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What inspires people to engage with politics, campaigning or activism,  
at a local and national level and at what age does this engagement  
take place, compared to current views of young people?

by

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## Abstract

In this mixed method study the motivations of individual's involvement in politics and campaigning are explored. Through an online survey (249 respondents, aged between 14 and 82), and two focus groups with young people participating in further education key questions were investigated; the nature of participants involvement with politics and campaigning and the key influences that initially prompted them become active. Through the development of this research project the use of social media by politicians and campaign organisations became a significant issue requiring further investigation. The main findings fall into these three categories.

In relation to individuals motivations for engagement the results showed that these can be categorised into seven key themes, which are: 1. to become more involved in party politics or a campaign, usually as a way of increasing knowledge. 2. identifying that a parties' manifesto aims matches an individual's personal beliefs. 3. The necessity to be member of a political party after being selected to stand as a candidate for a particular party. 4. An individual's desire for a change from the current situation and wanting to assist with enabling that change to happen. 5. Being passionate about a specific cause or issue and wanting to actively support that cause. 6. The social aspect that comes from membership of a political party or campaign group, by meeting and interacting with others that hold similar views. 7. The influence of family, either through discussion regarding politics and campaigning growing up or to support a family members with their own campaigning activities. Individuals' history and previous political or campaign actions stemmed from the seven themes.

The use of social media by politicians, political parties and campaign organisations is increasing, but it is currently not as effective as more traditional forms of campaigning. Young people are more likely to use social media as a way of campaigning or accessing political information than their older counterparts.

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## Introduction

In this dissertation the areas of political activities and campaigning will be identified and discussed, with the aim of gaining insights into people's motivations for engaging in these activities and how social media can impact this.

I initially decided on this research topic when I stood as a candidate in the United Kingdom parliamentary elections in 2016. During the run up to the election I attended several hustings to debate issues with the other candidates, spoke to constituents and the press and I was repeatedly asked what could be done about young people's political apathy. Initially this surprised me as many of the events that I attended had been organised by young people themselves. The schools I visited held very successful mock elections within the schools and engaged the student in the political process and debates.

During my election campaign I had the opportunity to meet with groups of Brownies (girls aged 7 to 10) and Senior Section (Girl guides ages 14- 26) as part of the Girl Guiding campaign 'Girls matter: Hear our Voice'. The aim of this campaign was to encourage and empower girls and young women to 'make their voices count' through education and discussion about democracy and politics. Even I was surprised at how keen and enthusiastic about the topic of politics and democracy some of the Brownies were at such a young age.

I have been involved in forms of youth democracy since the age of fourteen when I started attending my local Youth Forum, and was then elected into the Youth County Council and the UK Youth Parliament. During my career to date as a Youth Worker, with a specialism in participation work, I have supported young people to have a voice locally and nationally and engage with local politicians and decisions makers.

I have always found that young people are keen and enthusiastic to engage with these projects and benefit from having access to these opportunities, even those young people that claim to have no interest in politics. All of these activities and organisations are A-political and specific party politics are not allowed to be discussed.

While undertaking this research I was working for County Council, as a Youth Participation Worker, supporting the Youth County Council (aged 11 to 19) and local youth forums and school councils. During this time I supported the Youth County Council on their 'Curriculum for Life' campaign, whose aim was to increase the level of PSHE (personal, social and health education) in schools, including more focus on understanding politics and the democratic process. The campaign was chosen as part of the Youth County Council elections which take place in schools, colleges and the community across the county. In the 2015 Youth County Council elections 30,039 young people voted and of these 4268 voted for the Curriculum for Life campaign, which in part calls for education in schools about democracy and politics to encourage young people to become more politically aware and active in the future.

The overall research question devised is:

What inspires people to engage with politics, campaigning or activism, at a local and national level compared to current views of young people?

The sub questions developed to explore this further are:

- What inspired individuals to engage with politics, campaigning or activism?

Gaining an understanding of what initially inspires people to become involved with party politics or campaigns would provide evidence to enable practitioners, like myself working with young people to use that information to encourage young people to become more active, but focusing on their own personal motivations or interests. This information could provide political parties or campaign organisations with information that could assist them in gaining more support from younger age groups.

- What are young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment?

It was crucial for me to gain an understanding of young people perceptions about politics and campaigning, as young people and their views were the inspiration for the research. As young people nationally campaign for votes at 16 and appear to be very engaged with politics and campaigning generally, this may not be representative of the majority of young people.

### **Context of the research**

- What impact does social media have on engagement with politics and campaigning?

The use of social media has grown amongst both adults and young people. With more politicians, political parties and campaign organisations using social media in an attempt to communicate with the public. Establishing if this form of communication encouraged wider participation of both young people and the general public would provide evidence of the effectiveness and help us understand how worthwhile campaigning using social media is.

This research was undertaken in a large county in England which has a selective education system. Areas that have selective education have two main types of schools, Grammar schools and comprehensive schools, which in many cases are now academies.

Grammar schools are schools that select their students after undertaking an exam at the age of 11, known as the 11-plus. The exam consists of an English and Maths paper and a paper on reasoning, which includes questions on verbal and non-verbal reasoning. This county is one of ten Local Education Authorities (LEAs) that the Department of Education classify as having a wholly selective education system and in the South East 12% of students attend a grammar school, which is the highest percentage across the country.

Grammar schools have a much lower percentage of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) 0.04% compared to 2.3% in secondary modern schools (Bolton, 2016). This is not surprising due to the nature of the entrance exams, these can disadvantage those students with SEN. To address this schools can apply for

support for students by either making reasonable adjustments to the test or allowing extra time in the exams, if the school can evidence the students' needs to the LEA.

Grammar schools also have a lower rate of students on free school meals than other schools, which in the past has been used as an indicator of poverty or deprivation, although this has been criticized in recent years as not being accurate.

Academies started to emerge in the UK in 2002, in the form of City Academies to tackle the problem of underperforming schools in inner city areas. The academy format was then seen as a solution to raise educational standards across a wider number of secondary and primary schools (Chapman, 2013). Academy schools are publicly funded, independent schools, who receive their funding directly from the government, rather than the local council. Some academies receive additional funding from sponsorship from businesses, faith or voluntary groups or universities.

As academies are independent of the LEAs they do not have to teach their students the national curriculum, but still have to follow the same rules as other schools in regards to Special Educational Needs (SEN). Free Schools, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools are also included in the definition of academies. Schools can work together and form academy Federations or chains.

In 2010, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government published The Importance of Teaching, The Schools White Paper. This paper laid out the government plans to extend the academies programme and make it easier for schools to become academies. At the time of writing 84% of schools in the county this research was undertaken were academies or had submitted applications to become an academy.

The first focus group undertaken with young people for this research was in a very high achieving Grammar school and the second focus group took place in a local academy school.

This paper is organised in the following sections:

1. Literature review:

In this section I will explore and critically evaluate the literature relating to the research questions and my research findings

2. Research Methodology

In this section I will explain the Methodology and how I undertook the research. Looking at the tools I used and how the original plan for this research developed during the course of the project. This includes the development of the initial survey and the responses received. This section also includes the details about the focus groups undertaken.

3. Data analysis

In this section I will analyse the results of the data gathered throughout the research. I will identify key themes and show how these link to my research questions



#### 4. Conclusions

In this section I will provide an overview of the key findings from the research

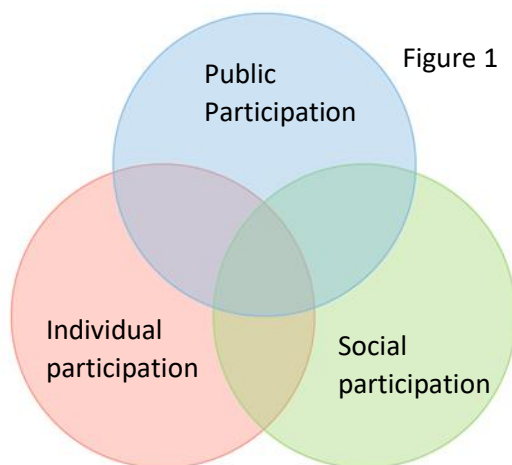
## Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to provide a critical evaluation of the literature that has been published in relation to the perceptions of young people about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment. The literature is initially focused on the general engagement of young people in relation to politics and campaigning, including possible inspirations for encouraging engagement with political activities. The third part of this section focuses on the use of social media as a tool to develop opportunities for individuals to engage with political institutions and campaigns. As well as using academic texts, the literature review includes biographies and relevant aimed at the popular market.

The literature review is structured around the research questions.

What inspires people to engage with politics, campaigning or activism, at a local and national level compared to current views of young people?

When we examine the involvement of young people, it is often described as Youth Participation and this can be broken down into three different forms of participation. Social, which is involvement in collective activities, for example community or religious groups or sports teams. Political which focuses on participation in democratic structures and is often referred to as public or civic participation and finally, Individual incorporates the choices people make, for example the products purchased or the charities people choose to support (BYC, 2015).



This is based on earlier work by Brodie et al (2011) which uses Public participation, as opposed to political. The advantage of using these categories in this way is that it can be seen that some participation activities have overlaps between the different categories as can be seen in Figure 1. An example of social activity is volunteering at a disability swimming club. Volunteering is popular among young people as it gives them opportunities to learn skills and gain experiences for their CV or UCAS applications.

Being a member of a youth council or forum sits between social and public, as young people's involvement is volunteering within the community, whilst also being part of a democratic youth organisation. Individual participation includes activities such as boycotting a particular brand.

### **Non-party political activities of young people**

For many young people their first experience of engaging with politics or campaigning comes in the forms of youth forums or youth councils, on a district or county level. These organisations are designed to be non-party political. This means that young people focus on campaigns and issues within their community, without the

official influence of party political ideologies. "Nationally the first UK Youth Parliament met early 2001 with 215 MYPs. Numerous politicians attended the launch of the body the organisers promised would be a-political –'solely issue based'." (Jeffs, 2005)

These organisation give young people a taste of what being involved in party politics would involve, by giving them opportunities such as standing as candidates in youth elections, meeting with elected officials and different campaigning methods. However, upon turning 18 it is then expected that young people align themselves with a particular political party. The 2016 Audit of political engagement found that only 38% of 18-24 year olds said that they were a 'strong supporter' of a political party. This is much lower than any of the older age groups.

During my own teenage years I was personally active in my local youth forum and county youth council, then later was elected to the UK Youth Parliament. Although some of my fellow council members had formed strong party political views, the majority had not yet aligned with a specific political party when they reached the age of 18.

- What inspired individuals to engage with politics, campaigning or activism?

The inspiration for people to become involved in politics and campaigning can come from a range of sources, depending on an individual's experiences. Understanding what inspires individuals to become active in politics and campaign is important, so that opportunities can be developed in the future to encourage those who would not have participated in the past.

After the 2015 general election Mhairi Black was elected and became the youngest MP (since the Reform Act of 1832) or the "Baby of the House". This led me to read about some other 'babies of the house' through biographies and internet research (Benn, 1994; McSmith, 2011). Although initially my research focused on the age that people become active in politics, reading the real life stories of encouraged me to include the inspiration for engaging in politics and campaigning into my research.

It is important to be aware that the nature of biographies is that they are written by the individual and comes from their own perspective. This can mean that they can be biased and cannot always be trusted as a reliable source of information.

After reading about elected politicians and their early lives, those who are known campaigners or activists that had biographies or autobiographies were selected to identify if their experiences or inspirations were in anyway similar to those in party politics. It was clear from the biographical information that growing up in an environment in which the parents or influential family members are active politically, or participating in one or more specific campaigns can be a key factor to an individual's engagement.

Using Emmeline Pankhurst as an example, she initially became involved in the suffrage movement due to her mother's involvement. "I was fourteen years old when I attended my first suffrage meeting. Returning from

school one day, I met my mother just setting out to a meeting, and I begged her to let me go along” (Pankhurst, 1914. Pg.10). Emmeline’s own daughters later became suffragettes themselves. However, in the later years there became a rift in the family as two of Emmeline’s daughters disagreed with the direction the movement was taking and left, thus causing a rift in the family. Although this is an extreme example, it is something that Pilkington and Pollock (2015, Pg.14) found in the course of their research that having the opportunity to discuss political subjects within the home does not always encourage young people to have similar political views to their family members, but will have a substantial influence on how those young people perceive politics and “research showed that they were likely to have more articulated political views if they were exposed to such discussions in the family.”(2015 Pg.14)

Like Emmeline Pankhurst, Tony Benn’s political career was also influenced by his family’s political activities. While growing up his father was an elected MP for the Liberals and then later the labour party and his mother was a campaigner on a range of issues, including campaigning for the ordination of women. Both his grandfathers were also elected members of parliament. Tony Benn was elected as a Labour MP in 1950 making him the ‘baby of the house’ (1994).

In their 2011 research into the political engagement of young people, Henn and Foard found that 54% of young people who participated, reported that they would discuss politics with their friends and family. This is good news for those young people who have parents or family members to discuss politics and wider issues at home, but for those who do not have these opportunities within their home lives there needed to be other opportunities to allow young people to explore their views and place in the wider world.

Unlike Tony Benn, Bobby Sands motivation for getting involved in politics was due to a more specific issue within his life and community. When he was 18 years old, Bobby Sands joined the IRA after Protestant violence drove his family from their home. In 1981, at the age of 27 Sands was in prison for activities relating to his involvement with the IRA and protesting that he and his fellow prisoners should be treated as political prisoners. Like Emmeline Pankhurst and other woman campaigning for suffrage during the 1900’s, hunger strike was used as an attempt to shame politicians of the day into acknowledging the rights of political prisoners. To this end, Sands was selected as a candidate for a parliamentary by-election as an Anti H-Block candidate in 1981. He won with a narrow margin, making him a ‘baby of the house’, while he was not only incarcerated but also leading a hunger strike, which killed him a month later (McSmith, 2011).

There are many ways to describe or group different political actions, this appears to be the most useful because any possible forms of political action can be clearly, categorised under the four categories: “We may distinguish four kinds of political action: Electoral political participation-voting-..Conventional political activities are traditional, party- related forms of participation...Unconventional activities... often referred to as ‘protest activities’ (e.g. signing a petition, distributing leaflets). Finally Non-normative, illegal political activities.”(Reichert, 2014. Pg.96). Describing political actions in this way allows us to organise the vast range of possible actions into categories.

There are some journalists and writers that are of the opinion that the events like the London riots in 2011 and other violent forms of protest show that young people are dissatisfied with current political systems (Taylor et al, 2011; Riddell, 2011). Through reading biographies of known campaigners it is also clear that historically violence has been used to try to affect a change, for example the Suffrage movement setting fire to post boxes (Pankhurst, 1914). There is also a long history of student groups using violent protests and riots against their university faculty or the communities surrounding their university, when students have been dissatisfied with their situation. The earliest examples of this come from clashes between students and townspeople in Oxford and Cambridge in the thirteenth century, referred to as “town-and-gown clashes”. After the Students’ Representative Council was established in 1884, demonstrations and conflicts continued in Britain sporadically. However, since then there are examples from all over the world of students using violent protests, to highlight dissatisfaction for a particular issues effecting them (Edelman, 2001).

Research from the Rowntree Trust (White et al, 2000) describe three defined latch points that activate political interest in young people. The first looks at how relevant politics is in their lives. As young people become financially independent by moving out of the family home, starting a new job or having a family, politics becomes more relevant to them. The advantage of this is that young people can experience how politics impact them personally and enabling young people to form their own views relevant to their own circumstances. However, many young people are now moving out of the family home at a much older age than they have in the past, meaning that that this political interest is happening much later in their lives than has been seen in previous generations .

There has been extensive research into the reasons that young adults are continuing to live at home until a much older age. MacDonald et al. (2005) shows that for many young people, particularly those in areas where opportunities for work are limited, the barriers to gaining secure and well paid employment can be greater for young people, particularly if they have fewer qualifications and skills. Job insecurity and low income make it more difficult to afford to live independently. This view is supported by Roberts (1997) who discusses the prolonged transitions to uncertain destinations for young people, and suggests that for those young people from lower income households their “likely next steps are into training schemes with the poorest prospects, or unemployment, whereupon the likelihood of failed transitions increases.”(Pg. 357). Roberts also examines the level of family support for those in middle class, higher earning households and shows that within both groups’ young people are needing family support for longer than in previous years when the transition from education into meaningful, secure work was more straightforward.

The recent housing market has meant that even those in higher paid, secure work find it very difficult to live independently, by either renting or buying. This is highlighted by the Francis (2018) in the Independent newspaper: “in 1960, the average first-time buyer was just 23 years old, paying a deposit of £595 on their first home- the equivalent of £12,738 today.” The impact of this is can be seen in the work of Webster et al. (2006) who when examining young people’s housing transitions state “Remaining in the family home is a practical way of displacing and delaying material costs of independent living.”(Pg. 6)

The second latch point identified was the role of family and friends discussing politics and as a result the individual is exposed to information about politics. Information from the television and role models was also highlighted. For those young people who have the opportunity to discuss politics at home with the family they will grow up with an awareness of political issues (Pilkington and Pollock 2015). Unfortunately not all young people grow up in a secure family home, for example children in care. This latch point relies on the family discussing politics at home, if the family are not politically aware or interested this could also be passed onto the younger generations. Similarly if the family are not interested in politics it is possible that they will watch relevant programmes on the television, limiting the young person's exposure to political information at home.

Having the opportunity to participate and become active was identified as the third latch point (White et al, 2000). This included the joining school or youth councils and uniformed organisations, such as the Scouts or Girl Guides. The advantage of this is that young people have the opportunity to experience for themselves democratic processes, for example standing as a candidate in a youth council election. However, these opportunities are limited and if young people have no previous interest in politics or campaigning it may not even occur to them to put themselves forward for such activities. There is also a risk that if the experiences of young people participating in these activities are not positive, for example if their involvement is tokenistic or the organisation use young people's participation as a box ticking exercise and not valued, it can lead to future disengagement (Matthews et al, 1999, Hart, 1992, 1997). Membership of uniform organisations and other groups specifically for young people can provide opportunities for members to experience civic engagement, but "many such groups are ill-suited to the conditions of late modernity (Furlong. Pg.214)".

Membership of single-issue campaign organisations or groups are more popular among younger people, than membership of political parties (Gould, 2015). Furlong and Cartmel (2006, Pg.10) suggest that "The majority of young people feel that party politics have little relevance to their lives, yet at the same time they are politically active in a broader sense." The wide range of issues which young people feel are important to them are not specific to party politics and can concern global issues not just local ones, for example human rights and environmental concerns.

Pressure groups try to influence politics on particular issues, without usually putting forward candidates for election. Coxall (2001) explains the role of pressure groups gaining support for a certain issue by encouraging Members of Parliament to raise the subject with ministers, through parliamentary questions and in the relevant committees. They may also try to have their concern addressed by requesting an MP puts forward an amendment or a bill to go to parliament. Pressure groups also have a role of providing MPs and Parliament with knowledge and expertise that can support their work, as many pressure groups undertake research and feedback on the issues or topics that they are campaigning for.

Using the Women's Institute as a case study it can be seen how an organisation, perceived as having a much older membership has been able to encourage younger women to join, many due to the opportunity to participate in campaigning. The age that women are able to join the Women's Institute is the same age that women are franchised to vote. In England and Wales membership starts at 18, but in Jersey, Guernsey and the

Isle of Man they have votes for 16 year olds, so the age they can join the Women's Institute at 16 years old. Wilkinson and Mulgan (1995) link the decline in younger people voting and the decline in young people joining political parties and the reduction of membership in the Women's Institute. They use this as another example of younger people disengaging with traditional institutions. However, since their paper was produced there has been a surge in new members joining the WI many of whom are younger. Unfortunately the WI does not collect data on the age of its members, but the anecdotal evidence and evidence from my own experience suggests many of the new members joining are younger. In a statement Janice Langley, Chair of the National Federation of Women's Institutes said, "It is always really positive to hear about so many younger women joining the WI, and it proves that perceptions are definitely changing... Many groups now choose to meet in a local pub or wine bar rather than the traditional village hall, and although traditional activities such as craft and cooking are still very popular with members, there are many less traditional activities taking place as well."

The Women's Institute is not just a women's group, but due to their resolution process they can also be seen as a pressure group. The organisation campaigns each year on what are referred to as resolutions and these are submitted and voted for by the membership ensuring they are campaigning on current issues for women. One way in which they achieve outcomes from the resolutions is by sitting on relevant parliamentary groups and lobbying the government. Individual Women's Institutes also employ more unconventional methods of campaigning to raise awareness of the issue locally. A popular example of the is 'Yarn Bombing', which involves members knitting or crocheting items or scenes depicting the issue and placing them in public areas, under the cover of darkness, to raise awareness of the campaign among the general public. "The constitutional aim of the WI has always been 'to improve the quality of life of the community' and our history shows the difference that women, working together, can make. Our policy has always been democratically determined through the resolutions we debate and approve at my AGM. These give members a mandate to speak out – to both local and national government – on social, economic and environmental issues that concern them"(Carey, 2005, Pg. 7). This is important as many members of the Women's Institute join as a social activity and then get involved in campaigns without feeling they are being conventionally political, this does, for some members encourage them to get more involved in party politics or other national campaign organisations.

British Youth Council and Girl Guiding UK undertake similar activities to ensure their campaigns influence government policy and to highlight issues important to young people, but like the Women's Institute the range of activities these groups provide does not mean that its members feel that it is a political or campaign organisation. This is highlighted by Flanagan "There is a strong association between civic engagement in youth and subsequent involvement in political activities in adulthood, partly because 'joiners in youth become joiners in adulthood' (2009: Pg.214 in Furlong 2013). These organisations also give young people experience and skills that can be useful when they transition into adult environments. However, as we have seen above the non-party political nature of these organisations does not always mean members become aligned with a particular political party or active in party politics. As well as encouraging members to participate in activities that encourage campaigning and citizenship, both British Youth Council and Girl Guiding UK, undertake their own research with young people. Each year Girl Guiding UK produce the annual Girls Attitudes survey, which

asks young women about a range of issues effecting them, for example harassment in schools, mental health and aspirations. Members from both British Youth Council and Girl Guiding UK participate in parliamentary select committees, to raise and address issues important to young people to politicians and ministers, in this sense they can be seen as a pressure group.

- What are young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment?

There is a large body of articles and literature into whether young people have political apathy and the reasons this may or may not be the case. Mycock and Tonge (2012) examine how there have been concerns that young people are apathetic to politics since the 1950's and highlight work that has been done since then by the main political parties, to attempt to increase engagement with younger voters. They identify that although work has been done in the past to educate young people or encourage them into activities to develop them as active citizens, in recent years funding for these activities have been cut, leading young people to feel disenfranchised, but not apathetic (2011).

The MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement) project was devised to map young people's civic engagement across Europe. Using surveys, interviews and ethnographies they consulted with young people from 12 countries and found that although they may not participate in 'public traditional' activities, for example voting or joining a political party. They did find that young people were participating in private, individual actions, such as boycotting unethical products. When young people do engage with a campaign it involves an emotional dimension and they have to have strong feelings about the specific cause, like animal rights or environmental movements. However, they found that the young people they spoke to expressed disappointment in politicians and political parties for not dealing with issues directly (Pilkington and Pollock, 2015).

Henn and Foard (2011) identify the concern among politicians that young people are becoming more disengaged with political systems and voting. However, the evidence does not show that young people are more apathetic than in the past. The respondents in the 2011 research show that they are more interested in political matters than their counterparts in the 2002 research.

In the paper *Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?* Kimberlee (2002) states that there is no one reason for young people's disengagement with voting and groups the possible reasons into four different categories. 'Youth Focused' suggests that apathy or social circumstance prevent young people from voting, for example young people move house more regularly, often in rented accommodation and so may not be on the electoral role. 'Politics Focused' highlights that there is a failure among traditional, political establishment to engage and inspire young people to participate, leaving young people to feel that voting is not relevant to them. The third category 'Alternative Value' focuses on young people's engagement with single issue campaigns or protest politics, for example environmental causes as an alternative to party politics. Finally the 'Generational' category, which is a less explored concept than the previous three categories,



identifies the possibility that today's young people are different to those in previous generations. This generation of young people stay in education longer, get married older and buy houses later, that their parents or grandparents have done previously. This could suggest that the transition from teenager into adulthood takes longer and that is a factor leading to voting at an older age (2002). There is little literature that states young people's apathy as a possible reason for such low voter turnout among younger ages groups, but we can see from the need to have four separate categories that apathy where it does exist is one small part of the overall picture.

Research into this area proved difficult in relation to finding academic texts or papers that support the view that young people are apathetic to politics. Many of the articles presented in the mainstream media highlighting the political apathy of young people do not seem to have considered the views of young people and are solely focused on voter turnout statistics by age.

This is a view supported by Furlong:

"The argument that more young people vote in shows like Big Brother than do in general elections has become a popular claim among journalists who use the figures as a way of highlighting what they often regard the apathy among the young electorate." (2012; pg216)

The report Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools (Citizenship Advisory Group, 1998) was written to put forward the case to have citizenship education as a statutory subject taught in schools. The report refers to a piece of work called Freedom's Children: work, relationships and politics for 18-34 year olds in Britain today (1995) which states "presented evidence of ignorance and – as it were – 'could-not-care-less' attitudes". On reading the Freedom's Children report closely it appears to not be wholly accurate. Indeed their research showed that young people did not feel they had a lot of knowledge about the political system, but it also showed that young people were very active in unconventional political actions like campaigning for animal rights or other single issue campaigns, and given the right issue it could encourage young people to become active. However, these actions are not usually related to party politics. This does not seem to suggest that young people 'could not care less'. However, it highlights that young people feel disconnected from politics and in some cases British society as a whole, but disconnection and not caring are not the same.

The debate as to whether young people do not vote due to being apathetic to politics can be broken down into two main areas of argument, those that blame young people for not voting or caring and those that look at the wider picture of barriers to young people engaging. "Overwhelmingly, media discourses have portrayed young people's failure to vote as reflecting a broader problem concerning youth attitude and lifestyle."(Kimberlee, 2002:Pg.2). Since the early emergence of teenagers, they have often been seen as a threat to adult societal norms, as they form their own identities, fashion and subcultures and their lack of engagement with democracy is sometimes blamed on this (Gould, 2015; Hackett, 1997; Farthing, 2010; Garratt, 1997).

The majority of research into why young people do not vote or are often seen as apathetic highlights that young people feel mistrust for politicians. This mistrust leads to young people feeling that politicians do not represent them, due to the perception that politicians lie or avoid answering direct questions. There is also a view that politicians are seen to participate in childish bickering with each other, rather than focusing on policies (Sloam, 2011; Henn and Foard; 2011)

Those who are against the argument that young people simply do not care, highlight that we are expecting that young people conform and fit into current political structures, which often are not very welcoming to younger people (Kimberlee, 2002; Gould, 2015; Edwards, 2015). Social policy has also been seen to be alienating to young people, for example increasing university tuition fees and cutting housing benefit for under 25 year olds. "Some studies argue that young people feel alienated from a political system that prioritizes the interests of older voters whilst overlooking representation of younger voters" (Mycock and Tonge, 2011).

The demographic of politicians can also alienate young people from engaging in traditional political institutions, as they do not see people like themselves representing them in elected office. Gould argues that rather than being apathetic, young people feel that politicians do not understand them, because they are so far removed from how young people think and feel. This causes young people to feel alienated and less inclined to vote (2015). After the 2015 general election women in parliament made up just 21% of elected MPs, compared to 51% of the general population and Black and Minority Ethnic MPs made up just 6% of Parliament compared to 13% of the population of the UK (Hudson and Campbell, 2015). When we examine the age of our current MPs the situation gets much worse, "In the period from 1979 to 2015, the average age of MPs at elections has been consistently around 50 years" (Audickas, 2016) after the 2015 general election only 2% of MPs are under the age of 30. The British Youth Council (2015), the MYPLACE research project (2015) and the Joseph Rowntree Trust (2002) have all spoken to young people that cannot identify with politicians due to the majority of them being seen as old and so out of touch with how young people feel.

Furlong (2012) examines the idea that to be effective, parliamentary democracies and those elected into them should be representative of the diverse communities that they represent. This has led to work within political parties to increase the number of individuals from under-represented groups, such as women and ethnic minorities to become candidates in elections. There has not been the same focus or similar initiatives to encourage and support younger individuals to take up elected office (2012). Looking at the under representation of certain groups within parliament; including women, ethnic minorities and those who identify as gay or lesbian, Durose et al, found that there is not just a problem of the general public feeling underrepresented by the lack of diversity in parliament and conventional political structures. They interviewed successful and unsuccessful election candidates, who identify as being part of the underrepresented groups and found that diversity was undervalued by those locally who select candidates due to "pressure to conform to the 'archetypal' model of candidate, which emerges as a white, middle aged, able-bodied, heterosexual man"(2013, Pg. 255).

It is important to consider that young people can be subject to the same barriers to voting as other age groups. An example of this is if a young person has a disability. Much research has been undertaken into the range of barriers that people with disabilities face when trying to participate in voting. The different needs that people with a disability may have, mean that there are a range of barriers that could prevent them from voting. For example, if the polling station does not have an accessible ramp to enable wheelchair users to enter or if there is not provision for those with sight loss to vote, including large print information and tactile voting devices. Scope (which is a charity that offers advice and support for people with disabilities and their families, as well as highlighting the obstacles they face to policy makers) undertook a large piece of research in 2010 into the experiences people with disabilities had while voting in the general election. The research showed that in the 2010 general election 14% of polling stations were not accessible to wheelchair users. However, this is an improvement as in the 2001 general election half of polling stations were not accessible to wheelchair users (Gilbert et al, 2010).

In the run up to the 2015 general election there was a push by many people and organisations to encourage younger voters to turn out at the polls. For example, the Girls Matter: Hear Our Voice resource produced by Girl Guiding UK "Girls of all ages will develop their understanding of democracy and the part they can play in the UK's decision-making processes whilst building crucial skills like speaking in front of others and working in a team." (Girl Guiding UK, 2015)

Comedian Russell Brand was encouraging the nation not to vote through television appearances and other media, "The idea that voting is pointless, democracy is a façade and that no one is representing ordinary people is more resonant than ever" (Brand, 2014). In response to this and comments about young people's political apathy, 'None of the Above' was written to encourage young people or first time voters to attend the polls "If you, like Brand, don't feel represented by any of the parties or candidates, you can still make your dissatisfied voice heard by spoiling your ballot, and hence voting for no one." (Edwards, 2015.Pg.204)

#### Vote for 16 and 17 year olds

At the same time there was a big focus on younger voters, as 16 and 17 year olds had the opportunity to vote in the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum "Our focus in the referendum was ensuring that, as the franchise has been extended to 16 and 17 year olds, they were able to participate fully, including being registered to vote" (The Electoral Commission, 2014).

Even though the Votes for 16 campaign has been running since 2003, supported by the British Youth Council, National Union of Students, Unlock Democracy and the Children's Society among others. At the time of writing, a total of nine Bills have been submitted to Parliament for debate, yet there has not been a decision to franchise 16 and 17 year olds to date (White, 2016). It is argued that at the age of 16 young people can take on adult activities for. For example, they can work and pay tax, but have no say in how it is spent by the government. 16 year olds can consent to sexual relationships and marry (with parent's permission) and have children, they can even join the armed forces, but do not have a say in regards to governments and policy that impacts them. This is a view raised by Sarah Champion MP, who is a supporter of the votes for 16 campaign,

she feels that by denying 16 and 17 year olds the vote the government is telling them that they do not care about their opinion and so it is not surprise that some young people become alienated from the political system (2014). However, Mycock and Tonge (2011) argue that highlighting taxation and other adult responsibilities is an out dated view, since the change in the law meaning that 16-18 year olds in England must stay in education until they are 18, this is not the case in other areas of the UK. Mycock and Tonge maintain that reducing the voting age is not addressing the real problems of voter disengagement and declining voter turnout. The problems include politicians not taking the concerns of young people seriously, not fulfilling promises that they have made once they are in power and not effectively communicating to young voters. If these problems are not addressed through reform, then it is likely that the newly franchised 16 and 17 year olds will also become disengaged from the process of voting. (2014).

One of the arguments against votes for 16 and 17 year olds is that, at that age young people do not have the knowledge and maturity to make an informed decision on who to vote for and this means that changing the voting age alone is not enough. There would have to be increased political education in schools and colleges to prepare young people for voting for the first time.

Mark Harper MP points out that whether you are in favour or against giving 16 and 17 year olds the opportunity to vote, young people themselves are divided (2014), which I have also found in the course of my research and my work with young people. Although the focus of my research has moved from votes for 16 and 17 year olds, the literature surrounding the debate shows that there are young people who are passionate about wanting to be enfranchised to vote.

- What impact does social media have on engagement with politics and campaigning?

Social media use among the whole population has increased dramatically over the last ten years, but the highest levels of social media use is among young people. Social media has become an intrinsic part of many young people's lives, so it is unsurprising that young people use social media platforms to develop and share their own political views. Young people are more likely to use social media and online forums to discuss politics or get involved in campaigns than older demographics (Pilkington and Pollock, 2015; Lenhart et al, 2010)

Research undertaken by the UK Young Ambassadors, supported by British Youth Council is relevant to this study as it is about young people's political participation, with a focus on social media use as a tool for engagement. Like my research it also used mixed methods to gather their data, specifically online surveys and focus groups with young people. The aim of their research was to make recommendations "to promote more inclusive and effective participation". This research found that "young people are neither apathetic nor ignorant about public life, however, they are less likely to participate in electoral processes than adults, and there is considerable regional and demographic variation" (2015, Pg.15). UK Young Ambassadors research goes further than the scope of this study when looking at the different demographics of young people, for example disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

The UK Youth Ambassadors research focused on the general engagement of young people, before emphasising the importance of social media use among young people, to engage with politics or campaigns. Social media engagement was highlighted through the surveys conducted and it was clear that young people want politicians to be more visible online 'as well as' rather than 'instead of' real life or face to face engagement. "60.3% of respondents stated that politicians should engage with young people in politics by using social media to campaign." However, the research also highlighted the negative aspects of online engagement "Concern is also growing about 'clicktivism' and a 'hashtag generation' that is not developing deeper connections to social issues, to the people engaged in those issues, or to other people in the community"(2015, Pg.19).

Pilkington and Pollock (2015) show that social media platforms and the technology that young people are using enhances participation, as social media tools are designed to be interactive and allow people to communicate and engage with people, organisations or groups around the world with ease. This gives young people the opportunity to explore their own political ideals, share ideas with others and have their views challenged by others, leading to debate. They also highlight how the use of the internet has allowed people much easier access to information, so that individuals can check the accuracy of news articles or confirm information they have heard. These developments to communication have also made contacting politicians or elected officials much simpler and accessible. The same is true for individuals starting their own online petitions or signing and sharing petitions to gain much wider support that would have been possible previously. Brie Rogers Lowery, UK Director at Change.org, which is an online petition site and has had over 1million users create online petitions on a range of issues, from tampon tax to ending the sale of eggs from caged hens; believes that the high numbers of young people starting their own campaigns challenges the notion that young people are apathetic, although the campaigns are specifically issue based and not linked to mainstream party politics.

The nature of social media means that individuals can easily start their own campaign and get their cause out to a much wider audience to gain support, often in very simple ways. For example Martha Payne, the nine year old from Scotland who blogged pictures of her school lunch each day to highlight their poor quality. Through her blog the campaign reached over three million hits from all over the world and was reported in the mainstream media. Although the local council and the school tried to close her blog down, she had already got her message out and got the attention she had hoped for. The success of her blog not only encouraged a programme to improve school meals in Scotland, but she was able to start a charity called 'Mary's Meals' which works towards improving school meals around the world (BBC, 2012).

The Pews internet and American life research project (Lenhart et al. 2010) examined the social media and internet usage of teenagers and young adults. They found that young people writing blogs has declined, but has increased in older adults, while the use of social media has increased by both young people and those over the age of 30. This research also examined how teenagers were using the internet and what sort of information they were accessing using the websites and social media. Lenhart et al found that "About two-thirds (62%) of internet-using teens consume online news about current events and politics" (2010, Pg. 28).

This research also looked at how the level of an individual's education links with their consumption of online political news. They found that those who have been educated to a college level were 75% more likely to access news focused on politics via the internet, compared to just 56% of those who have not received a college level of education.

Do people "Like" Politicians on Facebook? Not really, The Nielsen and Vaccari (2013) paper examined how effective the use of social media platforms were for candidates standing in elections. They found that although the majority of candidate had a presence on social media, (in this case Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) these forms of communications were not as effective as more traditional methods of campaigning, such as television appearances, leafleting and telephoning voters. They identified that of those that do "Like" or "follow" candidates standing for election these are very small numbers compared to the size of the electorate over all.

Although both these articles examine the use of social media in relation to political engagement specifically, they are both produced in 2010 and the nature of social media is that the platforms that are used and who is using them changes rapidly. For example, the two main social media platforms that formed the focus of the research were Facebook and Twitter. In 2010 there were an estimated 482 million monthly users of Facebook and 30 million monthly users of Twitter, compared to 2017 which has seen 2072 million monthly users of Facebook and 330 million users of Twitter ([www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), 2017). These articles do not include the use of Snapchat or Instagram; whilst they are very popular currently particularly amongst young people and are focused specifically in America and they were not in existence when the research was carried out.

The paper Changing Citizenship in the Digital Age (Bennett, 2008) examines the engagement of young people with democracy, with the focus of the use of digital media. Having been published in 2008 before the expansion of social media use among the populous; the only social media platform it includes is MySpace. MySpace was launched in 2003 and had dominated the social media market until April 2008 when Facebook matched the 100,000 monthly users. Just a year before, in April 2007 MySpace had an estimated 100,000 monthly users compared to Facebook which at that time had 40,000 (Arrington, 2008).

Similar to other publications looking at young people's engagement, Bennett (2008) identified that young people were seen as disengaged due to their civic engagement not conforming or fitting into the conventional government-centred activities, "If there is an attendant decline in the credibility or authenticity of many public institutions and discourse that define conventional political life, the fault lies more with government performances and news narratives than with citizens who cannot engage with them (Pg.2)". This paper highlights how the use of technology has had an impact on the mobilisation of activists for particular causes. For example the world wide protests against the war in Iraq in 2003, that were organised both off and online became the largest protest movement to date. Examples of users organising protests within the online gaming platforms World of Warcraft and Second Life, show that individuals are demonstrating their activism in new ways, using digital media in new ways.

Bennett's (2008) paper introduces the Traditional Civic Education Ideal of the Dutiful Citizen (DC) versus the Emerging Youth Experience of Self-Actualising Citizenship (AC) model as summarised in the table below:

Table 1.

| <b>Actualising Citizen (AC)</b>   | <b>Dutiful Citizen (DC)</b>   |
|---|---|
| Diminished sense of government obligation- higher sense of individual purpose.  | Obligation to participate in government centred activities  |
| Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism   | Voting is the core democratic act   |
| Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment  | Becomes informed about issues and government by following mass media  |
| Favours loose networks of community action- often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies | Joins civil society organizations and/or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilize support |

Building on the previous paper; Bennet et al. examine in more detail at the Dutiful Citizen (DC) versus Actualising Citizen (AC) model, with a focus on how it can be used to develop civic education in schools that suit not just the Dutiful Citizen (DC) as it has historically, but also include the civic learning styles of the Actualising Citizen (AC) as seen in table 2 (2009).

Table 2. Civic learning styles and civic identity

| <b>AC civic learning styles</b>  | <b>DC civic learning styles</b>   |
|--|---|
| Interactive, project-based, peer-to-peer networked information sharing                                     | Authoritative, text-based one-way knowledge transmissions to individuals                                    |
| Participatory media creation   | Passive media consumption   |
| Preference for democratic environments- learners participate in creating content and assessing credibility | Knowledge and skills and assessed by external standards- little learner content creation or peer assessment |

Again the weakness of this paper is that it was written during a time when social media was not being used by the large numbers of people, which it is today.

Traditional Civic Education Ideal of the Dutiful Citizen (DC) versus the Emerging Youth Experience of Self-Actualising Citizenship (AC) model has been developed further by Bennett et al (2011) to include four “civic competencies” needed for individuals to become effective citizens. These are Knowledge, the information citizens should know. Expression, training in effective public communication skills. Join Publics, learning how to connect to others through networks and groups and take action, actions that engage citizens with specific public issues or campaigns (pg.842). This research focuses on websites that offer young people the opportunity

to develop civic skills and experiences for engagement. However, unlike the previous work focusing on the AC-DC model it highlights that the disadvantages of these websites are that they do not offer the same opportunities for interactivity and engagement as social media platforms, in this case Facebook.

A strength of this model is that rather than focusing on the decline of young people's involvement in more traditional public participation opportunities (DC), instead it acknowledges that other forms of engagement (AC) are different, but just as important.

Another advantage of this model is that it is not designed that an individual would be either an actualising citizen or a dutiful citizen, rather that they will engage differently depending on the circumstance or opportunity, as the focus groups suggested. Shehata et al (2016) suggest that use of social media will increase AC qualities such as online forms of political activism including single issue causes. Though Bennett (2008, 2011) has provided a starting point for analysis, the findings from the focus groups suggest a more complex relationship with social media for young people which is explored in the analysis.



## Methodology

“Many would-be researchers, in their jobs and daily lives, are already in, or can find around them, situations that have the advantage of presenting ready-made research settings.”(Holliday, 2007. Pg.25).

This research has been inspired by the young people I have worked with in my role as a Youth Participation Worker and my own experience of political engagement, and a need to ensure that their views are heard. The research questions arose from these two strands. The following section will show how the research developed over the course of this project.

What inspires people to engage with politics, campaigning or activism, at a local and national level and how does this engagement take place, compared to current views of young people?

- What inspired individuals to engage with politics, campaigning or activism?
- What are young people’s perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment?
- What impact does social media have on engagement with politics and campaigning?

To find out what inspired individuals to participate in politics, campaigning or activism and how young people feel about these activities I used an interpretivist approach. This enabled me to understand the perceptions and motivations of my research participants (Henn et al, 2006). It also enabled me to include the voice of the young people I am researching.

My research is mixed method, as initially I wanted to do a quantitative survey as a starting point, so that the results would inform the development of the focus groups with young people, to get qualitative responses from them. The advantage of using both quantitative and qualitative methods is that they both enable us to understand the world in different ways (Kara, 2015). The quantitative data from the survey allowed me to get a broad picture of the different political actions a range of individuals have undertaken, while the qualitative data from the focus groups allowed me to hear the young people’s views, directly from them.

Through my work with young people in the charity sector, for the last 10 years I have applied for funding and supported young people to write funding bids to finance projects. On the funding applications, funders usually ask for statistical information as a background for why the project is needed, but they also what to hear voice of the young people who will benefit from the project. In this way, funding bids are similar to a small scale mixed method research projects and due to this experience in my professional life, I felt comfortable using mixed methods.

Using mixed methods for my research also enabled me to get the points of view of a different range of people. It was important that I sought out views of adults looking back at how their engagement with politics and campaigning developed. Within the scope of this small scale research project it was not possible to interview large numbers, but I was able to access their views through the survey. Getting local elected politicians

together to participate in a focus group would also have presented a challenge, due to how busy the individuals are, however, it was much easier to organise a focus group of young people through schools.

The clear advantages of mixed method is that by initially collecting a range of different types of data it provides better understanding of the research problem. Starting with a broad survey gives you general results about the population being surveyed and then allows you to focus in on the more detailed views of participants (Creswell, 2003).

### **Developing the survey**

To initially gather the quantitative data element of the research I chose to undertake a survey. The advantage of this was that all the respondents would be asked the same questions, which would enable me to compare a large number of responses. Surveys are an effective tool to find out factual information and if it is well designed and piloted appropriately, can be both time and cost effective (Bell, 2005).

For the survey it was preferable to use an online tool to ease production and analyse the survey, by contrast paper surveys it would be very time consuming to distribute and collate the answers. Using a survey online was cost effective as I did not have to worry about printing or postage costs.

The tool I selected to produce my survey was BOS, because it was provided by the university. This reduced the cost of producing the online survey as other tools available for producing surveys online (for example survey monkey) can charge you money for their service, if you have a large number of responses or if you wish to design the survey in a particular way. BOS was very simple to use and enabled me to produce a survey with different question types. The advantage of using a tool like BOS online is that it collates the data for you and allows you to download it, to analyse. The disadvantages of using an online survey tool are that not everyone has access to the internet, so would have been unable to be involved in this aspect of the research. Being online also has the drawback that if the link to the website stops working or the website goes offline then respondents will not be able to complete the survey. After taking these disadvantages into consideration I decided that for the purposes of this research the positives of online data gathering outweighed the negatives.

Although the survey was being distributed online and no respondents were obligated to fill it in, it was necessary to ensure that those who did fill in the survey gave their informed consent and ownership of data (Henn et al. 2009). To establish this, I wrote a statement that was displayed at the top of the survey stating the purpose of the research and assuring participants that their answers would be anonymous.

I devised the main questions to be multiple choice so that all the respondents would have the same options to select from. This enabled me to more accurately compare the answers from all the participants. If I had asked those filling in the survey to think about and write in the answers they may not have included things they thought were not relevant or missed things as they had forgotten. Multiple choice questions also have the advantage of reducing the time it takes for respondents to fill in the survey.

The main question in the survey was a list of the main political or campaign actions that respondents could select which they had participated in personally. As it was not a comprehensive list of every possible action, I included the opportunity for respondents to select 'other' which then enabled them to input any actions they had participated in that were not covered in the list, using a free text box.

Several of the questions allowed respondents to input their own answers, for instance the questions relating to people's motivations. This was due to the range of different, possible motivations an individual could have and I did not want respondents to be constrained by my personal interpretation of what their motivations might be.

After completing the initial pilot survey I made a few adjustments, suggested by those who participated in the pilot. The majority of the changes were small spelling errors or typing mistakes. I was keen during the pilot to ensure these errors were picked up, as due to having dyslexia, I always struggle if I have not had someone to proof read. I felt it was important that the survey looked professional and I did not want it to contain any mistakes. Piloting the survey in this way was an opportunity to ensure that the phrasing of the questions was clear and made sense to the individuals completing the survey. The feedback from the individuals who participated in the pilot survey assisted me in ensuring that the order of the questions worked well and that the answer options provided by the online tool matched the questions.

On the suggestion of one of the respondents to the survey pilot I also included a question about why people may not have participated in any of the activities listed. This was a revelation, as I had been so focused on why people do engage with politics and campaigning, it did not occur to me to ask why they may not have engaged previously. That being said, people who were not interested or engaged in politics or campaigning were less likely to fill in the survey.

### **Survey distribution**

During the development of the survey the focus of the research questions were broadened from political actions to also include campaigning and activism. The advantage of changing the focus of the questions to include campaigning was that it opened up more opportunities for me to distribute my survey and target a larger demographic of respondents. For example, it enabled me to share my survey with members of the Women's Institute. The Women's Institute is very clear that it is a non-party political organisation, in the sense that there should be no promotion of party political views. Although my survey would not have been focusing on a specific political party, when I approached them (locally and on the Unofficial Women's Institute Facebook page) they had concerns that the survey may be too politically focused for them to share with their members. After changing my research questions and focus to include campaigning they were more than happy to share my survey with their members as the Women's Institute has a long history of campaigning on issues voted for by members as part of their resolution process. This not only enabled me to get additional respondents for my survey, the Women's Institute have used lots of innovative campaigning methods, for example Yarn Bombing which I would not otherwise have been able to include in my research. Although the Women's Institute has a public perception of being an older demographic of women, the anecdotal evidence

through social media, the WI's membership magazine and the increase WI's being set up in universities and inner city settings, and the decline in afternoon WIs shows that more young women are joining than in the past. Unfortunately the Women's Institute does not gather the data about the age of its members currently.

Adding campaigning also allowed me to get permission from my manager at work to share the survey with the young people I work with on the Youth County Council, as like the Women's Institute the Youth Council is very careful to ensure that it stays non-party political. Due to the age of the Youth Council members many of them are not old enough to fully participate in formal political activities like voting or standing for election on behalf of a political party. However, to become a member of the Youth Council they all have been elected by other young people in the County. This meant that I had some responses to the survey from young people under the age of 18.

When I first started to distribute the survey I contacted the main political parties and some campaign organisations to see if they could help me with distributing the survey to their members. It was important for me to give all of the political parties in particular, equal opportunity to contribute to the research, as it was essential to me to try to get respondents from different political leanings to reduce the possibility of bias.

Another motivation for getting in touch with the political parties and campaign organisations early on in the research, was to give them an opportunity to access the results of the research. Many organisations are working hard to engage younger members and the results of my research could be useful to them in focusing their work in this area.

In addition to contacting the main political parties directly I also emailed the survey to all the elected councillors at the local Borough and County Council. This was extremely time consuming and initially I had concerns that it would not be worthwhile and was unsure if they would fill in the survey. Even with this being the case I decided that it could be beneficial to target some individuals who hold an elected office, in the hope it would give me broader responses to the survey. However, I received numerous emails in response saying that they had completed the survey for me. One Borough councillor made the point in their email that one of the good things about politics is how there is no retirement age on participating in politics and so it is something that many people can get involved in when they have retired from their working careers. While the main focus of my research is young people's engagement or lack of this, is an interesting point to consider.

Initially I received communication back from several of the campaign organisations wishing me luck with the research, but unable to help as they "are unable to share content with their members from outside parties". Although this was disappointing, it was not unexpected as I was aware that many organisations have policies about what they can share and with whom. From the main political parties I received one response informing me to contact my local branch of the party to see if they could distribute the survey locally to members.

I utilised social media to distribute the survey. I shared the survey in a number of campaign groups I am a member of on Facebook. This may have caused a larger number of women to complete the survey as I am a member of the Women's Institute, but I felt that as they are an organisation who undertake such a range of

campaigns (often using new and inventive ideas, for example yarn bombs which use knitted or crochet displays in public spaces, often assembled overnight to raise awareness of an issue) it was worth the possibility of having more female respondents. However I was mindful that “Research online throws up all sorts of problems with sampling, for various reasons; for example not everyone has access to online environments, or the identity of online participants may be wholly or partly concealed, which can make it difficult to fill quotas.” (Kara, 2015.Pg.33). The elected local politicians who I sent the survey to were predominantly male, so I felt this balanced out the risk of having a larger majority of women, through distributing the survey through my links at the Women’s Institute. Of the 249 respondents to the survey 66 (26%) were male, compared to 178 (71%) were female. However, although my survey was shared with young people on the Youth Council only 41 of the 249 respondents were under the age of 25.

### Survey questions

When developing the survey questions the different types of political or campaigning related questions came from those discussed in the literature, particularly ‘None of the above’ (Edwards, 2015) and ‘Wasted: How misunderstanding young Britain threatens our future (Gould, 2015). I also included political or campaign activities I have personally undertaken. The list of possible political or campaign actions were used to identify what activities respondents had or had not personally participated in, analysed alongside the information about the respondents age, gender and level of political education I hoped to identify similarities between the individuals and the actions they had undertaken.

1. Do you consider yourself to be an activist, campaigner or politician?

With this question I wanted to see how the respondents considered themselves and to see if people that stand for election and get involved in politics consider themselves a politician, or if it is only the people who have been successfully elected. I was also interested to see if those that consider themselves politicians also consider themselves activists or campaigners.

2. Have you ever done any of the following?

- Voted in an election (European, General, local, parish, referendum etc)

I included this question to identify whether respondents have undertaken electoral political participation and voting is seen as crucial aspect of a healthy democracy. As we have seen from the literature and reports about voting patterns from previous elections, many individuals do not choose to vote.

- Stood as a candidate in an election

I wanted to find out if respondents had stood as a candidate in an election, because this shows that an individual has engaged in conventional political activities.

- Signed a petition
- Started a petition

With the increase of campaigning on the internet and use of social media, petitions can be circulated to a wider audience much more quickly and effectively than they have in the past. The use of the internet has also made it much easier and accessible for individuals to start and distribute their own petitions. The more traditional paper version of petitions are still often used by campaign organisations on community stalls or on the doorstep to get signatures for their cause.

If the required number of signatures are received on a petition then the relevant authority has a responsibility to respond or discuss the issue. If a petition reaches 10,000 signatures it should get a response from the government and if a petition reaches 100,000 signatures the petition will be considered for a debate in Parliament, although there has been criticism of the system in the past with the government not having time set aside to discuss the petitions.

- Written to your MP
- Met with your MP at their office

I felt it was important to include communicating with Members of Parliament (MPs) in the survey, as a MP's role is to represent the views of their constituents and should support them with issues in the local area.

- Attended a council meeting

Council meetings are open to the public to enable transparency and offer the public to ask questions or make comments on the work the council does. Many councils now stream their meetings on the internet to make them more accessible for those who cannot attend in person. I did not include a question about watching council meetings online, as without the opportunity to comment or participate in the meeting I did not consider it to be a political action.

- Been on a march or protest

Throughout recent history marches or protests have been used to raise awareness for a cause or express dissatisfaction for a situation. Most marches and protests are peaceful, but there are cases in which some participants have resorted to violence or damaging property.

- 'Like'/followed a party or politician on social media
- Shared a political post on social media
- 'Like'/followed a campaign organisation on social media
- Shared a campaign organisations post on social media
- Started you own social media campaign

I thought it was key to include the use of social media in the survey questions as through the reading I had undertaken there was a lot of commentary on the increased use of social media for campaigning and in politics. Social media is also very popular with young people.

- Participated in a strike or industrial action

For those who are members of a trade union striking can be an effective way to get the attention of decision makers, although they can be unpopular with the general public as they are designed to cause disruption.

I did not include a question about non-normative actions like rioting, as through the reading I made the decision that these forms of action would not be included in my research, as the motivations of the individuals involved are not usually clear and the perpetrators are not always young people. However, the young people in the first focus group and a limited number of survey respondents raised rioting and civil disobedience, so I reversed my decision and included them in the analysis.

### **Developing and undertaking focus groups with young people**

The focus groups were undertaken with young people to get the qualitative data needed to gain insight the research question: What are young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment? Using the online survey as a starting point, the responses were used to develop the questions and activities to be used in the focus groups with young people. "In a two phase, sequential project in which the second phase elaborates on the first phase, it is difficult to specify the second phase questions in a proposal or plan." (Creswell, 2003. Pg.114). The initial use of the survey showed that for the focus groups more questions on who the young people speak to about politics and campaigns or important issues to them, and how these people have influenced the views of the young people participating needed to be included. This aspect was missing from my survey and so the focus group was an opportunity to get information on this.

Holding focus groups provided the opportunity to consult with several young people at once, rather than having to interview young people individually. Interviews with young people would have had the advantage of more in depth answers that come from speaking one to one. Additionally, for those young people who are not very confident at speaking and expressing their views in a group environment an individual interview may enable them to feel that they can share their views. However, to have undertaken several one to one interviews it would have been extremely time consuming.

An additional advantage of using focus groups to speak to young people, as opposed to a one-to-one interviews, is that I have the opportunity to speak to several individuals at the same time. The participants in the group challenge each other's views and the discussion as a result of this generates richer responses (Choak, 2012).

Due to my work running sessions with young people, I could draw on this experience when developing the plan for my focus groups. Some of the activities were adapted from training sessions previously used with young people. The risk in using activities within the focus group used previously in my work role as a youth worker, was that I might have lost focus on the research and reverted back to that youth worker role. To address this, I ensured that the activities I had used in the past were adapted to be focused on the research.

The first part of the session was the introduction. This was used to explain the details of the research, discuss the role the young people will have and talk through any concerns that the young people participating may have had. It also gave the participants the opportunity to withdraw from the research at that point, if they wished. This is also the time when I explained that I would be recording the young people's comments, to enable me to more accurately analyse their comments at a later date. To enable the young people's identities to stay anonymous they were given the opportunity at this point to pick a pseudonym that would be used when compiling their comments, when writing up the focus group results. The young people participating in the focus group received an overview of the research on their participant sheet and a consent form, in advance of the session, to ensure that they and their parents were happy to be a participant in the research. During this introduction we revisited the participant sheet, to ensure everyone taking part was clear about their involvement.

The first activity was one that was developed from working with groups of young people in my role as a participation worker, is used to help young people think about how they want to run their own campaigns. For this research focus group it was used as an introduction to get the participants to think about campaigns they have previously seen or had some experience with. As well as the audio recording of this session, I encouraged the participants to write down their answers as a group with flip chart. This worked really well, as it gave the group focus to their discussion, and also enabled me to use the words they have written down as another way of gathering data from the session using their voice.

Encouraging the group to think about not just the campaigns they have seen, but what it is about the campaign that appeals to them or would encourage them to get involved was really useful. Prompting the participants to think about the different platforms that campaigns use to get their message across also enabled me to see what formats most appealed to young people.

The next section of the focus groups examined influential campaigners or prominent supporters of campaigns. This included campaigners from history, recent times and politicians. This activity was adapted from a similar activity I have run with young people in the past. Previously, when I have run this activity the young people always say the same few people; the usual examples that are given are Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and JK Rowling. For this activity I wanted the group to think more broadly and not just think of the most obvious answers. To overcome this, in advance of the session a sheet with the photos and basic details of a selection of the most prominent or famous campaigners that the young people may have heard of was produced. This allows the group an opportunity to talk about the campaigners on the prompt sheet initially, but then took the focus away from the most obvious individuals and gave the group space to think about who is not included on the sheet and who they would also include. As well as the sheet of campaigners I produced, I also had flip chart and pens for the group to write down their ideas. In the first focus group at the grammar school the prompt sheet was not used, as the young people participating had a very in depth knowledge of politics and campaigners and the examples they initially provided were quite unusual, so the sheet was seemed unnecessary on this occasion.



The next activity produced was based around an activity commonly used in group work, called Diamond 9 or diamond ranking. This format is used to help people think of priorities or rank things in the order of importance. Usually the group is given a number of cards with topics or issues written on them and asked to put them in a diamond shape with the most important at the top, then the next two and then then three until all the cards are laid out in a diamond shape. Often participants are also given some blank cards, so that they can write in their own priorities or issues. The difference in my activity is that I have a lot more than nine topics.

For the diamond activity that I used with my focus group I produced a card for each of the different political actions that were featured in the survey (see pg. 21-22) I used to gather my initial data. I asked the group to rank them by relevance, to them. Unlike the survey I could not ask them to think about which actions they have personally participated in, as due to their age they will not have been able to participate in some of the actions previously, for example, voting. Participants were asked to rank the actions in order relevance to them, to see which activities they may participate in, given the opportunity. It also showed which activities the focus group participants were the most familiar with. It was important to include some of the elements of the survey in the focus group to ensure they linked together and so that the views of the young people participating in the focus groups with the answers from the respondents of the survey could be compared.

For the second focus group in the academy school this activity was adapted as the young people were not familiar with what many of the political actions were, so rather than asking the participants to rank them the group were encouraged to just discuss each action and I explained their meanings, where necessary.

Next, the groups were encouraged to think about the people in their lives that they speak to about politics. This was important to see not only who the young people speak to, but also the levels of influence these individuals have on how the young people's own political views develop. This section of the focus group took the form of a group discussion. Where possible the participants were allowed to talk, and discuss who they spoke to about politics and campaigns; I then prompted them with questions when there was either a lull in the conversation or to get more detail on a point they were making.

Like the survey questions it seemed relevant to speak to the young people about their use of social media, and the use of social media by politicians, influential campaigners they may be aware of. Social media use is now so widespread among young people that it has become part of their daily lives. For many young people social media is how they communicate with friends, access news and follow the lives of influential people. In the first focus group all the young people had social media accounts, predominantly Twitter. The participants in the second focus group had social media accounts with Snapchat and Instagram, except one individual who did not use any social media platforms.

For five minutes at the end of the session I took the opportunity to thank the young people for participating. At this point the young people were asked how they had found the focus group and ensured they were still happy to have their views and responses included in the research. It was explained what they had said would be written up and submitting it to the university, I also made sure that the participants understood that the

research may be used in the future to share at conferences and that there is a possibility that it may be submitted and published in research journals. It is at this point the participants were reminded that the recordings taken during for the focus group, would only be kept for as the length of time needed to analyse the data.

It was important that the focus groups were not too long for several reasons; initially I did not want the length of the planned focus group to discourage schools from allowing me to run the group with their students. Teachers and students are extremely busy and have to stick to strict timetables, keeping the session short limited the impact of missing lessons for the students participating in the focus group, particularly as 6th form students have a large work load. Although the activities planned for the focus group were designed be varied and interesting, if the session went on too long it may mean that the young people become bored and disengaged. Another advantage of keeping the focus group to a short time limit is to manage the volume of data for analysis.

### **Ethical implications of undertaking focus groups with young people**

An important aspect for the ethics of this project was that I recorded what the young people said in the focus groups. It was essential that the participants were aware of this and consented to having their views and comments recorded. Due to recording the focus groups and the possibility that individual participants may be able to be identified, in order to keep the young people involved safe, I had to ensure that the recordings were treated appropriately. I decided to use my work iPhone to record the sessions, as it is provided by the County Council it has the most up to date security features and as I use it for my work with young people, I did not have to have the young people's comments and information on my personal phone. "Mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets are increasingly used to communicate with research participant and record audio and video data for research purposes. However, these digital interactions can be traced by third parties, which may compromise participant's anonymity."(Kara, 2015. Pg.52).

The downside of recording the focus group was that some young people may not have felt comfortable being recorded and wished to withdraw from the research. If they did continue to participate they may not have expressed their true feelings or views, as they were being captured on a recording device. An audio recording is limited in the sense that it does not capture the interactions within the group or pick up on body language, as a video recording would do. To address this I noted down any exchanges between participants or non-verbal communication, for example hand gestures during the focus groups to use in conjunction with the audio recording.

I had to be very clear in the participant information that I would be the only person listening to the recordings, but also ensure that the recording was kept safe while I was using it and then would be deleted once I had finished needing it in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

I made it clear to the school, the focus group participants and their parents that all comments made by the young people would be anonymised, so that individual young people could not be identified. This was done

through the participant information sheets, the consent form and verbally, during the introduction to the research at the beginning of the focus group.

On the ethics form I responded 'Yes' when asked if participants would be minors, have learning disabilities or be vulnerable, as the young people who will be participating will be under eighteen and as the school selected the participants for the focus groups I did not know in advance if a member of the group had learning difficulties or was particularly vulnerable. I would not have wanted this to stop a young person participating in the research if they wanted to and with my experience of working with a range of young people with different needs, I was confident that I would be able to support the participants if they did have additional needs.

During the introduction to the research I explained that we could stop the focus group at any time, if any of the participants wished. If during the focus group a participant became distressed or uncomfortable I would have stopped the focus group and ensured that the individual had additional support from a member of staff at the school, which was agreed with the staff at the school in advance.

I was not concerned about holding focus groups with young people as I am an experienced youth worker and have extensive experience working with groups of young people, often on sensitive issues like drugs and alcohol or sexual health. As my research is not about sensitive issues for young people, the risk of the participants become upset or distressed from taking part in the focus groups was minimal. However, it was made clear to the young people participating that they would be able to withdraw from the research at any point. If a participant wished to withdraw after taking part in the focus group their comments would be excluded from the analysis.

I offered the participants the opportunity to provide me with an email address, so that I could share the results and an overview of the research on the completion of my research analysis and write up. This was entirely optional.

### **Gaining access for the research**

When planning for my focus groups I was very aware that schools within the county are all very different and so I selected the schools to approach very carefully.

I had the advantage of knowing many different schools across the county well and have worked in a range of them, as part of my work role. This meant I had links with teachers that I could utilise when approaching schools to see if I could come in and hold a focus group with their students. This personal link to a member of staff or the gate keeper was key, as without a contact within a school it could have been extremely difficult to gain access to the setting. The downside of having worked in the schools in the past is that I may have worked with the individual young people participating in the focus group before. Holding the focus group with 6th form students was an advantage in that respect, as my work in schools rarely involves this age group, so this reduced the possibility of me having worked with the young people in the past, as in that location I had only recently worked with young students in my professional capacity.

I initially decided that I would hold focus groups with young people in two schools. One a comprehensive or academy and one a Grammar school. It was important to speak to young people in both these settings to see if there were differences in the experiences and attitudes of the students in the different types of schools. Although the plan was to only run two focus groups, four possible schools were identified to approach (two grammar and two non selective schools) in case the schools did not allow me to undertake a focus group there.

Although it was important to run focus groups in both a grammar school and a non-selective school, I am aware that this would still not be representative of all of the different educational establishments available or those young people who are home schooled, which would not have been possible due to the limitations of a small study of this kind.

The numbers of young people who are home educated or home schooled are very difficult to establish as LEA's do not always have the students registered as home educated, as parents are under no obligation to register their child. Students educated at home do not have to follow the national curriculum or complete state wide tests. Many families who home educate their children are members of home education social groups and participate in a range of activities outside the home. If I were looking to run a focus group for home schooled young people I would utilise these social groups, but at that time I did not think it was necessary.

Another type of education establishment that could have been included in this research would be Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) which are for young people who have been excluded from school or are at risk from exclusion. They may also attend a PRU for other reasons, for example if they have behavioural issues, health problems that prevent regular attendance at a main stream school. Teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers and school phobic young people or school refusers may also attend. Young people who attend a PRU are often some of the most vulnerable, so having much smaller class sizes enables students to access more support than they would receive in a mainstream education setting. On balance the two focus groups undertaken had sufficient data for a study of this size.

In the outline to my project I explained that I would be recruiting young people to participate by contacting schools and asking them to host my focus group. Working with the schools ensured that I had an appropriate venue to speak to the young people. However, I was aware that by holding the focus group within a school setting and the teacher speaking to the prospective participants that they may have felt obliged to participate rather than giving their informed consent (Henn et al, 2006). To address this, I provided the teacher with a participant sheet to share with the student and their parents, to ensure they had a clear understanding of how the focus groups would work. This ensured that they were able to make an informed choice to be a participant in the focus group and have something to show their parents to get permission from their parents to be involved.

I decided to speak to young people who are in the 6th form as this means they will be older and more able to understand the research and I hoped that this would also mean getting permission from parents would be easier which turned out to be the case. One disadvantage of this is that not all schools have a 6th form and so

this limited which schools I could approach for access to their students. Students in the 6th form and studying A-levels have a larger and more intense work load than that of students lower down the school, the disadvantage of this is that these students will have less time and availability to participate in the research.

I undertook a focus group in a local grammar school. The group consisted of two male and three female participants, all in the first year of 6th form and aged 17. The group members were all undertaking International Politics A-level, so their understanding of politics was extremely strong and detailed.

For my second focus group I spoke to a group of five young people who attended a local academy. Although they were 17, the group was established for young people that were not quite ready to attend the main 6th form, so were not undertaking A-levels, but were participating in a foundation year to build up either their level of attainment or confidence, to enable them to access mainstream education in the future.

### **Comparisons between the focus groups**

The first focus group was undertaken in a boy's grammar school, who admits girls in the 6<sup>th</sup> form. At the time the school was fourth highest in the league tables for schools in the county. The second focus group took place in a mixed, non-selective academy which at the time was positioned 46<sup>th</sup> in the county league table for secondary schools.

Although both groups of young people were part of the 6<sup>th</sup> form at their school, their levels of previous education varied considerably. The 6<sup>th</sup> form of the school in which the first focus group took place require students to have obtained a minimum point score of 52 for their best 8 subjects under the new GCSE grading system. They also prioritise students whom already attend the school and only when those places are filled do they accept applications from students who have previously studied at a different school. This means that of those transferring into the 6<sup>th</sup> form from a different establishment they have received extremely good exam grades at GCSE. Of the five participants from this school in the focus group three had joined the 6<sup>th</sup> form from a different school.

The participants in the second focus group had not achieved grades at GCSE that would have allowed them to access the mainstream 6<sup>th</sup> form of their school. Instead they were part of a group that is supported by a youth worker based at the school, with the aim of enabling the students to gain enough confidence and skills to either access further training via college or an apprenticeship.

### **Changes to the focus group**

In the second focus group there was time at the end of the session, so I decided to include a question about whether the participants thought that young people aged 16 and 17 should be given the opportunity to vote. As I had asked the first focus group their views about votes at 16, I ensured that I also asked the young people in the second focus group to ensure that there was consistency between the groups.

### **Challenges from the focus groups**

Although it was planned in advance to approach several schools to run focus groups, the first non-selective school that was approached was unable to accommodate running a focus group with their students. The second school agreed, they were the participant information sheets and consent forms and a date was booked several months in advance. Two weeks before I was due to run the focus group in the school I contacted the school to confirm, but was then told that they could not accommodate my session after all. As it was two weeks before the summer holidays, I was unable to secure a date with another school before the students left for the summer. This meant it was a further two months before I could undertake the second focus group, which had the effect of delaying the final data analysis.

While planning the focus groups with young people, I was confident that I would be able to manage the group and get the information I needed, as I am an experienced youth worker and have run numerous consultations with young people in the past. I had not specifically considered how different the role of a researcher is, as opposed to a youth worker facilitating a group session. This became apparent during the second focus group when I had asked the group if they had looked at and compared different political parties' manifestos. One of the female participants explained that the only thing she had looked at were which parties had strong policies on reducing immigration, so that they would "send all those Muslim terrorists home". My first instinct was to challenge the comment and had I been running the session as a youth worker that is what I would have done. As it was I had to remind myself that, as a researcher I was there to hear what the young people had to say and not influence them with my own beliefs or values. This meant that rather than challenge the participants comments I let her finish the point she was making and just asked the rest of the group if they had looked into any of the parties manifestos.

The second focus group was also challenging as the young people participating were not confident in what they thought or had to say, so they were very quiet and for two participants the only thing they said throughout the whole session was "I don't know". Despite me giving the young people lots of encouragement and asking the same thing in several different ways the young people did not contribute any of their views or experiences. This made the session difficult to run and I had to ensure that they young people participating did not see that I was feeling frustrated. Afterwards, once the young people had left, I spoke to the youth worker who supports the group in school and had organised the opportunity for me to speak to them about how quiet they were. He explained that when working with the young people in the group he struggles to get some of them to speak about anything. Many of the group's participants had very low confidence and self-esteem and that they were regularly told that they were wrong. The youth worker had hoped that by me undertaking my research with that particular group it would have given them a bit of confidence, as the young people were not ever asked about their views or experiences. This explained the young people's reactions and questions while I was introducing myself and the research initially, as several participants asked why I wanted to speak to them and it was clear that they had very limited experience of adults asking their opinions. As the participants did not have prior experience of being consulted by adults, they lacked confidence in what they were saying and I had to reassure them repeatedly that there were no wrong answers. Even then some of the participants were

extremely timid and did not contribute unless I specifically directed a question to them. This limited the data I received from the group as a whole, as several participants did not contribute their views to the focus group.

### **Changes to research questions**

My initial questions were:

What inspires people to engage with politics and democracy, at a local and national level and how does this engagement take place, compared to current views of young people?

- What inspired individuals to engage with politics or democracy?
- What are young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment?
- Should we have votes for 16s in the United Kingdom?

Following the focus group the questions above were amended to:

What inspires people to engage with politics, campaigning or activism, at a local and national level and how does this engagement take place, compared to current views of young people?

- What inspired individuals to engage with politics, campaigning or activism?
- What are young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment?
- What impact does social media have on engagement with politics and campaigns?

The emphasis being when people engaged in politics and democracy became challenging, as I felt it was too narrow. Many of the people I researched did not necessarily engage in formal political actions or democracy. Many people get involved in campaigns or become active within a particular cause, rather than standing for election for instance. This led me to change my research question to include campaigning and activism as well as politics and democracy. This also gave me the opportunity to see if being a part of a specific campaign and the activities associated with it then encourages people to get involved in more formal politics.

I decided to change the focus of my research questions very early on in my research project, while I was undertaking some initial reading. The advantage of this was that at that stage I had not written my survey questions and was able to include campaigning and activism, as well as politics and democracy in my survey. Taking the focus away from formal politics also allowed me to consider the different types of social action that people may get involved in, such as producing petitions and taking part in protests, which previously may not have been included in the research. Although these sorts of activities can link into more formal political actions, they are often more accessible and familiar to people who do not consider themselves involved in politics.

It was while I was analysing the data from the focus groups and the survey that I established that there was such a large amount of information focusing on the use of social media, which prompted me to include the question regarding the impact of social media. I had not initially intended to examine issues related to social

media, other than including 'liking' and sharing posts and information from campaign or political parties within the questions relating to the actions that individuals had participated in. When I analysed the transcripts of the focus groups it became apparent that the young people participating in both of the focus groups, spoke at length about their use of social media. The young people participating in the first focus group used social media very differently to those in the second focus group, even the social media platforms that they used differed greatly. For example, the young people in the first focus group all used Twitter and followed politicians or campaigners on that platform. None of the young people participating in the second focus group had a twitter account.

At the same time I realised that votes for 16 and 17 is such a large topic that when I began to examine articles and transcripts of the debates young people have on the subject, it became apparent that there was not sufficient scope within this research to adequately address the votes at 16 debate. This enabled me to make the decision to remove the specific research question about votes for 16 and 17 year olds and replace it with the question relating to social media. Although I felt this change to my research questions could be a risk at such a late stage in the research project, I decided it was beneficial as examining social media use in this way was much more interesting and had the potential to demonstrate a level of originality in the research, rather than focusing on votes for 16 and 17 year olds, as there was already a vast amount of research into reducing the voting age to 16.

While undertaking reading in relation to the use of social media and digital technologies I found the Dutiful Citizen (DC) versus Actualising Citizen Model (Bennett, 2008) and the addition to this model examining civic learning styles and civic identity of Dutiful Citizen (DC) and Actualising Citizens (AC) (Bennett et al. 2009). I made the decision to use this model as a framework for analysing the data gathered from the two focus groups with young people, as it became clear through the reading that it provided a clear conceptual basis directly relating to the experiences of the young people.

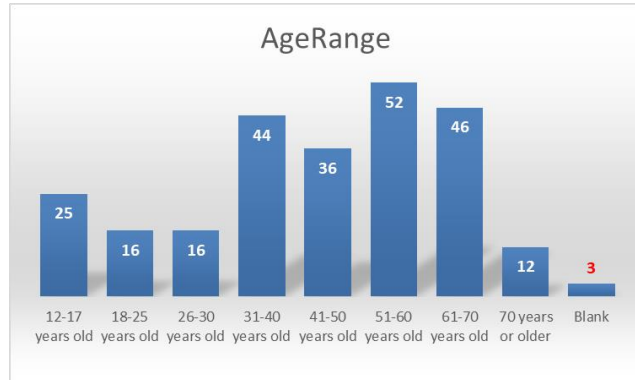


## Data Analysis

In this section all the data from the survey and the focus groups with young people is analysed, framed by the research questions. At each stage the analytical tools will be explained and explored. All direct quotes from participants are included in italics.

There were 249 responses to the online survey.

Of the 249 respondents 66 or 26% stated that they were male and 178 or 71% stated they were female with five or 1% preferring not to say. 95% or 235 respondents lived in England, Four respondents were from Scotland, four from wales and six from Australia. There was a good spread of ages of the respondents, as can be seen by the graph below. I had initially though



that the survey would be completed by adults and then to undertake the focus groups with young people.

However, as the survey data on age shows 25 respondents were under the age of 18. This is due to changing the focus from politics to include campaigning and having the opportunity to share the survey with members of the youth council.

- What inspired individuals to engage with politics, campaigning or activism?

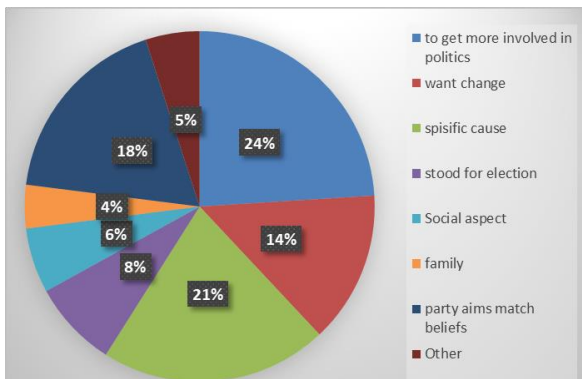


Figure 3: What were your reasons for joining a political party?

To see what had inspired people to become active in politics or campaigning I initially asked the respondents to the survey their motivation and reasons for joining a political party or campaign organisation. 100 of the 249 respondents filled in the free text box. The reasons stated could be organised into seven defined groups, the largest being that the respondents had become more interested in politics and wanted to get more involved, with 24 responses.

The second highest response with 21 people completing the free text question were those who joined a political party due to a specific cause that they wanted to campaign on. 18 respondents stated that they joined because a political party as their manifesto matched their personal ethos or views. Smaller numbers of survey respondents joined after being approached by a political party to stand for election for them (8 respondents) or to support a family member who was standing for election that they wanted to support with their campaign (4 respondents). 6 of those who used the free text box joined a political party for the social aspect and the opportunity to meet new people and 5 joined simply because they wanted change.

Research by the Rowntree Foundation echoes the reasons that activate political interest as seen in the survey data, specifically becoming more interested in politics and wanting to be more involved as an inspiration can often come after a change of circumstance. Taking on additional responsibilities, like starting a new job or having a family. The influence of parents and family discussing politics in the home and being given the opportunity (White et al, 2000).

The reasons stated for joining a political party for some were that they simply enjoyed politics or wanted to get more involved. Seven respondents used the word *“enjoyed”* and two stated they *“Love politics”* in the free text box. Of those that stated they had joined a party due to wanting to become more active, many of the responses specifically mention becoming more politically aware while attending university. Using the free text 13 respondents stated that they wanted to be more *“active”* or *“get involved”* in politics. One respondent said, *“I was becoming increasingly politically aware and felt like the next logical step was to join a political party.”*

Agreeing with the parties’ policies or wanting to offer more support to a local candidate was a common theme, as was joining a party in response to being dissatisfied with the current party in power or being disappointed at the result of an election.

The survey respondents who joined a campaign group or organisation stated much more specific reasons for joining. To campaign on a specific cause or several causes that they felt passionately about was the main motivation. Most campaign groups have clear explicit aims of what they are hoping to achieve, which makes membership appealing to individuals that share those aims.

The social aspect and the opportunity to interact with likeminded people, was also a strong motivation for those joining a campaign group, particularly those who were members of the Women’s Institute or Scouts and Girl Guiding.

A participant in the first focus group had joined CND as she had strong feelings against Trident and nuclear weapons. Due to this she participated in a march against Trident as they had emailed her inviting her to be involved. She had not joined CND with the motivation of actively campaigning, but to access additional information about the cause. However, given the opportunity she decided she would attend.

A cause being seen as personally relevant by an individual encourages them to support a campaign as stated by Gelai *“Both political and civic engagement are directed towards the perceived betterment of one’s community”* (2011). During the first focus group a participant explained that he was supporting an event to raise awareness of knife crime in London. He felt this was a cause that he wanted to be involved with as he has friends and family that have been affected by people carrying knives and being stabbed. In the second focus group a participant explained that his motivation for signing and sharing a petition was as it was in relation to animal cruelty and that it made him think of his own dogs and how he would feel if someone had abused them. In both cases the campaigns resonated with the participants as it made them think of their own personal experience and feelings.

In the first focus group one of participants felt that he became interested in politics from speaking with his Grandad and dad after hearing about how they had both fought against communism in the past. While they had been fighting for their rights and did not see themselves as particularly political, listening to the history of his family encouraged the participant to become interested in the political aspects of the conflict. One of the aspects of Pilkington and Pollock's MYPLACE research was to examine the importance of "intergenerational transmission of memories and political values" and found that young people consider hearing from older family members, about their own personal experiences of historical events more trust worthy than the information and education they receive about the same events from elsewhere, for example school (2015).

Examining both the survey responses and the family histories of current Members of Parliament, and previous 'Babies of the house', family members already being involved in political parties can be a reason for initial involvement. Initially getting involved in politics or campaigning, so that they can support the campaigning activities of a family member was reflected in the survey data. For those individuals who have grown up in an environment where family members have been actively involved in politics or campaigning and this has been part of their experience of growing up, it is seen as a normal thing to do and so the natural next step is becoming active themselves (Benn, 1994. Gould, 2015. Pankhurst, 1914. Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013).

Furlong and Cartmel believe family influence can be extremely significant to the development of a young person's attitudes to politics. Having the opportunity to discuss their views and debate topics increases and individual's political socialisation and can encourage young people to have similar political views or values as their family members (2002). One of the participants in the first focus group when referring to speaking to family members about politics, stated: "Most of our discussions are debating rather than arguing about issues, what would be better challenging complex ideas, rather than arguing about which person is right, but just exploring the issue."

"The family remains central to processes of political socialization and to a large extent young people come to share the political concerns of their parents. Although there is some evidence that younger generations have a weaker commitment to traditional party politics, existing data does not support the conclusion that political orientations among the young have become more individualised." (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006. Pg.107)

The MYPLACE research found that rather than young people identifying with political views and values of their parents or family members, their opinions are more closely linked with those of their peers. This became more apparent the more politically active an individual is and those young people who are less inclined to participate in political actions had similar political views to their family members.

Politicians or campaigners in the public eye can also inspire individuals to become more active in politics or campaigns. This can be for positive reasons like one of the young women in the first focus group who stated, "My main ones are Emma Watson, Angelina Jolie, Emaya Kino, those are the ones I look up to because they're like women who have actually got into power, well not really power but they just represent something I like". This young woman identifies with these campaigners and looks up to them.

This was also apparent from the survey responses. When asked why they joined a particular party initially many respondents stated that it was either to vote in the party’s leadership elections or because they liked an individual associated with the party.

However, some politicians or campaigners can encourage people to get involved in particular campaigns or actions as a response to feeling that and individuals or organisations aims do not fit with their ethos. An example of this was the Woman’s March movement that emerged as a response to Donald Trump being elected the president of the United States of America, after making comments during his campaign that many felt were inappropriate and even discriminatory. This was reflected in the comments from all the participants of the first focus group. When asked to identify politicians or campaigners that inspired them, there was some debate as to whether they should include those that inspired them for the wrong reasons and these were predominantly dictators, war criminals or politicians with very strong views, which the young people felt went against what they personally believed. Historically we have also seen this in the 1980’s when musicians and other performers became more publicly outspoken about their political views in response to their dissatisfaction with Margret Thatcher and current Conservative government (McSmith, 2011).

Scouting and Girl Guiding have a long history of encouraging their members to become involved in activities relating to campaigning, both in their local communities and on an international scale. Due to the age that children and young people participate within these organisations this may be the first opportunity they have to experience a campaign of some kind. Of those that participated in the survey 127 respondents or 51% had been part of Scouts, Guides or similar uniformed organisations. Youth organisations like the Scouts and Girl Guides enable their members to develop a range of skills including citizenship skills and a sense of duty to others and the community (Furlong, 2012)

The opportunity for children and young people to become active in decision making and influence their local communities can give those skills and experiences that encourage greater participation with politics and campaigning in the future. Although none of the young people who participated in the focus groups had been a part of any formal youth council, 14% or 35 respondents to the survey had been a member of a local district youth forum and/or a youth forum or parliament, at a county level. These types of organisations are designed to support young people to participate in democratic activities such as standing as candidates and voting in elections. As well as giving them the skills to campaign on issues that are important to them and their peers. Having this early experience of being involved in campaigning or politics, even youth politics can encourage young people to continue similar activities into adulthood, “Joiners in youth become joiners in adulthood” (Flanagan, 2009 Pg.297 in Furlong 2013).

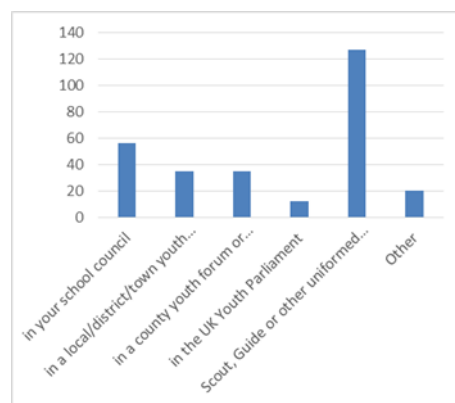


Figure 4: Have you in the past been a member of the following..

Compared to the Scout and Guide movements which are both over 100 years old, these organisations and projects are relatively new. For example, the UK Youth Parliament which was formed in June 1998. 12 (5%) respondents to the survey have been an elected member of Youth Parliament. The age range for the UK Youth Parliament is 11 to 18, so only those under the age of 37 (at the time of writing) would have had the opportunity to join.

- What are young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism at the moment?

The survey responses showed that signing a petition was the form of unconventional action that the most respondents had previously participated in with 94% or 234 respondents stating they had signed at least one petition. This is unsurprising as signing a petition is a very simple and quick activity to undertake, particularly in recent times with the emergence of numerous online petition platforms, for example Change.org and 38 degrees. These websites make it quick and easy to produce and distribute petitions on the internet and via social media and so enable people to take action on a large and diverse range of issues (Gould, 2015). However, looking at producing or starting a petition the numbers were much lower with 17% or 42 respondents having started their own petition.

During the second focus group one of the participants explained that she had used an online petition tool when her pet dogs had gone missing. Although she did not consider this to be a campaign, distributing the petition and members of the public signing and sharing it on social media raised awareness of the cause, in this case her missing dogs, which led to them being found. The petition they produced received such a large amount of support locally that the family were invited to speak about their experience on the local news.

Voting in an election had the second highest number of responses from the survey participants with 90% or 224 respondents stating that they had voted in an election. As some of the respondents were under the age of 18 and not a resident of a country that allows 16 and 17 year olds to vote, these respondents have voted in local youth council elections. The participants in the first focus group all agreed that voting was important, and one participant stated that her parent had voted on her behalf in a recent election, as she was unable to herself, but felt very strongly about who she would have voted for. All the participants in the first focus group thought that their parents voted.

In the second focus group the participants were much less convinced of the value of voting, as one participant stated "basically all you are doing is voting for who you want to be prime minister and that is it. It hasn't got a big part in your life. They are just some bloke and not really important". Another participant said that she might vote but "It depends on the person". Only two of the young people in this focus group thought that they would vote in the future, when they were old enough and only if there was a candidate that they really liked or believed in. The participants in this group were unsure if their parents voted. The views of these young people support the work of Kimberlee (2002) and Gould (2015) who believe that young people do not vote due to politics and politicians seeming irrelevant to their lives, which then causes young people to feel alienated from politics.

Many of those writing about not just young people's perceived apathy for politics, but also wider disengagement by adults, identify miss trust of politicians or political establishments as a cause. This miss trust became very apparent during the second focus group when the participants were discussing the reasons that they would or would not vote in the future. One of the female participants stated "I don't understand why when you go to vote you are only allowed to use pencil aint ya? I bet they rub it off and they write down who they want. Cheating aint it?".

The participants of both focus groups disagreed on whether 16 and 17 year olds should be able to vote in elections and referendums. The participants in the first focus group all had a high level of political knowledge and education, leading them to strongly believe that young people were capable of making an informed decision on who to vote for. The opposite was true for the second focus group, who had not received any education at school about politics. The majority of this group felt that young people would not have the knowledge to be able to make an informed choice when voting. However, it is worth noting that this group of participants did not see the value of voting and had no plans to vote when they turned 18 years old and would be entitled to do so.

"When I was chatting to a class of 17- and 18- year-olds about why they had no intention to vote. Several of them explained that they didn't feel they knew enough about politics, or the parties, or the issues."(Edwards, 2015 Pg. xiv)

Both focus groups put higher importance on standing as a candidate in an election than that of voting. However, this is due to the level of responsibility that comes with taking on such a role. The participants in both the focus groups did not feel that standing as a candidate would be something that they would like to do in the future. 29% or 27 of those who filled in the survey had previously stood as a candidate in an election. Similar to the results about voting, as some of the respondents who stated they had stood as a candidate in the past were under 18, they had stood as a candidate in local Youth Council elections.

During the first focus group the participants had a discussion about whether or not riots counted as a political action. They agreed that even if there is an initial reason that sparks off a riot, without that reason being explicit from the start many of those taking part in the riot would have different motivations for being involved, including participating in violence, vandalism and looting. Due to this the focus group thought it should not be considered a political action. Certain members of the focus group had very strong feelings about rioting, as they were living in London during the riots in 2011. Several respondents to the survey indicated in addition to participating in other political and campaigning activities that they had in the past been involved in and arrested for civil disobedience. Furlong has a slightly different view of whether non-normative actions like rioting or urban disorders should be classified as political events. He believes that due to the individuals (often young people) involved showing their dissatisfaction with the initial motivation for the civil disobedience; which in the case of the London riots was poor relations between the police and the community, which came to a head with the shooting of Mark Duggan by the police, they should be interpreted as political events (2012).

The participants of both focus groups held similar attitudes to strikes and industrial action. Many of the participants expressed that they felt that those participating in strikes were selfish for inconveniencing the general public for their own cause. One participant said "I hate striking. I really hate striking...because you don't want to just think about yourself. I think you should think about other people." This focus group took place during the Southern Rail train strike and several of the participants and their families had been personally affected by the strike. When challenged by another participant about whether she felt the same about the recent junior doctor's strike, she felt that that was more acceptable, as while the junior doctors were striking they had senior doctors to undertake their duties.

In the second focus group the young people shared similar view about striking, one participant said "I don't think it is a good thing, cause all you are doing is moaning at the people you work for, they don't really care so you are doing it for no reason. Just causing more chaos for everyone so there is no point to it really." None of the participants of either focus group were employed, so they would not have had the need to personally participate in a strike concerning their own employment rights.

27 % or 67 respondents to the survey stated that they had participated in a strike or industrial action at some point. However, of those that had not participated in a strike three respondents stated that they would have if they had been personally given a reason or situation in which to do so.

The data from the survey concerning trade union membership showed that 48% or 122 of participants that undertook the survey had been or currently were members of a trade union. From these responses I excluded all those who stated they had joined a trade union after the age of 25, which showed that 32% or 80 of those who have been members of a trade union joined while under the age of 25. Examining these participants against their current age showed that only 17 (%) of those that had joined under the age of 25 were currently under the age of 40.

Although in recent history there has been a general decline in trade union membership, they provided an introduction for working class individuals to political actions and working with others to further a campaign or cause. Without trade union activity there are less opportunities for individuals to gain experiences that encourage political action (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006). However, within the UK's university system there are opportunities to participate in student unions which like trade unions are not run by the university and focus on the rights of students, enabling those who participate to gain experiences similar to other forms of political structure (Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013).

When asked about the importance of attending a council meeting the participants in the focus groups had mixed responses. The first focus group attributed attending a council meeting to being of similar importance to writing to an MP and starting their own campaign on social media. However, during the discussion within the group it was clear that some participants had very different views of how effective attending a council meeting could be. Although they all agreed that having the opportunity to voice their opinions in person would be more effective than writing to their MP or local councillors, some of the participants had seen council meetings broadcast and noted that the meetings attracted very low numbers of people in attendance, which then would

limit who would hear the views they wished to express. Of the survey respondents 47% or 117 stated that they had attended a council meeting, but it is important to realise that a large percentage of those filling in the survey were elected Borough and County councillors, so they will have had to attend council meetings as part of those roles.

132 or 53% of respondents to the survey stated that they had received no political education and 25% or 62 respondents stated that they had only received general information at school and not a formal qualification relating to politics. One participant in the first focus group stated, “the more educated they [young people] are the more likely they are to talk about politics and the less educated they are the less likely they are to talk about politics.” In the survey I only asked respondents about the education they had received in relation to politics specifically and not their level of education generally.

However, four survey participants when asked their reasons for joining a political party stated that they had gained an interest in politics while attending university or college. While attending college or university students have the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills and explore new ideas. They experience a new environment in which challenge and debate is commonplace, this can lay a foundation for future engagement with politics and campaigning (Furlong, 2012 and Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013).

One of the main arguments against votes for 16 and 17 year olds having the vote is that young people do not have enough education or knowledge to make informed decisions about who to vote for. This view is reinforced by the survey data, as more than half of those who participated in the survey had received no education about politics. However, it is worth noting that participants who stated that they had not received any political education came from all age ranges.

There were similarities between the political actions that respondents to the survey stated that they had been involved with, that were not one of the multiple-choice options provided using the free text box. These included lobbying politicians in parliament, participating in letter writing or email campaigns before the availability of social media and sending Freedom of Information requests, to relevant politicians or organisations. Respondents also highlighted leafleting and distributing information on how to vote in the run up to particular elections or referendums.

The other actions submitted linked to participating in civil disobedience, with several respondents having been surveilled and arrested for these actions. Sabotaging fox hunting and participating in sit in's or occupying buildings

- What impact does Social media have on engagement with politics and campaigning?

The participants of both focus groups talked in depth about the use of social media and the use of the internet in general. In the first focus group, when asked if they felt that the internet and social media contributed to people's involvement in politics or campaigns one of the female participants stated “I think it's increasing



because as the world is making a shift from paper to the internet we have a lot more access to different documents more easily and we have a lot easier access to the internet". All the participants in the first focus group used social media to follow high profile politicians and their campaigns in the United Kingdom and abroad. The participants of the second focus groups all used social media, but did not follow any particular campaigns or politicians, other than one female participant who subscribed to YouTube channels of individuals who campaigned on increasing awareness of mental health issues.

The results from the survey showed that 62% or 155 respondents had shared a political post on social media. When asked if they liked or followed a political party or politician on social media and liked or followed a campaign group on social media the results were 56% (140 respondents) and 58% (146 respondents) respectively. Those that had started their own campaign on social media was only 8% or 20 respondents.

Although the majority of the comments from the young people in the focus group were positive towards the use of social media by political parties and campaign organisations, to raise awareness and gather support for their campaign, one participant in the first focus group raised concerns that on social media individuals can see the information that reinforces their own views. He said "My biggest problem with social media is that it creates an echo chamber for people to just hear their own political opinion because the way each service of social media is set up is an algorithm that detects the things you like and just filters them. It just filters out anything that opposes your view". This was reinforced by some of the comments made by one of the female participants of the focus group, when talking about the recent elections campaigns run by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the presidential election in America. She followed both Trump and Clinton's campaigns and individual supporters, so she saw both sides of the situation on social media. She felt that both groups were constantly, reinforcing their own views and in many instances would not even engage or consider the views that opposed their own. The views of the young people in this focus group mirrored the findings of Pilkinton and Pollock, who identified that although due to the interactive nature social media young people have the opportunity to discuss ideas with a wide range of individuals or groups it does not in itself "expand or diversify young people's political horizons" (2015. Pg.5).

The participants in the first focus group raised concerns that social media gives a platform to those who give their views on topics and issues that they may not actually have any knowledge of, but because they have a lot of follower's people take what they have to say seriously. An example of this were the Kardashians and similar celebrity figures, that may not have any specific knowledge of a campaign, but just by giving their own view their followers blindly do as they say "like sheep". The young people did highlight that when these public figures made statements on their social media platforms, siding with a particular campaign there is often negative comments given by the public, which sometimes are extreme to the point being threatening.

The second focus group were much more sceptical about the value or importance of social media when used by politicians. One participant stated, "it is irrelevant, cause it is only Facebook, init?", However, two participants thought that social media was a good way of politicians to keep people informed of what they are doing and so that more people could find out about them.

The focus groups and the survey raised the issue of the age of those using social media. One participant explained “Well at the moment the majority of political leaders in our country and the world are old and can't use them so they have their advisers using them, which makes the entire thing pointless unless you're Trump who actually uses Twitter”. Donald Trump’s use of twitter has been widely commented upon by news outlets since he started his presidential campaign and has continued to do so since being elected as the president of the USA.

The participants in the survey were asked why they had not participated in certain political or campaign actions. Some of these responses were “I don’t do social media”, “I have no appetite for social media” and “Being of the age I am I am not confident with the use of social media.” All of the respondents who stated specifically in the free text box that they did not use social media were over the age of 51. When the data from the survey regarding social media was examined in more depth it showed that of those that have not personally participated in any actions that are related to social media they are also more likely to be over the age of 51. Of those who stated that they were aged 71 years or older which was 12 respondents overall, 6 (50%) did not participate in in any actions involving the use of social media. Those within the 61-70 age bracket, 16 (35%) had not used social media and 22 (33%) of 51-60 year olds. The youngest age range of 12-17 showed that 5 respondents (20%) had not participated in any political actions on social media. It is worth noting that two of the main social media platforms that are used by politicians at the time of writing are Facebook and Twitter, both of which have policies that users should be over the age of 13 years old, so respondents to the survey within that age range may not be old enough to use these social media platforms.

I used the Dutiful Citizen (DC) verses Actualising Citizen Model (Bennett, 2008) and the addition to this model examining civic learning styles and civic identity of Dutiful Citizen (DC) and Actualising Citizens (AC) (Bennett et al. 2009) model to analyse the views expressed by the young people I had spoken to during the two focus groups.

(AC) Diminished sense of government obligation- higher sense of individual purpose verses (DC) Obligation to participate in government centred activities:

Young people in the second focus group had no interest or desire to engage with democratic institutions or political parties. However, the young people participating in the first focus group all put a high level of importance on being involved with traditional political institutions. For example, during the Diamond nine activity they ranked standing as a candidate in an election, meeting with an MP and voting in elections as the three most important actions. A participant said, “one has the most political effect by being an actual candidate as a voice and representing people.” One participant in the first focus group was also a member of a political party.

(AC) Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism verses (DC) Voting is the core democratic act:

The participants in the second focus group did not see the value of voting and all but one stated that they did not think that they would vote in the future, once they were old enough to have the opportunity. When asked if they would vote in the future one participant stated “Not really, cause basically all you are doing is voting for who you want to be prime minister and that is it. It hasn’t got a big part in your life”. The young people in the first focus group’s views on voting were the opposite. Every member of the group was desperate to vote and talked passionately about the importance of voting. When asked about campaigns they had heard of in the past they talked about the suffrage movement, the Trump and Clinton election campaigns and the Brexit referendum in 2016. None of the campaigns mentioned in the second focus group had any links to voting or political campaigns.

(AC) Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment verses (DC) Becomes informed about issues and government by following mass media:

Mistrust of politicians or the systems that surround them was raised by one of the participants in the second focus group, in relation to those that count ballot papers in elections knowing who they wanted to win and changing the votes, she said “I don’t understand why when you go to vote you are only allowed to use pencil aint ya. I bet they rub it off and they write down who they want. Cheating aint it, why would they want you to do it in pencil and not permanent marker?”. During the first focus group there was a large amount of discussion regarding individual politicians, many of whom the young people expressed a dislike for, but at no point did any of the participants talk about not trusting politicians.

(AC) Favours loose networks of community action- often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies verses (DC) Joins civil society organizations and/or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilize support:

The campaign activities that those in the second focus group have participated in or had an awareness of were all online, for example YouTube campaigns regarding mental health. The members of the group also discussed the use of online petition platforms, which could be shared with friends and family on social media. The campaigning activities that the young people in the first focus group had participated in were all organised by large campaign organisations, specifically Amnesty Youth and CND. A participant in the first focus group explained “we do the Amnesty Youth so each we try and get people to come along to the club and discuss different human rights issues and how they’ve been infringed upon”.

(AC) Interactive, project-based, peer-to-peer networked information sharing verses (DC) Authoritative, text-based one-way knowledge transmissions to individuals:

The young people who participated in the second focus group were all part of a group within their 6th form that were not at an academic level to work towards A-levels. They were supported by a youth worker, rather than a teacher who through group discussions and small projects enabled the group to increase confidence and develop skills to enable them to move onto college or work in the future. The young people from the first

focus group were all highly academic and working towards a-levels in academic subjects. This learning takes the form of learning from textbooks and teachers and have less opportunity for learning from their peers.

(AC) Participatory media creation verses (DC) Passive media consumption:

The results from the focus groups do not fit within this aspect of the model, as young people participating in both the focus groups had used social media to create their own content online. The first focus group had fit clearly within the Dutiful Citizen (DC) category on all other aspects, nothing the participants said suggested that they were passive in their media consumption.

(AC) Preference for democratic environments- learners participate in creating content and assessing credibility verses (DC) Knowledge and skills and assessed by external standards- little learner content creation or peer assessment:

The young people from the second focus group were not working towards any formal qualifications as a group (some individual members were studying for GCSE retakes separately), instead they planned what they wanted to work on or develop in each session with the support of the youth worker. In contrast, the young people from the first focus group were all studying academic subjects, which would be assessed through exams and producing essays that would be marked from a strict criteria by teachers and examining bodies.

## Conclusion

### Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to find out what inspires people to engage with politics, campaigning or activism, at a local and national level and how does this engagement take place, compared to current views of young people?

The specific research objectives were to:

- Explore what inspired individuals to engage with politics, campaigning or activism?
- Explore what young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism are at the moment?
- Evaluate critically what impact social media has on engagement with politics and campaigns?

This section will revisit the research objectives identified above, give an overview of the research findings and provide conclusions established from those research findings. The previous chapter examining the research analysis provided an in depth look at the findings, so these will be summarised in this chapter.

Recommendations on how this research could be built upon in the future to enable the development of further research are identified.

By using this format it is intended that the research project be concluded and establish if the research has achieved the objectives.

### Research Objectives: Summary of Findings and Conclusions

- Explore what inspired individuals to engage with politics, campaigning or activism?

Summary of findings:

The reasons that people of all ages initially get involved in activities relating to politics campaigning or activism can be broken down into seven categories; 1. To become more involved in party politics or a campaign, usually as a way of increasing knowledge. 2. Identifying that a parties' manifesto aims matches an individual's personal beliefs. 3. The necessity to be member of a political party after being selected to stand as a candidate for a particular party. 4. An individual's desire for a change from the current situation and wanting to assist with enabling that change to happen. 5. Being passionate about a specific cause or issue and wanting to actively support that cause. 6. The social aspect that comes from membership of a political party or campaign group, by meeting and interacting with others that hold similar views. 7. The influence of family, either through discussion regarding politics and campaigning growing up or to support a family members with their own campaigning activities.

Conclusion: An individual's personal beliefs and values are crucial to their initial interest in become involved, but having the opportunities to explore those values with others encourages them to become active.

- Explore what young people's perceptions about politics, campaigning or activism are at the moment?

Summary of findings:

Young people engage in a range of political and campaigning activities, often in settings that are a-political and without having aligned themselves to a specific political party or ideology. The opportunity to participate in activities that promote knowledge of democracy and campaigning, through education in schools or as members of organisations such as youth councils or uniformed groups, give them the skills and experiences to encourage further participation in the future. Although young people are leading the campaign for votes for 16 and 17 year olds, outside of this campaign young people themselves are divided on whether the voting age should be lowered. Young people receive varying amounts and quality of education regarding politics, but those who do have access to these opportunities tend to participate in political and campaign activities later into life.

The age of those currently elected into political positions and the lack of diversity within these institutions lead young people to feel underrepresented, as they do not see individual that they can identify with. This leads young people to feel disengaged and undervalued.

Conclusion: Lowering the voting age alone will not encourage young people's political engagement. Education and opportunities for them to experience democracy for themselves is much more effective at encouraging participation in the future.

- Evaluate critically what impact social media has on engagement with politics and campaigns?

Summary of findings:

The use of social media by politicians, political parties and campaign organisations is increasing, but it is currently not as effective as more traditional forms of campaigning. Young people are more likely to use social media as a way of campaigning or accessing political information than their older counterparts. Social media allows young people the opportunity to explore ideas, debate and form their own opinions, but these can be limited if they only interact with those who have similar beliefs to their own.

Conclusion: Social media can be a useful tool for politicians and campaigners to get their message out to a large number of people. However, the people that tend to 'like' or 'follow' these campaigns on social media tend to be engaged or interested already.

### **Recommendations**

Rather than the media and traditional political structures criticising young people for their perceived apathy, they should focus on engaging young people using issues that are important to them. Highlighting how politics and campaigns affect young people will encourage them to act.

More diversity among those taking political office needs to be encouraged. If members of the public and not just young people, see that people like them standing for election on campaigning on issues this will make people think they can do it too.

Young people should have consistent education about campaigning and democracy, both in school and in the community. Allowing young people to participate in opportunities that enable them to experience democracy and campaigning, will make them more engaged adults.

Social media should be utilised to accompany more traditional campaign methods, but to be effective politicians, political parties and campaigners need to adapt and change to use new forms of social media as they are developed.

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