people to shape and influence policy while increasing communication between youth and politicians seem a necessary undertaking (Henn and Foard, 2014c; Stoker, 2014). This would signal to youths that politics is relevant to their lives and young people's political interest and efficacy is, as a consequence, likely to rise because they feel they can influence the process. Youths could also learn more about democratic engagement through youth clubs, voluntary organisations and political parties (Frisco, et al, 2004; McFarland and Thomas, 2006). Therefore, increasing funding to youth-centred projects with democratic aims and increasing the opportunities for young people to

influence political parties could help develop the characteristics required for political participation.

For the interviewees, citizenship education offered the most potential for increasing youth political engagement and enjoys large support in the literature. Citizenship education provides a location for political socialisation and is particularly important if political interest and knowledge is not being stimulated from other locations, such as the family (Claes et al, 2009; Keating and Janmaat, 2016; Wiseman et al, 2011). However, there are issues with how citizenship education is currently provided which need acknowledgement if it is to be successful in creating active political agents. In the UK, citizenship education has not been very effective (Keating and Janmaat, 2016; Whiteley, 2012). There has been a retrenchment of citizenship classes due to the increase of academies in the UK and is a low priority for schools that do continue to offer citizenship education as a subject (House of Lords, 2018). It is also adult-centric and produces a competitive ethos for future employment rather than teaching about democratic cooperation and encouraging participatory behaviour (Kisby, 2017). The delivery of citizenship education was criticised by many interviewees. For them, it seemed to be an afterthought; it did not impart relevant information and it had no clear direction. Thus, despite being enthusiastic about the potential of citizenship education, the interviewees stated that it needed significant development to achieve its aim of encouraging a civic spirit among youth. We should also remember that educational establishments are not level playing fields. They reflect and reproduce existing social hierarchies. Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to gain knowledge and confidence from lessons than those from dominant social groups (Nieuwelink et al, 2019; van Deth et al, 2011). Moreover, voluntary political activities, such as mock elections, may only attract those already inclined towards politics (Hoskins et al, 2017). As those inclined towards politics come from dominant groups and are already more likely to be predisposed towards political action, such measures may only benefit those who already have a strong *illusio* in the political *field*.

For the interviewees, creating political interest among young people was the most necessary method to increase youth political participation. If schemes which could effectively encourage

young people to become interested in politics were enacted and proved successful, then more youth would participate. However, as the insights gained from the comparisons of UPs, EPs and Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participants (NEUPs) have demonstrated there are significant barriers to becoming interested in politics and having the self-assuredness to contribute to politics. There may be a lack of leisure time required to ponder and discuss politics if parents work long or irregular hours (Bourdieu, 1991). Those whose parents have little cultural capital may not gain the skills they feel they need to be political agents (Jennings et al, 2009). The family is important for debating and testing political opinions. If insufficient opportunities arise for political interactions within the home, then these youth may not have the space to develop their political knowledge and efficacy (Ekström, 2016). Even if they are interested in politics, they may not understand how to put this interest into practice or understand how formal politics can be influenced. The children of parents with little education may not have the guidance to acquire political knowledge, causing anxiety about their political competency when they engage in political discussions (Diemer, 2012; Persson, 2015). Those who lack the various forms of capital may also feel marginalised in political discussions. As some of the interviewees described, their class or their gender has led to others discriminating against them or marginalising them in political discussions, furthering the feeling that politics is not for someone like them. Overall, it seemed that objective structures, such as class and education, formed the subjective proclivity to engage with politics. The EPs had the resources to feel like they were competent political actors and the self-belief that a person like them could influence the political system. Conversely, the UPs did not have access to resources to nurture a feeling that they could be political agents and consequently lacked a *habitus* which interpreted political participation as an activity they could succeed in. Therefore, a lack of resources often seems to lead to deficient political interest, knowledge and efficacy.

If we are to encourage youth from all social groups to engage with politics then finding ways for marginalised youths, like the UPs in this study, to overcome these barriers is crucial. Finding locations for them to become politically socialised may be the most important, as these locations cultivate the habits, skills and confidence required for future political participation (Duke et al, 2009; Eckstein et al, 2012) and pre-adulthood is the stage of the

lifecycle where the development of these skills is most likely to occur (Arens and Watermann, 2017; Haug, 2017; Russo and Stattin, 2017; van Deth et al, 2011). A deficit of these skills because of insignificant political socialisation seemed to erect the largest barriers to political engagement amongst the UPs, as they did not learn to become a political agent which inclined them towards political passivity as they grew older. Furthermore, as political participation and non-participation is habit forming (Cutts et al, 2009; Dinas, 2012; Gerber et al, 2003), then promoting political engagement before young people become first eligible to vote is crucial.

Encouraging schools with significant numbers of disadvantaged children to pay attention to their student's political development could help mitigate barriers to participation. Focusing investment towards youth centres and politically-aligned groups in poor areas would also stimulate political engagement amongst dominated social groups. Parents often produce primary political socialisation for their offspring, so improving political engagement levels among parents who are working-class or don't have higher education could encourage disadvantaged youth to become interested in politics. Due to the prioritisation of the median voter and middle-class issues, many working-class voters have abandoned politics (Evans and Tilley, 2017a). Thus, by refocusing on working-class issues, political parties may be able to attract these voters back to formal political participation; which would lead to more disadvantaged youths being exposed to politics at home. Broader economic reforms which lessen inequality and the consolidation of political power among the wealthiest would benefit the political socialisation of marginalised youths for similar reasons.

The factors creating barriers to marginalised youths' political participation are varied and complex. Thus, multifaceted and nuanced measures are needed to tackle youth political disengagement. The investigation carried out within this study concurs with the literature which suggests that a broad range of reforms are required to overcome youth's political disenchantment (Henn and Oldfield, 2016; Mycock and Tonge, 2014; Stoker, 2014). It does not recommend any of the administrative reforms considered in Chapter 7 of this thesis as they pursue the symptoms not the causes of youth political disengagement. Moreover, the

evaluation of the evidence in Chapter 7 suggests that technical modifications have limited appeal to those who are disengaged or structurally disadvantaged in the political *field*.

The thesis has consequently recommended a range of proposals which could help the disadvantaged overcome barriers to participation. While recommendation (ii) below was proposed by the interviewees, most have not come directly from the interviewees themselves but have been developed according to the insights provided during the data analysis conducted in chapters 5 and 6. In particular, how the UPs experiences of barriers to participation have inclined them towards political disengagement and how these barriers could be overcome through a combination of methods. The five recommendations are:

(i) *Expand disadvantaged youths' political interest, knowledge and efficacy*

The main issue reducing disadvantaged youths' potential political participation identified within this study was that they had internalised the belief that they possessed insufficient political knowledge, their opinion did not matter and that someone like them could not influence the political system. Expanding the opportunities for disadvantaged youths to gain the political interest, knowledge and efficacy they feel they need to be political agents is the highest priority if these youths are to overcome barriers to political participation. Increasing opportunities to become interested in politics could be realised if the subsequent recommendations were enacted.

(ii) *Improve citizenship education*

Citizenship education is the location of political socialisation where governments can most easily influence disadvantaged youths' political interest. However, if it is to be successful, then citizenship education must be made mandatory across the UK. It must also have clear aims with teachers who are specialists in the area. It must encourage political engagement through nurturing curiosity and promoting participation by students. It is also essential that extra-curricular politically-aligned activities are designed to encourage all social groups to participate and do not favour those who

are advantaged by their access to superior resources. Likewise, citizenship education will only support disadvantaged youths if the environments where it occurs are egalitarian and do not privilege certain social groups.

(iii) *Explore methods to increase political socialisation in the family*

The family is the primary location of political socialisation. Exploring how to reach this resource is not explored at length in the literature and we have already addressed above why accessing the family is problematic. Broad economic reforms promoting greater equality may lead to further political engagement amongst disadvantaged adults and young people. If political parties broadened their appeal, aimed more policies at the working-class and paid attention to other social groups beyond the median voter, then disengaged adults may increase their political participation and enhance the political socialisation they provide to their children.

(iv) *Increase the opportunities for young people to be involved in democratic, civic and political organisations*

It is important for disadvantaged young people to experience democratic arrangements and provide spaces where they can increase their political knowledge and efficacy. Growing the number of youth and political organisations available to young people, particularly in deprived areas, would provide a location for young people to develop political habits and behaviours.

(v) *Provide opportunities for young people to influence policy and communicate with their political representatives*

Disadvantaged young people are more likely to feel ignored by the political system and believe it does not have a positive impact on their lives. Providing opportunities for youths from marginalised groups to shape policy and discuss issues with their political representatives would make politics relevant to those young people. If this change could be enacted, then disadvantaged youths are likely to feel that their views

are given consideration and that they can influence policy, encouraging them to become politically active. Disadvantaged youths also feel a disconnect from politicians, so providing them with further opportunities to interact with their representatives could lead to a more trusting relationship between them and bring youth issues to politicians' attention.

The recommendations provided here are specifically focused on helping disadvantaged youths to engage with politics. It is likely that other reforms discussed by the literature may help young people from all social groups to become involved in politics. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of this study's enquiry to offer an evaluation about how each reform could influence the participation of all youth. However, it is important to highlight that youths from disadvantaged groups are the least likely to be politically active. Therefore, efforts to increase general youth political participation need to pay attention to the specific circumstances of those groups or political inequality will rise and efforts to increase young people's political engagement will, at best, only be partially successful.

Original contribution to knowledge

The category of Unexpected Participants

As we discussed in 4.6.2, the classification schema deployed in this thesis, of which the UPs were the defining element, is an original approach. It was created to investigate what the politically active can explain about the politically disengaged, with a specific focus on how people during youthhood become politically active (or passive), and experience barriers to political participation. It is useful because it brings the differential ability of youth to become political agents to the fore by demonstrating the influence of structures and access to resources on potential political participation. The use of the three categories meant that this study could compare the contrasting experiences of youth and illustrate why young people should not be treated as a homogenous group when examining youth political disengagement.

Contrasting the commonalities and divergences in the experiences of the three groups – UPs, EPs and NEUPs - also provided the analytical tools to explore if insights from the politically active can contribute to developing strategies to overcoming barriers to political participation. The experiences of the UPs provided a lens through which we could understand how they became interested in politics and the factors which created barriers to their involvement. These participants were unexpectedly politically engaged because their demographics would suggest they are unlikely to become political agents. Yet, for various reasons documented in Chapter 6, they were able to overcome obstacles to political participation. By talking to the UPs, we are better able to grasp how barriers to political participation are erected in their path and suggest methods to overcome these obstacles for youth who are likely to be politically disengaged. Furthermore, the insights from the politically engaged allowed us to partially evaluate competing suggestions arising from the literature review. For example, many of these engaged interviewees discussed having friends who did not vote because they were disenchanted with the political system or did not feel that casting their ballot led to substantive change. This lent tentative support to the claims of the anti-apathy school (Almlund, 2018; Cammaerts et al, 2014; Henn and Foard, 2014a; Sloam, 2007).

The journey to political participation

The research design also delivered an original perspective on the journey towards becoming politically active. This approach involved asking politically active young adults to reflect on the experiences during their formative years which limited or expanded their potential to become politically active. Additionally, insights could be drawn about how these experiences impacted on their political engagement and participation when they were older. No other research discovered in the literature has taken this approach to understanding political participation using semi-structured interviews.

This method allowed the interviewee to reflect on their life-course and provided interesting and rich data about the intertwining facets of political socialisation and how they produce

political agents. Combining these experiences provided significant information about how preadult biographies are mediated by resources and inform the development of an individual's *habitus* and *illusio* in the political *field*. For example, Emily was able to reflect on how her parents' lack of education stifled her political socialisation and reduced her confidence when entering into political conversations. If Emily's interview had been conducted when she was a teenager, the thesis would not have been able to interpret how her parents had influenced her later political behaviour. Similarly, if Victoria had been interviewed as a young teenager, we would not be able to analyse how she became politically aware and active in democratic activities because her *habitus* was inclining her towards political disengagement at this point in her life. Consequently, we would not be able to illuminate how she had overcome barriers to participation. Thus, this original approach has allowed the thesis to critically analyse how the journeys to becoming politically active are the culmination of a multifaceted and dynamic process, which is particularly evident during the formative years.

Limits and challenges within this study and recommendations for future research

The precision of Unexpected Participant, Expected Participant and Neither Expected nor Unexpected Participant categories

In 4.6.2, the thesis outlined how the participants' demographics acted as a guide rather than set rules to how they were categorised in this study. This was because maintaining precise demographic criteria for these categories would not have illuminated the reality of the resources they had at their disposal. This introduced subjectivity into the categorisation of the research participants, but it did provide a more accurate picture of the interviewees' access to resources. This may cause complications for future research which utilised these research participant categories. For instance, another researcher may subjectively allocate interviewees to different categories than was the case in this study. To overcome these issues concrete criterion could be adopted for each of the categories – though researchers may experience the same issues about inaccurately categorising individuals through their demographics encountered in this study. Future research adopting these categories could

also redesign the criteria so that it only takes one demographic, such as education, into account. However, this may lead to researchers overlooking some of the other facets of social life which influence political participation. Hence, why this thesis chose to prioritise accurately depicting the interviewees' access to resources as this provided a more precise overview of their lives.

The age-range and differential experiences of participants

The interviewees in this study covered a significant age-range, from 18 to 35. The aim of this thesis was to explore millennials' experiences in becoming political agents. To capture this group, the thesis utilised the dates of birth suggested by Furlong and Cartmel (2012). Comparing people from such a large age-range may have created issues about the validity of comparing the interviewees upon their demographics. For example, many of the younger interviewees still lived with their parents, but most of the older interviewees no longer did so. Therefore, who was the main-wage earner in the household may be a parent, a partner or the interviewee within this study. Moreover, the older interviewees may possess demographics which are not representative of their childhood. It is possible that fluctuating circumstances over such a long period of a person's life-course undermines the credibility of comparisons between those who are at different stages of their life-cycle. As we discussed in 1.4, period, lifecycle and period effects may have produced different political values and opinions between the oldest and youngest of the research participants. Future research using a similar methodological approach may reduce the age-range of participants to minimise differences in life-cycles. Or it could provide systematic comparisons between older and younger participants. This study, however, was interested in the experiences of the whole millennial cohort so opted for the extended age-range. Comparisons between older and younger interviewees were also conducted during the initial data analysis stage, but no significant differences between these groups could be found which were relevant to the research aims.

Using politically engaged participants to provide solutions to political disengagement

In 7.1, the thesis discussed some limitations of using politically active millennials to evaluate solutions to political disengagement. As the interviewees were politically engaged, solutions which appealed to them may have little influence on those who are politically passive. Therefore, the thesis pointed out that the research participants' perspectives may have limitations and combined the interviewees' responses with research in the literature to provide a more accurate evaluation of solutions to political disengagement. Future research which attempted to use politically engaged individuals to provide solutions to political passivity may also benefit from seeking the views of the politically disengaged in their empirical investigations. The suitability of solutions suggested by the politically active could then be evaluated by the politically passive to assess whether the former are able to provide solutions to the latter's political disengagement.

The data provides partial explanations about social phenomena

As was remarked upon in 4.4, qualitative data was preferred to provide rich insights into the causal mechanisms erecting barriers to political participation. This study did not intend to pursue examples that can be generalised to the whole population, instead it sought to provide breadth and depth to a small number of cases to provide insights about the millennials' political participation. Future research may seek to combine quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover causal influences which could be generalised to broader groups.

There were also limits to what the engaged participants could tell us about political disengagement. For example, many of the interviewees were very keen on using citizenship education to increase interest among disengaged youth. However, this perspective originates from individuals who are politically engaged so they might not consider how citizenship education would be less appealing to someone inclined towards political passivity. Future research may seek to compare the experiences of UPs to those who do not participate to establish to what extent engaged political actors can illuminate the experiences of those politically disengaged.

Power relations in research

During the data analysis, class was highlighted as the primary structure influencing barriers to political participation. This was because the literature review had identified class as the variable having the strongest impact on potential political participation and the responses from the interviewees predominantly highlighted the importance of class in understanding barriers to participation. However, as the researcher is a white male, females and those from BME groups may not have wished to share experiences of sexism and racism with a person who may not be able to appreciate their perspectives. Nevertheless, all females and ethnic minority participants were asked if their gender or ethnicity had impacted on their pathway to becoming a political agent and their responses were reported accurately in the thesis. Future research in this area may wish to specifically interview only females or ethnic minorities to examine if this study has overlooked the impact of these demographics in its analysis of barriers to political participation.

Concluding remarks

The suitability of current political practices within liberal democracies are being increasingly questioned by citizens (Hay, 2007; Stoker, 2006). Only a minority of citizens within developed countries trust their government (Edelman, 2018) and dissatisfaction with the political system in Britain is reaching new heights (Hansard, 2019). This has translated into decreasing political participation across the Western world (Solijonov, 2016). Members of the working-class feel betrayed by their political representatives (Evans and Tilley, 2017a; 2017b) and are increasingly favouring populist and nationalist parties to demonstrate their anger towards the political status quo (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). Likewise, young people feel resentment towards a political system that seems to be wilfully ignorant of youth views and demonstrates little inclination to improve their socioeconomic position (Gardiner, 2016b; 2016b; Henn and Foard, 2014a). For those who support liberal democracies, there are troubling indications that contemporary youth are increasingly open to non-democratic methods of governing and authoritarian rulers (Foa and Mounk, 2016; 2017).

Consequently, there seems a clear need to reengage the working-classes and youth with institutional politics if liberal democratic norms are to be sustained. This requires effort from political elites to alter their behaviour, reform democratic practices and focus on the needs of each social group in society. This thesis has highlighted the importance of encouraging political interest during the formative years to create political engagement and participation during adulthood. This not only requires focusing on improving political interest amongst the young, but also improving how adults view politics as their faith in democratic arrangements filters down to the youngest members of society. Improving youth political participation also requires acknowledgement that young people lead varied lives which have differential impacts on their ability to access politics. Therefore, academics need to consider more fully the different pathways to political action and give attention to those youth who encounter significant barriers to political participation. This thesis has contributed to this discussion by formulating new methods for highlighting barriers to political participation, the sources of these barriers and how these barriers could be overcome. The thesis is optimistic that contemporary youth have the potential to be active citizens and are willing to engage with politics if the political system is reformed. However, if recommendations to improve a civic spirit continue to be ignored by the political class (Mycock and Tonge, 2014), then the opportunity to rejuvenate democratic arrangements will be missed, possibly leading to the further weakening of liberal democracies.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Research participant demographics

Name	Location	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Attended university	Occupation	Participant type
Charles	Worcestershire	23	Male	White British	No	C2	UP
Edward	Worcestershire	25	Male	White British	No	D	UP
Edgar	Worcestershire	26	Male	White British	Yes	C2	NEUP

Matilda	Birmingham	20	Female	White British	Yes	C1	NEUP
Fahad	Worcestershire	19	Male	Mixed white British and Pakistani	No	C1	UP
Jane	Nottingham	25	Female	White British	Yes	E (student)	NEUP
Henry	Worcestershire	24	Male	White British	No	E	NEUP
Arthur	Worcestershire	18	Male	White British	No	B	EP
Mary	Herefordshire	21	Female	White	No	B	EP
Thomas	Herefordshire	20	Male	White British	No	D	UP
Elizabeth	Nottingham	19	Female	White British	No	C2	UP
Anne	Nottingham	22	Female	White British	Yes	B	EP
William	Derby	18	Male	White	No	A	EP
John	Derby	21	Male	White British	Yes	C1	NEUP
Richard	Derby	20	Male	White Irish	Yes	C2	NEUP
Stephen	Lincoln	21	Male	White	Yes	E (student)	NEUP
George	Worcestershire	18	Male	White British	No	B	EP

Victoria	Nottingham	24	Female	White British	Yes	E (student)	UP
Alfred	Herefordshire	18	Male	White British	No	C2	UP
Alexander	Worcestershire	33	Male	White British	Yes	C1	NEUP
Phillip	Worcestershire	26	Male	White European	Yes	C1	EP
Margaret	London (via Skype)	32	Female	White British	Yes	B	EP
Joan	Cheltenham	20	Female	White British	Yes	C1	EP
Emily	Worcestershire	30	Female	White British	No	D	UP
Donald	Worcestershire	33	Male	White British	No	C2	UP
Eleanor	Worcestershire	35	Female	White British	No	C1	UP
Saanvi	Worcestershire	27	Female	Indian	No	C1	UP
Malcom	Bristol	31	Male	White British	No	C1	UP
Duncan	Birmingham	20	Male	White British	Yes	A	EP
Robert	Birmingham	20	Male	White British	Yes	D	UP
David	Worcestershire	33	Male	White British	Yes	D	NEUP

Sofia	Birmingham	30	Female	Romanian	Yes	E (student)	ME
Rachel	Worcester	25	Female	White British	Yes	C2	NEUP
Mark	Birmingham	22	Male	Black British	No	D	UP
Lionel	Bristol	24	Male	White British	No	C1	NEUP

Appendix 2: Interview guide and questions for research participants

Demographics

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your ethnicity?

What is the occupation of the main wage earner in your household?

Have you attended university?

What is politics?

When I say the term 'political participation', what do you think that means?

What activities do you consider political?

Political Activity

How often do you participate in political activities, if at all?

What do you enjoy about these political activities?

Have you previously voted?

How likely are you to vote in the next general election?

How likely are you to vote in the next local election?

Are you a member of a political party?

If you vote, do you feel that your knowledge of politics/the political system/politicians/political parties allows you to make an informed decision when voting?

Importance of political activity

How important do you think it is for people to vote?

Do you think that you can influence the direction of politics/politicians?

How accessible is politics to the general public?

Do you discuss politics with your friends?

Do you discuss politics with your family?

What factors motivate you to participate in politics?

What motivated you to become interested in politics?

Do you think that political participation has had a positive influence on your life?

Were you taught politics/citizenship at any of the educational establishments you have attended?

Opinion of the political system

Young people are less likely to vote than older people, why do you think that is?

What is your opinion of politicians?

Would you change anything about the current political system?

How do you feel about the following solutions to political disengagement? PR, compulsory voting and lowering the voting age

Are there ways in which communication between politicians and young people could be improved?

Life-experiences

Do you feel that there have been barriers which you have had to overcome to participate in politics? For instance, are there cultural, economic or social factors which have made political participation more difficult?

If you experienced barriers to political participation, how did you overcome these barriers?

Do you consider it easy for people from all walks of life to participate in politics?

If your friends are politically active, do you think they have faced barriers to participation?

In what ways does politics need to change - if it does at all - to make it easier for young people to vote?

Appendix 3: Informed consent form

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Informed consent to participate in this research

Thank you for agreeing to consider participating in this research project. Before you decide whether to participate in this interview, it is important that you understand the reason why this research is being carried out, and what your participation will involve. I would be very grateful if you could take some time to read the following information carefully. Please do not

hesitate to get back to me or my supervisor if anything is unclear, and to take as much time as you need to decide whether or not to participate.

The purpose of the interview is to reveal young people's experiences of political participation. I will be asking you a series of questions about your opinion of politics/politicians, your current level of political engagement and some of your life experiences which may have affected your ability to politically participate. I will also be enquiring about some other personal information - age, gender, ethnicity, occupation of main wage earner in household and whether you have attended, or plan to attend, university.

You are being asked to take part in a one-to-one interview lasting 60-90 minutes. The interviews will be recorded so that I can transcribe your responses. Your name will be anonymised when the data you have provided is written up, so your identity will be protected. No information which may identify who you are will be released into the public domain. Your contribution to the discussion will be saved in a private database in a password-protected computer, which only the researcher and his supervisors will have access to. All data will be deleted from the database after the end of the research.

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You have the right to withdraw at any point during the interview and you can withdraw your data after the interview has taken place. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please let me know up to 6 weeks after the data has been collected, and any data collected about you will be destroyed. In order to do this, please contact me by email at

james.hart2015@my.ntu.ac.uk so that I can destroy any data that relates to you. If you have any other questions which you forgot to ask when I interviewed you, do not hesitate to contact me on the same email address.

Participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated. If you are happy to take part in this research please sign and date this document below. If you have any questions or concerns before, during, or after your participation please inform the researcher.

By ticking the box you agree that you are at least 18 years, have read and understand the purpose of this research and your part in it (__).

Thank you very much indeed for your time and consideration.

For further questions please do not hesitate to contact me: James Hart - james.hart2015@my.ntu.ac.uk, or my supervisor: Professor Matt Henn - matt.henn@ntu.ac.uk

Participant:

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Signature	Date