Journal of Youth Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjys20

Social differentiation in young people's political participation: the impact of social and educational factors on youth political engagement in Britain

Matt Henn[a] & Nick Foard[b]
[a] Division of Politics and International Relations, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK
[b] Division of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK
Published online: 25 Sep 2013.

To cite this article: Matt Henn & Nick Foard (2014) Social differentiation in young people's political participation: the impact of social and educational factors on youth political engagement in Britain, Journal of Youth Studies, 17:3, 360-380, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2013.830704

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.830704

Journal of Youth Studies, 2014
Vol. 17, No. 3, 360–380, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.830704

Social differentiation in young people's political participation: the impact of social and educational factors on youth political engagement in Britain

Matt Henn[a]* and Nick Foard[b]

[a]*Division of Politics and International Relations, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK;* [b]*Division of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK*

(*Received 24 January 2013; accepted 22 July 2013*)

Over the course of the last decade, policy makers in Britain have become increasingly concerned about the apparent and persisting withdrawal by young people from the formal political process. In this article, the authors consider the results from a representative online national survey of 1025 British 18-year-olds conducted in 2011, including both those who voted at the 2010 General Election and those who did not. The findings reveal that young people do profess a commitment to the political process, although they consider that there are relatively few opportunities available for them to intervene effectively in formal political life. Our study also indicates that there is no uniform youth orientation to politics, and the data reveal that this generation's engagement with formal politics is complex and nuanced. Social class and educational history both appear to have a crucial bearing on political engagement, while views also differ according to ethnicity and – to a lesser extent – gender. The authors also consider the findings from 14 online focus groups with 86 young people who opted not to vote at the 2010 General Election. These findings enable us to consider what influenced these young people's patterns of (dis)engagement with politics.

Keywords: young people; political participation; disengagement; voting

Introduction

Patterns of political behaviour among young people in Britain have recently attracted much attention, as research suggests that they are increasingly turning their backs on democratic institutions and withdrawing from the formal political process (Norris 2011; Furlong and Cartmel 2012; Henn and Foard 2012). Indeed, the current youth generation is often characterised as apathetic or even as antipolitical, with neither aptitude nor inclination for participating in any form of collective social endeavour, and with no sense of civic responsibility (Fahmy 2003; Russell 2004; Power Inquiry 2006; Stoker 2006, 2011; Hay 2007; Farthing 2010). For instance, the driving force underpinning the introduction of citizenship classes in schools in England in 2002 was an acknowledgement of, and apparent concern with, what was considered as a growing democratic deficit and increasing political apathy among young people (Kisby and Sloam 2012; Tonge, Mycock, and Jeffery 2012). Further, in 2008, Prime Minister Gordon Brown set up the Youth Citizenship Commission with a key brief to investigate how young people might

*Corresponding author. Email: matt.henn@ntu.ac.uk

be more effectively encouraged to participate in political life (Youth Citizenship Commission 2009).

And yet as recently as 2011, British youth were prominent in a series of significant – and indeed dramatic – mass social actions. Whether these were the spontaneous and often violent episodes of civil unrest that beset many major cities across Britain that summer (Bennett 2013), the more organised student-led protests against the rise in university tuition fees (Hopkins, Todd, and Newcastle Occupation 2011; Theocharis 2012) or the campaign of occupations at London St Paul's Square and at other major metropolitan sites (Halvorsen 2012), young people's interventions have been observed with increasing concern by national politicians.[1]

Young people's apparent willingness to take part in these more unorthodox methods of mass social and political action, along with their abstention rates at recent elections, have left policy makers lamenting what they consider to be a persisting decoupling of young people from the formal political process (Ministry of Justice 2007; Mycock and Tonge 2012). This was particularly apparent in the aftermath of the 2001 General Election, and it shows no signs of diminishing a decade later. Thus, election turnout in 2001 was the lowest witnessed since 1918, with only 59% of the eligible electorate casting their vote, and the apparent disconnection between citizens and the political process signalled by this led some to conclude that it represented a developing crisis of democratic politics in Britain (Harrop 2001; Whiteley et al. 2001). In particular, only 39% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted, falling even further to 37% in 2005 (Ipsos MORI 2001, 2005), despite the introduction of all-postal voting by the Government which was intended to simplify and boost the ballot (Henn and Weinstein 2006). Although turnout within this youth group is estimated to have increased to 44% in 2010 (Ipsos MORI 2010), it remains well below the national adult turnout of 65% and suggests that a large majority of those young people who registered to vote opted not to do so. It is also a significantly lower youth turnout rate than recorded in earlier elections, when it was reported as 66% in 1987 (Swaddle and Heath 1989), 61% in 1992 (Butler and Kavanagh 1997) and 68% in 1997 (Jowell and Park 1998).

It is not just young people's election turnout that has also come under scrutiny. The principal theme to emerge out of much existing research into the general field of young people and politics is that this generation has been characterised as dissatisfied with, and alienated from, the political process (Kimberlee 2002; O'Toole et al. 2003; Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest 2005; Marsh, O'Toole, and Jones 2007; Wattenburg 2008; Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion 2010). Furthermore, many studies conclude that young people have comparatively lower levels of political knowledge than their older contemporaries (Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2004) and have a distinct lack of interest in (formal) politics (Park 2004). Compared with older adults, they are less likely to be politically active (The Hansard Society 2013), display comparatively weaker commitments to political parties (Tilley 2003; Clarke et al. 2004) and are less likely to be members of such organisations (Sloam 2007; Mycock and Tonge 2012). Indeed, the message from many such studies is that young people's levels of political participation in general are in decline, and at a somewhat more rapid rate than is the case for older adults and also for previous youth cohorts (Russell et al. 2002).

A number of recent quantitative- and qualitative-based empirical studies have challenged the predominant political apathy thesis, arguing instead that young people are interested in political matters and do take part in diverse forms of political action (Norris 2003; O'Toole et al. 2003; Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2004; Quintelier 2007;

Wattenburg 2008; Dalton 2009). Furthermore, Phelps (2012) has observed an emerging alternative 'anti-apathy' paradigm, in which young people are considered to have an interest in politics but feel alienated from formal politics and institutions (Marsh, O'Toole, and Jones 2007; Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion 2010; Holmes and Manning 2013) – and as a consequence, characterised as 'engaged sceptics' (Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002; O'Toole, Marsh, and Jones 2003). Despite this evidence, the central preoccupation with young people's falling election turnout rates persists, as do concerns therefore about their detachment from the British democratic process (for a recent review of the debate, see Phelps 2012).

Aims and objectives

In this article, we consider this notion that young people are disengaged from the formal political process and from democratic institutions in Britain. We do this by examining data from a research project that we conducted in 2011, and we address the following issues:

- Young people's levels of interest in, and understanding of, politics and elections;
- Youth attitudes towards the political process and democratic institutions in Britain;
- The degree of faith that young people have in political parties and politicians.

Moreover, while there has been a tendency to treat young people as a homogenised group, with many research studies considering youth as a single category for examination, we also investigate whether or not young people's political views are linked to their backgrounds and life circumstances.

Young people are increasingly understood within the context of a media-saturated cultural sphere in which identities are liquid, and under constant re-evaluation; this view has led to a reframing of the influence of variables such as gender, social class and ethnicity over political engagement (Giddens 1991; Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). As Furlong and Cartmel observe:

> In the context of late modernity, young people may increasingly find it difficult to make connections between their own life circumstances and those of others occupying similar positions or sharing core experiences. As a consequence … factors such as class and gender lose significance as predictors or become manifest in new ways. (2012, 14)

While recognising that young people's lives are being shaped by myriad aspects of contemporary culture, the influence of social predictors remains a significant question, given that research of all voting-age adults in Britain has identified an increasing heterogeneity over time in terms of people's orientation to politics – a diversity based on social class (Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2004; Holmes and Manning 2013), gender (Furlong and Cartmel 2012) ethnicity (Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2011; Heath et al. 2011) and educational attainment (Stoker 2006; Tenn 2007; Sloam 2012). Length of time in full-time education is also likely to have an important bearing on political outlook; in particular, experience in higher education is likely to lead to exposure to forms of political socialisation not available to other young people (Flanagan et al. 2012). There is, by comparison, very little research evidence available to offer insight into the potential diversity of political perspectives within the younger generational group.

A primary and additional aim of this study is therefore to examine whether, as is evident in the general population, social class, gender, ethnicity and educational career variables retain salience in structuring young people's political views and values, given the complex and individualised lives that today's generation of young people are claimed to lead in Britain. If so, in what directions are these uneven patterns manifest? In formal terms, our hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Young people from higher social class backgrounds will be more engaged with formal politics than their contemporaries from lower social class groups.

H2: Young men will be more engaged with formal politics than young women.

H3: White youth will be more engaged with formal politics than their contemporaries from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups.

H4: Young people who have achieved higher level qualifications will be more engaged with formal politics than less qualified young people.

H5: Young people who have opted to remain in full-time education will be more engaged with formal politics than those young people who have left.

Research design

The study is based upon a consideration and analysis of the views of 18-year-old 'attainers' – young people eligible to vote for the first time when the 2010 electoral register came into force. The main purpose for limiting our study to this age group was that at the time of our study, these young people had had minimal formal experience of participating in politics in terms of voting in comparison to older people. They were therefore less likely to have formed deep-seated views about politics, elections and the democratic process.

We adopted a two-phase research design, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods that included a national online survey and a series of online focus groups.

Phase 1 – National online survey of attainers

In this initial phase of the project, we conducted an online survey of 1025 attainers that was designed to yield a representative national sample of young people from across England, Scotland and Wales. Respondents were drawn from an existing and ongoing online access panel (co-ordinated by an international polling agency, Ipsos MORI[2]), that included 430,000 members from across Britain. A combination of online and offline recruitment methods was used to create the panel which ensured that, while the data collection would take place online, the sample was not generated exclusively from *regular* Internet users; this approach was intended to guard against any sampling bias that might have derived from an exclusively online sample selection method.

A subsample of 25,000 potential respondents from the panel was identified using the criteria that respondents should have had their 18th birthday (and therefore be eligible to vote) *before* the General Election of 6 May 2010, but *after* the local and European elections of 4 June 2009. This ensured that all members of our sampling frame had no voting experience prior to the 2010 General Election, and it was from this that the sample

of attainers was generated. Region and gender quotas were used to control the final profile of the sample. Finally, data were weighted to accurately reflect population estimates of gender, ethnicity and region according to the most recently available census updates, recorded in mid-2010. Data collection took place from 20 April 2011 to 4 May 2011 thereby ensuring that respondents had not yet had the opportunity to vote in the Alternative Vote referendum of 5 May 2011.

The large data-set generated through our survey affords us the opportunity to conduct detailed examination of various subsamples that are of sufficient size for us to obtain meaningful insights into whether or not respondents' views of politics are influenced by their sociodemographic background (gender, social class, ethnicity), and educational career (qualifications obtained and whether they have left or remain in full-time education). The membership sizes for each category of each of the sociodemographic variables selected for analysis are set out in Table 1. Such analyses allow us to gain an overall perspective on whether young people are a relatively homogeneous or differentiated group when it comes to their orientation towards politics in Britain. In doing so, this enables us to contribute to an understanding of young people's political participation in Britain in a way that has been lacking to date.

Independent variables

Multiple regression is used to investigate the impact of five sociodemographic background and educational career variables on young people's political views and orientations. All of these predictor variables are operationalised as dichotomous variables. Coding for these variables is outlined in Table 1.

The eight category *National Statistics Socio-economic Classification* scheme is used to assess social class, with respondents each defining their position not by their own occupational circumstances but the reported circumstances of the main wage earner in their household.[3] For this particular independent variable, respondents are distinguished by whether they are categorised as managerial/professional (middle class) or not.[4] The educational qualifications variable compares those who have attained educational and vocational qualifications that are of a level sufficient to provide a route through to higher education, with those who have not.[5]

Dependent variables

A combination of eight dependent variables allows us to examine the extent of young people's political engagement. These variables include levels of political interest, the

Table 1. Coding for independent variables.

	0 (reference category)	*N*	1	*N*
Gender	Female	498	Male	527
Ethnicity	White	890	Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)	122
Educational qualifications	Not having level 2 qualifications or above	358	Having level 2 qualifications or above	636
Education status	Not in full-time education	330	In full-time education	688
Social class	Not managerial/professional	436	Managerial/professional	589

degree of confidence that respondents have in their own knowledge and understanding of politics (internal efficacy), the degree to which they feel that there are opportunities open to participate meaningfully in political affairs (external efficacy), their views both of the electoral process and of voting and their attitudes towards the key political players (parties and politicians).

All dependent variables are derived using factor scores extracted from a principal components analysis of multiple items included in the original questionnaire. The dependent variables and related items from which they are derived are set out in the Appendix 1.

Phase 2 – online focus groups with attainers

In addition to the online survey, we conducted 14 online focus groups during November 2011, with 86 attainers who had chosen *not* to vote at the 2010 General Election. The purpose of these focus groups was to examine what influenced the participants' decisions to self-exclude from the election, and more generally to uncover some of the deeper perceptions and meanings that the young people in the survey attached to politics and political activity. Through this research, we were able to gain a deeper insight into young people's views and opinions than was possible through the survey alone. In this respect, the focus groups provided an opportunity to contextualise the data gained from the survey and supplement that data in very important ways. The focus groups also allowed the participants to express themselves in their vernacular; as we shall see in the *Results* section below, this is important, given that the young people in our focus groups were encouraged to communicate to us their meaning of 'politics', rather than respond to conventional definitions.

The groups were synchronous, making use of a chat-room in which discussions were focused around a framework of questions designed in advance. Groups were facilitated by members of Ipsos MORI's research team using this framework of questions, accompanied online by the authors who were able to make real-time suggestions for prompts. Each group lasted approximately 1 hour.

In conducting these focus groups, we were conscious of the need to ensure that we should take into account the potential differences in political outlook and orientation for different groups of non-voting youth. To make allowance for any such underlying structural influences, we subdivided our focus groups by 'type', and for this purpose, we held separate groups of young white people[6] and those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, separate male and female groups, and also groups comprising either those who had progressed to higher education or those who had opted not to do so. To consider potential differences in outlook arising from their social class background, we also held distinct focus groups with young people from predominantly professional and middle class (ABC1) households, and those from more broadly working class (C2DE) households.

We also built a geographic dimension into our focus group strategy, to account for potential urban/rural effects, and possible effects arising from country in which people lived. Thus, while most of the focus groups comprised people living in England, we also organised separate online focus groups of young people living in Wales and Scotland. Typically the focus groups comprised young people living in urban areas, while one group included young people from across the country who were living in specifically rural localities.[7]

Finally, and given the apparent turnout rate differences noticed at recent general elections between those living in 'marginal' constituencies with those living in 'safe' parliamentary seats (Curtice 2005), we wanted to take into account local party competition as a possible variable impacting on young people's political outlook. We therefore chose to include a focus group comprising attainers living in marginal constituencies in which the controlling party holds a majority of less than 20%,[8] and also a separate 'safe' group where the margin of difference was 20% or more.

Participants were recruited face-to-face in-street for the online focus groups. Quotas were used to ensure that these young people met certain key criteria (age, non-voting at the 2010 General Election, region, gender and internet access).

The initial intention for the focus groups (as listed below), was that each would be selected from an individual constituency, so that for example those in the 'marginal' group would be from the same locality. However, given the extremely narrow age range and social desirability bias (some members of the target group did not wish to admit that they had not voted in 2010), it proved impractical to recruit from single constituencies, and the groups were selected from more dispersed areas. The 'rural' participants were recruited nationally from small rural towns, while other groups were recruited nationally from urban and suburban areas. The 'marginal' group comprised young people selected from 10 marginal constituencies across Britain, and the 'safe' group from 9 safe constituencies. The nature of the online focus groups enabled us to record the text of the discussions without the need to transcribe from an audio recording thereby ensuring the contributions of participants were preserved precisely in their original format. A form of thematic analysis was used following the approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008), consisting of a first stage of open-coding of the data to identify the properties and dimensions of specific experiences and attitudes. This process of coding led to the formation of a number of concepts which, through a second stage of axial coding, were linked to each other, and higher level categories – the key themes which are evident throughout the data. Direct quotes provide illustrations of the concepts, as voiced through the experiences and attitudes of the focus group participants, and in turn these concepts help to shed light on the broader themes.

Results

Our results are organised under headings that allow us to examine the extent of young people's interest in, engagement with, and views of 'politics', the democratic process and the political classes.

Political engagement

When asked what they understand by the concept of 'politics', young people's response is that it is a process that is mystifying and difficult to engage with; it is also characterised as remote from their immediate experiences and considered to be a world that is inhabited by an unrepresentative and self-centred political elite. This characterisation supports the findings from earlier studies (Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest 2005; Furlong and Cartmel 2012; Holmes and Manning 2013).

Figure 1 summarises the coded responses to an open question that was placed at the beginning of the online survey questionnaire, and which asked, 'When people talk about "politics", what does that mean to you, exactly?'. This enabled the young people

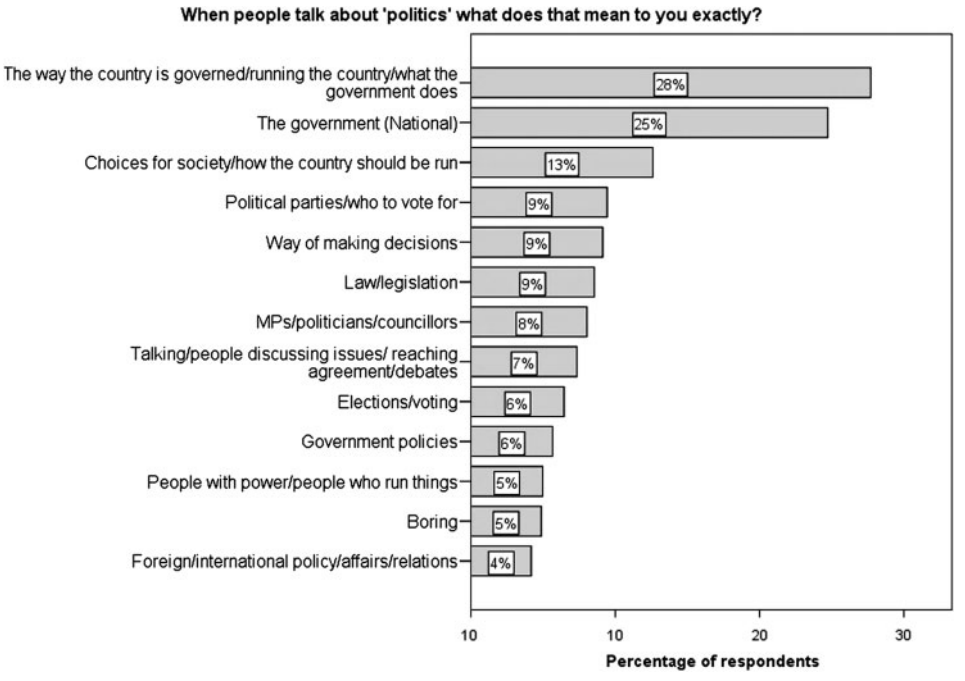

Figure 1. Characterisation of politics.

participating in the study to express in their own terms how they understand the world of politics. The data overwhelmingly indicate that these young people considered politics to be about central government and the political elite. Thus, politics is defined in terms of governance (by 28% of the respondents) and the national government (25%), of government policies (6%) and about how choices are derived for managing Britain's affairs (13%).[9] It is also about the key political players (parties − 9%, politicians − 8%), the process through which they achieve power via elections (6%) and also how they wield that power (5%).

It is perhaps little wonder therefore, that the young participants of our focus groups – who had opted *not* to vote at the 2010 General Election – considered the political world to be far removed from their own everyday lives. They found it to be 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. This characterisation was particularly evident in the responses offered to the question, 'If I say politics, what do you say?'. The immediate reactions were that politics was '*Boring', 'confusing', 'intellegant men talking S**t', 'control', 'influence', 'power', 'money', 'corrupt', 'lies', 'miniplulation'*, or perhaps as one participant from the 'affluent' focus group put it, '*politricks:)*'.[10]

In line with earlier studies (Diplock et al. 2002; Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002), a common theme that emerged was that young people found politics in general, and the previous general election in particular, to be confusing, and the following responses were typical of those offered by participants:

- *being a youngster myself i see that politics is very hard to understand and complicated*
- *Politics is so inaccessible to the general public*
- *politics = me being a bit baffled*
- *[politics] just gets me a bit confused at times … at all times infact*
- *keep it simple for us:) … the basics … without tricking us*

This complexity was very commonly cited by these non-voting focus group participants to be a crucial factor in shaping their decisions to abstain at the 2010 UK General Election:

- *i didnt vote because i dont understand the parties and what they were offering*
- *I think the main reason [for not voting] was because I didn't understand it all properly, and talking to anyone about it confused me more, or made me feel stupid*
- *I think it [the election] can be overwhelming- or seems like jargon when you watch and read about the different parties*
- *i didnt vote because i didnt understand each of the parties promises and who could actually help*

However, young people were also concerned at what they perceived to be an overly centralised and remote political system, and professional politicians were considered therefore to have little prospect for connecting with young people or of championing their concerns:

- *[If] they spoke in plain English and most importantly EXPLAINED their actions. At least then we could agree or disagree with the reasoning, and not just their decisions*
- *i dont think they can really relate to students or youths … clearly theres a problem when students are protesting and youths are rioting*
- *because the goverment just dose what it wants to do and dosent listen to what the public want they say they will make changes so you will vote for them and then dont back up there promises*
- *they [should] spent a week in our shoes, trying to find a job, continue on in education and face day-to-day happenings we go through*

Ultimately, the professional politicians were considered to be elitist and self-serving, a characterisation that echoes earlier qualitative research (White, Bruce, and Ritchie 2000; Diplock et al. 2002; Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002; O'Toole 2003):

- *… they seem to live in a totally different world to everyone else*
- *… [politicians] dont think like the majority of the "common person"*
- *i believe that the government already have everything planned out. the ruling class in society (government) always have control on what happens.*
- *I think the government is ultimately very unresponsive to the views of the public - – however much they may state the contrary!*

This echoes the sentiments expressed by participants in the Hansard Society's *Parliament 2020* project, where it was found that 'younger participants felt that the diversity of representatives was important and, more widely, it was felt that representatives should be

portrayed as the "normal people" that they are. It was believed that this would make representatives seem more credible to the public, and strengthen levels of trust and facilitate engagement between the two groups' (Williamson and Fallon 2011, 785).

Although young people seem to find the world of central Westminster politics (for that is how they conceptualise it) as broadly remote and unappealing – indeed the majority appear to have a deep aversion to many aspects of it – they do nonetheless claim an interest in it. In this respect, they might be characterised as 'engaged sceptics' (Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002), as people who are alienated from politics, but who are neither apolitical nor apathetic (Marsh, O'Toole, and Jones 2007; Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion 2010). In the survey, the majority of respondents (63%) declared that they had some or more interest in political affairs (only 12% of our survey participants reported that they had no interest at all), and a similar proportion (64%) claimed an interest in the General Election held in May 2010 (only 14% had no interest at all). This finding would seem to contradict the conventional view that young people take little interest in political matters. However, an analysis of the data using multiple regression suggests that the pattern is not a uniform one; the results reported in Table 2 reveal that there are some statistically significant variations in the levels of interest across different groups of young people – specifically their sociodemographic backgrounds (gender and social class) and their educational histories. Thus, there is evidence of a statistically significant gender gap with men being more interested in politics than women, and this is one of only two dependent variables where such a gender gap is revealed. Those from middle class managerial/professional households are significantly more interested than their working class counterparts. However, it is current educational status which has the strongest bearing of all the independent variables considered, and those who had chosen to prolong full-time study are much more interested in political affairs than those who had left full-time study.

Despite their professed interest in politics, the young people in our survey seem rather insecure in their knowledge and understanding of British politics, lacking personal, internal efficacy (Westholme and Niemi 1986). The larger group of young people seem secure in their knowledge of political parties when it comes to deciding how to vote at election times (52%), although a sizeable minority (46%) claim that they do not. However, young people feel considerably less at ease in terms of their knowledge and understanding of politics in general; nearly half (47%) declare that they do not feel they know enough about politics (against only 24% who feel confident in this respect), and a similar sized group (50%) doubt their understanding of what is going on in government and politics (only 19% consider themselves to be well-equipped to appreciate such matters). As Table 2 indicates, there are again some important differences across our groups of young people, with women, those from predominantly working class households, those holding lower level educational qualifications and those who have left full-time education all exhibiting less confidence in terms of their knowledge and understanding of political affairs.

External efficacy

Today's generation of 18-year-olds seem to lack external efficacy[11] and are doubtful about their abilities to gain access and influence over the political process – reflecting the findings from other previous studies (White, Bruce, and Ritchie 2000; Diplock et al. 2002; Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002; O'Toole 2003). Considerably more young

Table 2. Influences on young people's political engagement.

Dependent variable	Predictors	*B*	*Beta*	*Sig.*
Political interest	*Constant*	−0.671		0.000
	Male	**0.213**	**0.106**	**0.001**
	BME	0.059	0.019	0.535
	Having qualifications	0.121	0.058	0.061
	In full-time education	**0.523**	**0.242**	**0.000**
	Managerial/professional	**0.320**	**0.158**	**0.000**
Internal efficacy – confidence in personal knowledge and understanding of politics	*Constant*	−0.631		0.000
	Male	**0.407**	**0.202**	**0.000**
	BME	−0.110	−0.035	0.275
	Having qualifications	**0.142**	**0.067**	**0.036**
	In full-time education	**0.393**	**0.181**	**0.000**
	Managerial/professional	**0.184**	**0.091**	**0.005**
External efficacy – confidence in the political system	*Constant*	−0.210		0.026
	Male	0.011	0.005	0.880
	BME	**−0.282**	**−0.092**	**0.010**
	Having qualifications	*0.081*	*0.039*	*0.278*
	In full-time education	**0.190**	**0.088**	**0.017**
	Managerial/professional	0.119	0.059	0.103
Faith in the electoral process	*Constant*	−0.374		0.000
	Male	0.112	0.056	0.087
	BME	**0.205**	**0.067**	**0.042**
	Having qualifications	**0.157**	**0.075**	**0.022**
	In full-time education	**0.248**	**0.116**	**0.001**
	Managerial/professional	0.065	0.032	0.323
Perceptions of the value of elections	*Constant*	−0.378		0.000
	Male	0.065	0.032	0.322
	BME	−0.162	−0.052	0.107
	Having qualifications	0.091	0.044	0.179
	In full-time education	**0.292**	**0.136**	**0.000**
	Managerial/professional	**0.258**	**0.129**	**0.000**
Support for the principle of voting	*Constant*	−0.431		0.000
	Male	0.012	0.006	0.855
	BME	0.100	0.033	0.313
	Having qualifications	**0.214**	**0.103**	**0.002**
	In full-time education	**0.275**	**0.127**	**0.000**
	Managerial/professional	**0.216**	**0.108**	**0.001**
Effectiveness of political parties and politicians	*Constant*	−0.238		0.012
	Male	−0.037	−0.018	0.622
	BME	0.022	0.007	0.853
	Having qualifications	**0.225**	**0.107**	**0.004**
	In full-time education	**0.164**	**0.076**	**0.045**
	Managerial/professional	0.001	0.001	0.987
Trust in political parties and politicians	*Constant*	−0.140		0.137
	Male	0.110	0.055	0.139
	BME	**−0.276**	**−0.087**	**0.018**
	Having qualifications	0.117	0.056	0.132
	In full-time education	−0.014	−0.007	0.860
	Managerial/professional	0.105	0.052	0.162

Note: Figures in bold are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

people agree (51%) than disagree (15%) that 'Young people like me have no say in what the government does', suggesting a significant fatalistic outlook has descended upon this generation. There is even greater pessimism with respect to the item, 'There aren't enough opportunities for young people like me to influence political parties', with 61% agreeing with this statement, compared to only 7% who disagreed with it.

As Table 2 reveals, there are some important differences within this youth group, however. Those who remain in full-time education feel less marginalised from the political process than do their counterparts who have chosen to leave formal education. Interestingly, this is one of only three dependent variables in which ethnicity exerts a statistically significant impact, and young people from BME groups are more dubious about their prospects for influencing the political process than are white youth respondents.

Faith in the democratic process

Interestingly, and despite these feelings of general political powerlessness and low external efficacy, the data from the survey reveal that young people do appear to be supportive of the notion of elections. The larger group of young people feel that elections keep politicians broadly accountable to citizens (43% as opposed to 31%) and provide a vehicle through which they are compelled to listen to (50%) and engage in talk with voters (53%). Given the concerns of decision makers (Ministry of Justice 2007) with respect to young people's engagement with the formal political process, and with the level of youth turnout witnessed at the UK General Election in 2010, these data suggest that this group of 18-years-olds have somewhat more faith in elections than we might have expected. Again, there are some important attitudinal differences displayed within this generational group. Education plays a crucial role in structuring attitudes for this variable, with full-time students as well as those holding higher level qualifications significantly more supportive of elections than their contemporaries (Table 2). Interestingly, there is evidence of an ethnicity gap for this '*Faith in the electoral process*' variable, with BME youth groups more positive about elections than white respondents. This accords with the findings of the Youth Citizenship Commission's quantitative study which found that white respondents were less attached to the idea of voting than their contemporaries from BME groups (Tonge, Mycock, and Jeffery 2012). Differentiation along cultural lines is further supported by evidence from O'Loughlin and Gillespie's recent qualitative work which has revealed that young British Muslims are 'committed to the idea of democracy' (2012, 122), although nonetheless uncertain about how to access and effectively engage with democratic channels.

However, although they feel elections provide a mechanism through which to link professional politicians and citizens, it is also the case that young people feel strongly that the actual *value* of elections is somewhat limited. Although they acknowledge that elections are important, a majority (57%) of respondents consider that 'although elections allow voters to express their opinions, they don't really change anything', and a sizable minority (32%) consequently consider elections to be a 'big waste of time and money'. However, these figures are not uniform. As Table 2 reveals, those young people from predominantly middle class households are significantly less sceptical of the value of elections than are their working class contemporaries; furthermore, remaining in (full-time) education appears to temper any doubts harboured about the electoral process.

There is considerably more faith invested by these young people in the broad principle of voting. For instance, they are twice as likely (45%) than not (22%) to have an appreciation of civic duty, and by a large margin (55–15%), agree with the statement that 'I would only consider I have the right to complain about the government if I voted in the General Election'. Moreover, a majority feel that voting could be a broadly satisfying experience (52%). Again, social class and educational career are most likely to exert impact here. Those from broadly middle class backgrounds, those who had attained higher level qualifications and those who had opted to remain in full-time education were considerably more positively predisposed to the principle of voting than other young people.

Attitudes to the political parties and politicians

As we have seen, although young people are broadly supportive of elections and of the democratic process, they are doubtful that elections have the capacity to accomplish meaningful social impact and change. In part, this may be explained by their collective perceptions of the effectiveness of professional politicians. For instance, as the data in the Appendix 1 reveals ('*Effectiveness of political parties and politicians*') young citizens are more likely to disagree than agree that the political class is able to adequately represent citizens and govern effectively. This view is shared across the different youth groups; however, those young people who have opted to leave full-time education and those with fewer and lower level qualifications are significantly more dubious of the effectiveness of professional politicians than are their contemporaries.

Perhaps more worrying for the political class, our data reveal a deep aversion towards formal professional politics, and to the political actors that inhabit this world, reflecting what Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion have characterised as a lack of 'diffuse trust' (2010, 422).[12] Appendix 1 includes details of eight items that we included within the survey to measure young people's perceptions of these professional politicians and the main political parties. The results reveal for instance, that 75% consider that 'there is often a big difference between what a party promises it will do and what it actually does when it wins an election', 65% claim that 'parties are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions', while 62% agree that 'those elected to parliament soon lose touch with people'. The data in Table 2 indicate that young people did not discriminate on the basis of their gender, their social class background or their educational status and achievements; the only differences noted in the survey were that white respondents demonstrated less aversion to the political parties than did those from minority ethnic groups. However, the general perception of political parties and politicians across the sample remains overwhelmingly negative.

The focus group data reinforce the suspicion that young people have of professional politicians and shed further light on where this scepticism comes from. The general consensus was that the political parties and candidates only really attempt to communicate with people prior to elections in order to win votes and compete for political power, a strategy which was perceived to be overly cynical by many of our focus group participants. Furthermore, there was a very strongly expressed and shared view that these political players are dishonest and deceitful. These positions are typified by the following comments:

- *… they all say there going to do something then once they get voted in the do the opposite*
- *i feel that they are just people spouting false promises*

- *they promise so much but give so little. they use there power to minipulate the situation.*
- *… In politics, NO, there's noone I admire. I think they all lie and deceive, and never fulfill their promises. Take Nnick Clegg for example. You're not safe to trust anybody in politics*
- *they can say what they want to get into power. once they have the office its a totally different ball game unfortunately*
- *… it feels like they'll say anything to get you to vote for them*
- *they say they listen to the public but really they don't*
- *They dont listen, they want votes and power and no responsibility for the disadvantages the public face*
- *… [politicians] all bend the truth to get where they need to be.*

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented evidence to suggest that, contrary to the common stereotype of a politically apathetic generation, young people are interested in politics, and do have faith in the democratic process. Nonetheless, it would appear that the political system and the established parties and politicians that dominate it, are together failing to provide the stimuli necessary to encourage young people to engage with formal politics. In this key respect, our data mirrors the findings reported elsewhere (Kimberlee 2002; Hay 2007; Sloam 2007; Hay and Stoker 2009; Youth Citizenship Commission 2009; Berry 2012). Furthermore, professional politicians tend not to champion the policy issues prioritised by the current youth generation who feel relatively ignored and marginalised as a consequence (O'Toole 2003; Furlong and Cartmel 2012; Mycock and Tonge 2012). As a result of the interplay of these factors, young people's recent experience of their first general election in 2010 has therefore left them feeling somewhat disheartened and frustrated. Indeed, our study has revealed a considerable aversion to formal, professional politics and to the political classes who are charged with conducting politics on young people's behalf – a finding that corresponds with earlier research (Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest 2005; Stoker 2006; Sloam 2007; Hay and Stoker 2009; Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion 2010; Farthing 2010).

However, young 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,[13] 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. This is despite the complex and individualised lives that today's generation of young people lead (Giddens 1991; Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Sloam 2012), and which some (Bauman 1992) have claimed serve to reduce the relevance and the usefulness of categories such as social class or gender, when people are increasingly looking to form their identities using symbolic concepts which they share with others (and which are culturally produced).

The data reveal some evidence to support the hypothesis that ethnicity impacts on young people's political outlook. BME youth groups are somewhat dubious about their prospects for influencing the political process and are more sceptical of political parties as mechanisms for representation than are white respondents. They are, however, somewhat more supportive of elections, reflecting the lines of cultural differentiation revealed in the

findings from O'Loughlin and Gillespie (2012). In line with the hypothesis, there is evidence of a gender gap, although effects are limited to political interest and internal efficacy; young men are more interested than women in politics and have greater confidence in their knowledge and understanding of politics.

By way of contrast, social class exerts a considerably greater impact on young people's political engagement. Those from predominantly middle class and professional households appear to be much more interested in political affairs than are young people from broadly working class backgrounds. Young people also have greater confidence in their own knowledge and understanding of such matters, are less critical of elections, and are more committed to the democratic process. These findings support the hypothesis that social class impacts on young people's political engagement, and are in line with evidence from other research studies, such as the UK Youth Citizenship Commission's recent study of 11- to 25-year-olds (2009), and research from Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest (2005).

Of the range of independent variables examined, the two that have most bearing on young people's political engagement are both educational in nature – whether or not respondents have remained in full-time education, as well as level and type of educational qualifications held. Again, this accords with our initial hypotheses. Those in possession of higher level educational qualifications are significantly more confident in their own knowledge and understanding of politics than are their less qualified counterparts, and tend to feel voting and elections offer valuable avenues towards representation. Whilst they too hold an antipathy towards the political parties and the professional politicians, they are noticeably less sceptical than are their contemporaries who have achieved lower level educational qualifications.

However, the results indicate that educational status exerts particularly strong impacts across all bar one of the eight selected dependent variables; it is only with respect to the strength of their negative evaluation of the effectiveness of politicians and the political parties that both students and non-students alike are in broadly equal agreement. In all other respects, staying on in the (full-time) education system has a clear and consistent impact on attitudes to politics, to the democratic system and to young people's place within it.

The conclusion that we must draw from these findings is that young people feel disenchanted by their recent experiences of formal politics and remain relatively disengaged from the political process and from democratic institutions and players. These results suggest therefore that government social policy which addresses socio-economic-related issues in general, and educational policy in particular, may have some impact on young people's engagement with democratic institutions and with the political process. Policy which succeeds in expanding educational participation and reducing social class differences and social exclusion, may all contribute in helping to at least limit the drift towards further political disengagement among youth in Britain.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Paul Carroll and Sarah Pope at Ipsos MORI, both for their preparation of the data and for their general contribution to the project.

Funding

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [RES-000-22-4450].

Notes

1. For instance, in the aftermath of the urban civil unrest during August 2011, UK Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a speech in which he represented the events as evidence of a 'slow-motion moral collapse' and characterised the over-whelmingly young participants as 'thugs… (who) do not represent us', operating with a 'twisted moral code' and a 'complete absence of self-restraint' (Cameron 2011).
2. http://www.ipsos-mori.com.
3. We recognise the limitations of this method of measurement of social class in that it is based not on objective personal circumstances but on each respondent's knowledge of the occupational situation of others. Nonetheless, as most respondents would not yet have reached their class of destination, and in the absence of other objective data, we feel this method provides a useful approximation of the social class of respondents.
4. This second group includes the original categories of: intermediate occupations; small employers and own account workers; lower supervisory and technical occupations; semi-routine occupations; routine occupations and never worked and long-term unemployed.
5. Respondents were asked to indicate the level and number of qualifications attained, and their responses were assessed against the *National Qualifications Framework* for England, Northern Ireland and Wales (http://www.educationforhealth.org/data/files/qca_framework.pdf).
6. Originally only 13 focus groups were scheduled. However, a second 'White' focus group was conducted because the first was found not to have recorded in full. Usable data from the original white group were, however, still included, and are reported in this article.
7. For the purposes of establishing this group, 'rural' was defined in line with *Office for National Statistics* guidelines (http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/products/area-classifications/rural-urban-definition-and-la/index.html).
8. This is the measure commonly used by opinion polling companies such as Ipsos MORI in the design of their exit polls for general elections.
9. In Figure 1, each bar represents the proportion of respondents who mentioned the item anywhere within their written response.
10. Quotes used in this article are from the original text responses typed by participants during the online focus groups and have not been altered to improve spelling or grammar. The exception to this is where we use [] as insertions which are designed to help clarify the context in which the response was given.
11. External efficacy as used here relates to the degree of confidence that young people have in the capacity of the political system to respond to people's actions, and the extent to which they themselves feel their own actions might shape the political process (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Almond and Verba 1963; Westholme and Niemi 1986)
12. Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion contrast this as more than 'specific trust' which involves an evaluation of political elites; instead, 'diffuse trust' is more values-based, 'expressing public attitudes towards regime level objects – for example, the values of a political party, integrity of politicians – regardless of their performance' (2010, 422).
13. For instance, key studies such as the Hansard Society's 'Audit of Political Engagement' series (annual since 2004) tend to separate-out the findings from key subgroups within the all-adult population including age, ethnicity, gender and social class. However, the small youth sub-samples (167 in 2013) do not allow similar sociodemographic analyses for this particular 18- to 24-year-old group (Hansard Society 2013).

References

Almond, G., and S. Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bauman, Z. 1992. *Imitations of Postmodernity*. New York: Routledge.

Beck, U., A. Giddens, and S. Lash. 1994. *Reflexive Modernization. Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bennett, J. 2013. "Moralising Class: A Discourse Analysis of the Mainstream Political Response to Occupy and the August 2011 British Riots." *Discourse and Society* 24 (1): 27–45. doi:10.1177/0957926512463634.

Berry, C. 2012. *The Rise of Gerontocracy? Addressing the Intergenerational Democratic Deficit*. London: Intergenerational Foundation.

Bird, K., T. Saalfeld, A. M. Wüst, eds. 2011. *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science.
Butler, D., and D. Kavanagh. 1997. *The British General Election of 1997*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press.
Cameron, D. 2011. *PM's Speech on the Fightback After the Riots, 15 August 2011*. London: Cabinet Office and Prime Minister's Office. Accessed July 3, 2013. http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots.
Campbell, A., G. Gurin, and W. Miller. 1954. *The Voter Decides*. Oxford: Row, Peterson.
Clarke, H. D., D. Sanders, M. C. Stewart, and P. Whiteley. 2004. *Political Choice in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/019924488X.001.0001.
Corbin, J., and A. Strauss. 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.
Curtice, J. 2005. "Turnout: Electors Stay Home – Again." *Parliamentary Affairs* 58 (4): 776–785. doi:10.1093/pa/gsi066.
Dalton, R. J. 2009. *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*. Revised ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
Dermody, J., S. Hanmer-Lloyd, and R. Scullion. 2010. "Young People and Voting Behaviour: Alienated Youth and (or) an Interested and Critical Citizenry?" *European Journal of Marketing* 44 (3/4): 421–435. doi:10.1108/03090561011020507.
Diplock, S., B. Gosschalk, B. Marshall, and K. Kaur-Ballagan. 2002. "Non-Voters, Political Disconnection and Parliamentary Democracy." *Parliamentary Affairs* 55 (4): 715–730. doi:10.1093/parlij/55.4.715.
Fahmy, E. 2003. "A Disconnected Generation: Encouraging Young People's Political Participation." *Youth and Policy* 81: 1–20.
Farthing, R. 2010. "The Politics of Youthful Antipolitics: Representing the "Issue" of Youth Participation in Politics." *Journal of Youth Studies* 13 (2): 181–195. doi:10.1080/13676260903233696.
Flanagan, C., A. Finlay, L. Gallay, and T. Kim. 2012. "Political Incorporation and the Protracted Transition to Adulthood: The Need for New Institutional Inventions." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 29–46. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr044.
Furlong, A., and F. Cartmel. 2007. *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. 2nd ed. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Furlong, A., and F. Cartmel. 2012. "Social Change and Political Engagement among Young People: Generation and the 2009/2010 British Election Survey." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 13–28. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr045.
Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Halvorsen, S. 2012. "Beyond the Network? Occupy London and the Global Movement." *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 11 (3–4): 427–433. doi:10.1080/14742837.2012.708835.
Hansard Society. 2013. *An Audit of Political Engagement 10*. London: The Hansard Society.
Harrop, M. 2001. "An Apathetic Landslide: The British General Election of 2001." *Government and Opposition* 36: 295–313. doi:10.1111/1477-7053.00067.
Hay, C. 2007. *Why We Hate Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Hay, C., and G. Stoker. 2009. "Revitalising Politics: Have We Lost the Plot?" *Representation* 45 (3): 225–236. doi:10.1080/00344890903129681.
Heath, A. F., S. D. Fisher, D. Sanders, and M. Sobolewska. 2011. "Ethnic Heterogeneity in the Social Bases of Voting at the 2010 British General Election." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 21 (2): 255–277. doi:10.1080/17457289.2011.562611.
Henn, M., and N. Foard. 2012. "Young People, Political Participation and Trust in Britain." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 47–67. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr046.
Henn, M., and M. Weinstein. 2006. "Young People and Political (In)activism: Why Don't Young People Vote?" *Policy and Politics* 34 (3): 517–534. doi:10.1332/030557306777695316.
Henn, M., M. Weinstein, and S. Forrest. 2005. "Uninterested Youth? Young People's Attitudes towards Party Politics in Britain." *Political Studies* 53 (3): 556–578. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2005.00544.x.
Henn, M., M. Weinstein, and D. Wring. 2002. "A Generation Apart? Youth and Political Participation in Britain?" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4 (2): 167–192. doi:10.1111/1467-856X.t01-1-00001.

Holmes, M., and N. Manning. 2013. "He's Snooty 'Im': Exploring 'White Working Class' Political Disengagement." *Citizenship Studies* 17 (3–4): 479–490. doi:10.1080/13621025.2013.793082.
Hopkins, P., L. Todd, and Newcastle Occupation. 2011. "Occupying Newcastle University: Student Resistance to Government Spending Cuts in England." *The Geographical Journal* 178 (2): 104–109. doi:10.1111/j.1475-4959.2011.00436.x.
Ipsos MORI. 2001. *How Britain Voted in 2001*. Accessed July 3, 2013. http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=1231&view=wide.
Ipsos MORI. 2005. *How Britain Voted in 2005*. Accessed July 3, 2013. http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2252&view=wide.
Ipsos MORI. 2010. *How Britain Voted in 2010*. Accessed July 3, 2013. http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2613&view=wide.
Jowell, R., and A. Park. 1998. *Young People, Politics and Citizenship: A Disengaged Generation?* London: Citizenship Foundation.
Kimberlee, R. H. 2002. "Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?" *Journal of Youth Studies* 5 (1): 85–98. doi:10.1080/13676260120111788.
Kisby, B., and J. Sloam. 2012. "Citizenship, Democracy and Education in the UK: Towards a Common Framework for Citizenship Lessons in the Four Home Nations." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 68–89. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr047.
Marsh, D., T. O'Toole, and S. Jones. 2007. *Young People and Politics in the UK. Apathy or Alienation?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Ministry of Justice. 2007. *The Governance of Britain*. Accessed July 3, 2013. http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm71/7170/7170.pdf.
Mycock, A., and J. Tonge. 2012. "The *Party* Politics of Youth Citizenship and Democratic Engagement." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 138–161. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr053.
Norris, P. 2003. "Young People and Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?" Paper presented at the *Council of Europe Symposium, Young People and Democratic Institutions: From Disillusionment to Participation*, Strasbourg, November 27–28.
Norris, P. 2011. *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
O'Loughlin, B., and M. Gillespie. 2012. "Dissenting Citizenship? Young People and Political Participation in the Media–Security Nexus." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 115–137. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr055.
O'Toole, T. 2003. "Engaging With Young People's Conceptions of the Political." *Children's Geographies* 1 (1): 71–90. doi:10.1080/14733280302179.
O'Toole, T., M. Lister, D. Marsh, S. Jones, and A. McDonagh. 2003. "Tuning Out or Left Out? Participation and Non-Participation among Young People." *Contemporary Politics* 9 (1): 45–61. doi:10.1080/1356977032000072477.
O'Toole, T., D. Marsh, and S. Jones. 2003. "Political Literacy Cuts Both Ways: The Politics of Non-Participation among Young People." *The Political Quarterly* 74 (3): 349–360. doi:10.1111/1467-923X.00544.
Park, A. 2004. "Has Modern Politics Disenchanted The Young?" In *British Social Attitudes: The 21st Report*, edited by A. Park, K. Curtis, C. Thompson, C. Bromley, and M. Phillips, 23–48. London: Sage.
Pattie, C., P. Seyd, and P. Whiteley. 2004. *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Phelps, E. 2012. "Understanding Electoral Turnout among British Young People: A Review of the Literature." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 281–299. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr056.
Power Inquiry. 2006. *Power to the People*. New York: The Power Inquiry.
Quintelier, E. 2007. "Differences in Political Participation between Young and Old People." *Contemporary Politics* 13 (2): 165–180. doi:10.1080/13569770701562658.
Russell, A. 2004. "The Truth about Youth? Media Portrayals of Young People and Politics in Britain." *Journal of Public Affairs* 4 (4): 347–354. doi:10.1002/pa.197.
Russell, A., E. Fieldhouse, K. Purdam, and V. Kalra. 2002. *Voter Engagement and Young People*. London: The Electoral Commission.
Sloam, J. 2007. "Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK." *Parliamentary Affairs* 60 (4): 548–567. doi:10.1093/pa/gsm035.
Sloam, J. 2012. "'Rejuvenating Democracy?' Young People and the 'Big Society' Project." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 90–114. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr051.

Stoker, G. 2006. *Why Politics Matters: Making Democracy Work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Stoker, G. 2011. "Anti-Politics in Britain." In *Developments in British Politics Nine*, edited by R. Heffernan, P. Cowley, and C. Hay, 152–173. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Swaddle, K., and A. Heath. 1989. "Official and Reported Turnout in the British General Election of 1987." *British Journal of Political Science* 19 (4): 537–551. http://www.jstor.org/stable/193989.
Tenn, S. 2007. "The Effect of Education on Voter Turnout." *Political Analysis* 15 (4): 446–464. doi:10.1093/pan/mpm012.
Theocharis, Y. 2012. "Cuts, Tweets, Solidarity and Mobilisation: How the Internet Shaped the Student Occupations." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 162–194. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr049.
Tilley, J. R. 2003. "Party Identification in Britain: Does Length of Time in the Electorate Affect Strength of Partisanship?" *British Journal of Political Science* 33 (2): 332–344. doi:10.1017/S0007123403000152.
Tonge, J., A. Mycock, and B. Jeffery. 2012. "Does Citizenship Education Make Young People Better-Engaged Citizens?" *Political Studies* 60 (3): 578–602. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00931.x.
Wattenburg, M. 2008. *Is Voting for Young People?* New York: Pearson Longman.
Westholme, A., and R. G. Niemi. 1986. "Youth Unemployment and Political Alienation." *Youth and Society* 18 (1): 55–80. doi:10.1177/0044118X86018001004.
White, C., S. Bruce, and J. Ritchie. 2000. *Young People's Politics Political Interest and Engagement Amongst 14- To 24-Year-Olds*. New York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
Whiteley, P., H. Clarke, D. Sanders, and M. Stewart. 2001. "Turnout." In *Britain Votes 2001*, edited by P. Norris. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Williamson, A., and F. Fallon. 2011. "Transforming the Future Parliament through the Effective Use of Digital Media." *Parliamentary Affairs* 64 (4): 781–792. doi:10.1093/pa/gsr028.
Youth Citizenship Commission. 2009. *Making the Connection: Building Youth Citizenship in the UK*. London: Stationery Office.

Appendix 1. Dependent variables

Summary dependent variables were derived using factor scores extracted from principal components analyses of multiple items from our questionnaire. The following table shows the indicators used to construct these derived variables, and the percentages of young people offering positive and negative responses to these questions.

Derived variables	Original indicators	Percentage	Percentage
Political interest		Some or more interest	Not interested
	Q1a: How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics?	63	12
	Q2a: How interested were you in the general election that was held on 6 May last year?	64	14
Internal efficacy		Confident	Not confident
	Q5: How confident are you that you know enough about political parties when it comes to deciding how to vote at election times?	52	46
	To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?	Agree	Disagree
	Q13_6: I don't feel that I know enough about what is going on in politics	24	47
	Q18_5: It often is difficult for me to understand what is going on in government and politics	50	19

Appendix 1. (*Continued*)

Derived variables	Original indicators	Percentage	Percentage
External efficacy	*To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*	Agree	Disagree
	Q18_1: Young people like me have no say in what the government does	51	15
	Q18_7: There aren't enough opportunities for young people like me to influence political parties	61	7
Faith in the electoral process	*Please indicate how you feel about elections here in Britain generally. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements*.	Agree	Disagree
	Q15a_1: Elections help to keep politicians accountable for the promises they make	43	31
	Q15a_3: Elections give voters an opportunity to tell politicians what they think is really important	53	18
	Q15a_5: Having regular elections forces politicians to listen carefully to public opinion	50	20
Perceptions of the value of elections	*Please indicate how you feel about elections here in Britain generally. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements*.	Agree	Disagree
	Q15a_2: Elections allow voters to express their opinions but don't really change anything	57	15
	Q15a_4: All things considered, most elections are just a big waste of time and money	32	33
Support for the principle of voting	*Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements*.	Agree	Disagree
	Q16_1: I (would) feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote / if I voted	52	14
	Q16_2: By voting / If I voted, I feel as if I can / could really help to change the way that Britain is governed	36	29
	Q16_3: I would be seriously neglecting my duty as a citizen if I didn't vote	45	22
	Q16_5: I would only consider I have the right to complain about the government if I voted in the General Election	55	15
Effectiveness of political parties and politicians	*Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements*.	Agree	Disagree
	Q17a_1: Political parties are effective organisations for changing the lives of people for the better	21	31
	Q17a_4: My member of parliament tries hard to look after the interests of people in my constituency	24	17
	Q17a_7: Parties generally do a good job in finding suitable people to run for parliament	22	29
	Q18_2: Political parties do a good job of listening to young people's concerns, and then responding to them positively	12	51

Appendix 1. (*Continued*)

Derived variables	Original indicators	Percentage Agree	Percentage Disagree
Trust in political parties and politicians	*Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements*.		
	Q17a_2: There is often a big difference between what a *party* promises it will do and what it actually does when it wins an election	75	3
	Q17a_3: In general, political parties are more interested in winning elections that in governing afterwards	65	9
	Q17a_5: The main political parties in Britain don't offer voters real choices in elections because their policies are pretty much all the same	40	18
	Q17a_6: Political parties do more to divide the country than unite it	47	12
	Q17a_8: In elections, political parties don't tell people about the really important problems facing the country	48	16
	Q18_3: Governments don't really care what young people like me think	54	14
	Q18_4: Those elected to parliament soon lose touch with people	62	6
	Q18_6: Parties are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions	65	8