

# Intergenerational Justice Review

Issue topic:  
**Low Electoral Turnout among  
Young Voters**



**VOTE**

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The peer-reviewed journal *Intergenerational Justice Review* aims to improve our understanding of intergenerational justice and sustainable development through pure and applied ethical research. The IGJR (ISSN 2190-6335) seeks articles representing the state of the art in the philosophy, politics and law of intergenerational relations. It is an open-access journal that is published on a professional level with an extensive international readership. The editorial board comprises over 50 international experts from ten countries, representing eight disciplines.

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The research articles in this issue were originally submitted as contributions to the Fifth Demography Prize for Young Researchers 2014/2015 on the topic “Low Electoral Turnout among Young People – Consequences and Remedies“. The award was funded and supported by the Stiftung Apfelbaum (Apfelbaum Foundation).

The global trend towards greater longevity means that the number of older voters is constantly increasing, and the proportional number of younger voters is decreasing. In many of the world's democracies, older people vote more consistently and in greater numbers than their younger counterparts. The apparent reluctance of the young to exercise their right to vote only serves to reinforce this demographic trend. The result is that politicians tend to pander to the "Grey Vote", and young people run the risk of being under-represented in parliament while seeing their issues overlooked by governments. In such a scenario, young people may be easier targets for unpopular government measures, such as the belt-tightening associated with austerity.

The statistics make the case. In Germany's 2013 general election, the average voting turnout was 72.4%. All of the age-cohorts above the age of 45 fell above this average, whereas all of the age-cohorts below 45 fell exactly on or below it. Turnout was highest amongst 60-70 year olds (almost 80%), whereas turnout amongst 18-21 year olds was below 65%.

In the United Kingdom, turnout in 2015's general election among those aged 18 to 24 decreased to a mere 43%, far below the average turnout of 66.1%. The participatory gap has widened over the decades and its last year's figures were exceeded only in 2005, when youth turnout was a staggering 24 percentage points below that of the entire population. A recent article in *The Economist* (23 April 2016) suggests, however, that this is partly due to the fact that most British university students live in short-term accommodation and tend to move frequently, which makes it hard for them to register as voters in the first place.

In either of these cases, would lowering the voting age make a difference? In Germany, where 16 year olds are eligible to vote in the local elections of some *Länder* (federate states), there is some evidence to suggest that a cohort who obtain their voting right at 16 will have a higher poll turnout over the course of their whole lives than a cohort who are not allowed to cast their first vote until a later age. In other words, early

participation seems to set a trend for life.

One possible way of reducing the median voting age could be the introduction of compulsory suffrage, which already exists in countries such as Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg, Cyprus, and Australia. However, this kind of imposed political legitimacy is seen by some to offend the principles of liberal democracy – even though it need not imply the imposition of legal sanctions against non-voters, as the case of Belgium and others demonstrates. The question of whether the democratic act of voting should be recast from a civic duty to an obligation is multi-faceted and will remain open to discussion for years to come. Additionally, measures to increase the electoral turnout of the younger age groups could aim at making the very act of voting easier, that is, more "user-friendly" – for example through e-voting.

At any rate, it is hardly possible for the interests and preferences of a group, even with the very best intentions, to be better identified by a third-party than by the affected group itself. The paternalistic conception that men understand women's needs better than women themselves, for instance, was successfully rejected by women during their long battle for the suffrage. As John Stuart Mill put it in his *Considerations on Representative Government*, the rulers and ruling classes are "under a necessity of considering the interests and wishes of those who have the suffrage; but of those who are excluded, it is in their option whether they will do so or not." Therefore the very idea of democracy is called into question if any group within it become sidelined, while others are favoured. There will be repercussions for political legitimacy if young people perceive themselves as being left out of the political process; hence remedies are needed to ensure that this does not happen.

This issue of the *Intergenerational Justice Review* addresses the topic from two angles: it asks for the reasons why the electoral turnout of young voters is comparably low in the first place, and it discusses some possible solutions to the problem.

In the first of two research articles, Charlotte Snelling asks for the potential of education in raising youth turnout. Aggregate

increases in education do little to alter an individual's relative status within the education system, she argues. Using the 2011 UK Citizens in Transition Survey, she suggests that education affects turnout by determining young people's positioning within social networks. Some of these networks, however, are more politicised than others. Individuals with relatively lower educational status continue to be excluded from more politically engaged networks – irrespective of their educational attainment – and, as a result, they lack the mobilisation and greater sense of political efficacy required to vote. In short, the simple formula "more education leads to more political interest" turns out to be just that, a simplification.

In the second article, Thomas Tozer discusses how to increase electoral turnout among the young. He considers two methods for doing so: compulsory voting and a scheme of financial incentives. The incentive scheme that he prefers would pay young people £30 if they attend an hour-long information session on the election, an hour-long discussion session, and then vote. Tozer argues that this scheme is preferable to compulsory voting because it is more likely to lead young people to deliver reasoned and well-considered votes; and it does so, he holds, without violating individual liberty.

In the review section, our authors discuss some of the most recent publications on voting and intergenerational justice. The research articles of this issue are the winning entries to the 2014/2015 Demography Prize, bestowed jointly by the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) and the Intergenerational Foundation (IF). Please also consider our Call for Papers on "Constitutions and Intergenerational Justice", printed at the end of this issue. Last but not least, we cordially invite you to visit our newly launched website at [www.igjr.org](http://www.igjr.org). Whether electronically or in print – we wish you a rewarding and insightful read.

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# “School’s out!” A Test of Education’s Turnout-Raising Potential

by Charlotte Snelling<sup>1</sup>

**A**bstract: Youth turnout in the UK is falling despite young people representing arguably the most educated generation. This article examines education’s role in social sorting, contending that the positive impact of educational expansion on electoral participation is tempered by relative education concerns. Using the 2011 UK Citizens in Transition Survey, it argues that education affects turnout by determining young people’s positioning within social networks. Some of these networks are more politicised than others. Individuals with relatively lower educational status continue to be excluded from more politically engaged networks – irrespective of their educational attainment – and as such lack the mobilisation and greater sense of political efficacy required to vote.

## Introduction

The positive relationship between education and electoral turnout at the individual level is so well-established to be largely uncontested.<sup>2</sup> Thought to raise levels of political interest and confer skills and knowledge required for voting, studies across Western democracies consistently find significant evidence to this effect; electors with higher levels of education demonstrate a greater likelihood of voting than those with lower levels.<sup>3</sup> It could reasonably be assumed that as the UK’s demographic profile becomes more educated, its population will become increasingly electorally participative. Brody,<sup>4</sup> however, has highlighted a “puzzle of participation”, observing that educational expansion had been accompanied not by rising but declining turnout. This is especially notable among young people, arguably the most educated generation of all and yet the least participative. To what extent, therefore, is a more educated youth electorate an effective and satisfactory remedy for tackling low youth electoral participation? Despite extensions to compulsory schooling in the UK and increased numbers entering higher education (HE)<sup>5</sup> – a 44% increase in students between 1999 and 2009<sup>6</sup> – only 44% of 18-24 year olds were estimated to have voted in the 2010 general election, versus a 65% average.<sup>7</sup> With voting often habitual<sup>8</sup>, fears are that if

young people abstain now, generational replacement will see electorate-wide turnout falling even further. Equally, these young people risk growing political marginalisation if parties are tempted to gear policy programmes primarily towards the voting “grey majority”.<sup>9</sup> Questions subsequently arise as to why educational expansion has seemingly failed to engender a more electorally participative youth and whether strategies aimed at reversing current trends can rely upon education alone to act as a key agent of pro-voting socialisation.

On the one hand, there are arguments that as young people enjoy more education they also become more critical, less deferential towards politics, leading them to be selective in their participation.<sup>10</sup> Entry into HE may also delay the transition into “adulthood” and thus the point at which politics can appear more relevant.<sup>11</sup> Both arguments focus on the young people benefitting most from educational expansion, namely the increasing number who are attending university. Conversely, in a departure from such theories, in this article I examine the contribution of less-well educated young people – individuals aged 18-24 years who do not go to university – to the youth turnout puzzle, considering how and to what extent educational expansion affects their electoral behaviours.

“With voting often habitual, fears are that if young people abstain now, generational replacement will see electorate-wide turnout falling even further.”

Certainly, nearly all young people today are “more” educated than in the past – in 1974 as many as 72% of British Election Study respondents left school at 16 compared to just 29% in 2005<sup>12</sup> – and yet individuals outwith HE cannot be assumed to have experienced the advantages of educational expansion in the same way as those attending university. Taking inspiration from Nie et al.’s sorting model<sup>13</sup> in which aggregate increases in education do little to alter an individual’s relative status and connections, I argue that education performs an important positioning role. A young person’s

social position can influence their political recruitment as well as how they view the political system and themselves as potential participants in it. These may then affect turnout, the ever lower positioning associated today with non-HE experiences leaving this group lacking mobilisation, feeling inefficient, and ultimately reluctant to vote, irrespective of their absolute education level. Using the 2011 Citizens in Transition Study,<sup>14</sup> I find that social networks and internal efficacy can mediate education’s impact on turnout. I conclude by highlighting implications this has for education’s potential role in remedies designed to encourage participation.

## Education and electoral participation

Education is typically associated with an increase in electoral participation potential. Dee finds each additional year in education increases the likelihood of voting by an average of 3.8 percentage points.<sup>15</sup> It is not within the remit of this paper to explore reasons for this correlation and with a wide pool of literature already available, it is possible simply to summarise the key arguments. Within classic civic education theory, education supports the development of political skills, knowledge, and interest, all of which are considered necessary resources and mobilisers for voting;<sup>16</sup> individuals become more capable of participating while increasingly believing there is reason to do so. Through education, they can also acquire practical understanding, for instance how to register and cast a ballot.<sup>17</sup> Without this they may lack confidence and feel ill-equipped to participate. Indeed, studies show that young people who report to be lacking sufficient understanding of politics are more likely to abstain.<sup>18</sup> Frequently viewed within rational choice thinking, education here lowers the anticipated costs of voting and heightens prospective benefits. This occurs both through formal teaching and informal extracurricular activities. Evidently within certain subjects, for instance social sciences and humanities, skills such as document analysis and critical thinking might be especially relevant in supporting political participation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, with

citizenship education introduced into English schools in 2001, many young people entering the electorate today should have at least some comprehension of politics, and more so than would be expected for previous generations.<sup>20</sup> Given its recent introduction however, its precise impact is still being assessed. Within universities, student unions also run elections and campaigns, political parties are represented by student societies, debates are held, and political figures are frequently invited to speak.<sup>21</sup> Students can become politically informed while gaining experience of democratic processes prior to any formal electoral participation and irrespective of variation in academic learning.

“Through education, individuals can also acquire practical understanding, for instance how to register and cast a ballot. Without this they may lack confidence and feel ill-equipped to participate.”

Analysis using British Election Studies, February 1974 to present day,<sup>22</sup> demonstrates that while turnout has been falling across all groups in the UK, this has been most pronounced among young people without HE experience (Figure 1). Just two-fifths reported voting in 2010 (39.1%) compared to 67.5% of their HE counterparts. We could think this results from their missing out on many of the politicising forces associated with HE and/or their experiencing comparatively less education. Superficially, there is support for a civic education hypothesis. However, since the school leaving age has risen over time it remains unclear as to why extra years in education alongside the possible experience of citizenship-style

education leaves this group being so under-participative within the wider electorate and with a widening participation gap. Figure 1 further justifies a focus on those individuals “left behind” by educational expansion, those who do not enjoy its full rewards – namely, entry into university and related benefits. It is non-HE young people contributing more than any others to low and falling youth turnout.

### The mechanisms of relative education and social sorting

A number of authors have considered the possible conditionality of individual-level education effects on levels of education in the environment, stated most notably in Nie et al.’s seminal sorting model.<sup>23</sup> Contrasted with additive effects theories in which rising education levels generate growing support for democracy across all groups,<sup>24</sup> they claim a more educated electorate negatively impacts individual turnout by affecting notions of relative education.<sup>25</sup> They argue that while education levels may have risen, entrenched hierarchies remain and mitigate the possibility of relatively less well-educated individuals (within a generational cohort) turning out in line with traditional expectations. In the past, staying in school beyond the age of 14-16 years in the UK may have been sufficient to ensure an individual felt able and inclined to participate in society, and by association in politics. It was a common phenomenon. Now with increasing entry into HE, school-level qualifications have fallen in value. There is educational inflation; as “average levels of education in the population have risen, each individual has needed ever more

education to be positioned at the top of the class hierarchy.”<sup>26</sup> Education is therefore a proxy for social position here, absolute skills and knowledge playing only a minor role in determining turnout.

“In the past, staying in school beyond the age of 14-16 years in the UK may have been sufficient to ensure an individual felt able and inclined to participate [...]. Now with increasing entry into HE, school-level qualifications have fallen in value.”

Much research adopts multi-level approaches, modelling turnout potential based on electors’ individual education interacted with that of the society or community in which they live.<sup>27</sup> However, the underexplored question of why relative differences in education matter for turnout persists, particularly given that the act of voting is not in itself competitive (one person voting does not prevent another) nor directly related to social position. Pattie and Johnston state: “Showing that voting patterns are consistent with contextual effects is not the same as demonstrating that such effects operate. It is necessary to uncover the mechanisms by which these contextual effects bring their influence to bear.”<sup>28</sup> Persson agrees that by focusing only on empirical tests of the relationship between individual and aggregate education, studies do “not allow for direct examination of the causal mechanism(s).”<sup>29</sup> By studying specifically the causal mechanisms here I can build on thoughts about why a relatively lower level of education continues to see non-HE young people abstain and overwhelm the positive impact of their absolute education having risen compared to that of older generations. The analysis in this paper consequently moves away from classic sorting model tests which typically utilise longitudinal, multi-level data. Rather I examine the extent to which differential turnout relates to social positioning’s mediating of education effects.

Such mechanisms are linked to a concept of *social network centrality*, concerned with the nature of the contacts and connections individuals can access and cultivate through their educationally-derived, environmentally-assessed social position.<sup>30</sup> As the authors themselves suggest, this is not always suitable for young people who, often still being in education, are yet to be formally sorted. However, given young people’s lack of electoral habits, political inexperience, and

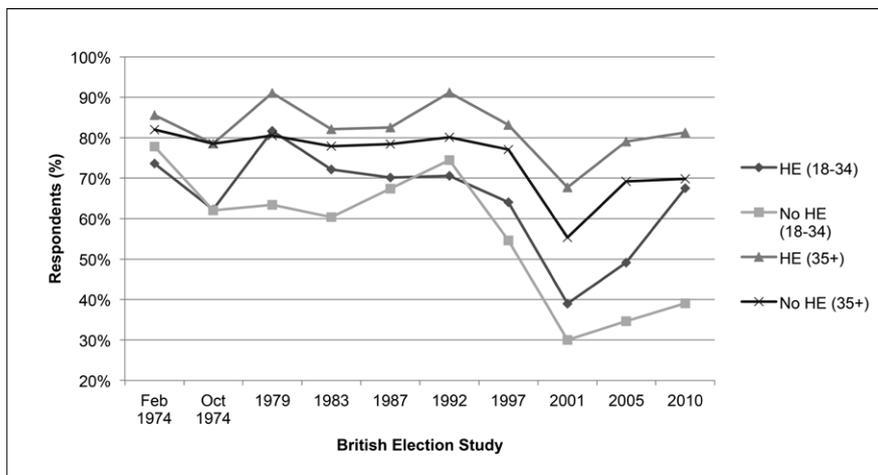


Figure 1: Absolute turnout at UK General Elections by age and HE experience, Feb 1974 to 2010. Source: British Election Studies Feb 1974 to 2010, n ranging from 1,874 to 3,955 (weighted by official turnout)

lifecycle stage, it is my contention that they may be especially susceptible to processes connected to the wider concept of relative education and positioning.<sup>31</sup> Different social networks and status levels are arguably already found to operate across different educational settings and young people do not need to have graduated to feel or experience these.<sup>32</sup>

For Nie et al., a high level of education is connected with high social status which supports interaction with influential social and political networks.<sup>33</sup> These determine the likelihood of direct political recruitment, individuals at the centre of these networks being invited to participate by peers who have an interest in encouraging greater participation by those with whom they share a stake in society. This is important because as Verba and colleagues explain, being asked to participate is a powerful mobiliser for political action.<sup>34</sup> By being both direct and targeted, such a “push factor” can overcome other obstacles or misgivings about participating.<sup>35</sup>

Student-led voter registration drives on university campuses offer a good example relevant to the youth population, further demonstrating how these effects can be operative even before formal sorting takes place; they are a direct attempt by individuals to target their peers and support their participation.<sup>36</sup> Non-HE young people are less easily targeted (being more widely dispersed) while as a group already less likely to vote, they can present as more costly to mobilise.<sup>37</sup> They are inevitably often neglected by campaign activities. Following the decline of other traditional mobilising forces, for instance trade unions and even the family, an “institutional lacuna” for non-HE young people is perhaps now especially apparent.<sup>38</sup> Thus the settings in which education positions young people may have a direct and significant impact on the level of political mobilisation they encounter.

Crucially, positioning within socially important and more politicised networks can also generate less overt yet still powerful normative forces to encourage voting. Individuals respond to political cues and often adhere to expected behaviours within their immediate networks. The reputational cost of not voting, for example, could be high for those who have strong political connections but not for those for whom voting and civic engagement are not dominant social norms.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, being in an environment in which politics is discussed

and peers are politically active can have informational spill-over effects. It encourages greater awareness of politics and makes voting at elections appear more relevant.<sup>40</sup> These normative influences can be particularly strong among young people who are yet to develop their own electoral habits.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, while HE students are still in the process of becoming highly educated, if we are talking of social positioning, the role of universities transmitting pro-voting norms cannot be ignored. Contrastingly, disadvantaged young people, typically with no HE experience, are less likely to encounter similar vicarious experiences. Thus their compulsion to vote is reduced.

“Given young people’s lack of electoral habits, political inexperience, and lifecycle stage [...] they may be especially susceptible to processes connected to the wider concept of relative education and positioning.”

I argue, however, that the role of positioning and networks within traditional sorting model approaches can and should be developed further if thinking about young people in their formative political years. Building on a body of work exploring the significance of efficacy on turnout in youth,<sup>42</sup> and factors accounting for differential efficacy within this, I suggest that in order to truly understand how social positioning mitigates absolute education effects, attention must be paid to its potential role in shaping individual’s perceptions of self and of politics.

Research tells us that a perceived lack of civic skills and understanding can lower electors’ confidence in participating at elections.<sup>43</sup> While this might be influenced by absolute education and based on formal knowledge, relative education considerations can also play a role. For instance, when viewing their political knowledge and skill in the context of levels assumed to be possessed in wider society, non-HE individuals may feel especially ill-prepared to participate. They may have sufficient skills where citizenship education at school, for example, in theory encourages them to participate politically.<sup>44</sup> The rising of the school leaving age also ensures a higher level of “basic” education than previous generations, applied to areas of literacy and numeracy. Their relative position, however, could leave them believing themselves less capable in fields deemed “intellectual”. Increasingly viewed as “below average”, a self-fulfilling prophecy can take

effect.<sup>45</sup> Contrastingly, individuals attaining high levels of educational success are more likely to possess a general self-efficacy given their higher position in any academic hierarchy. They are typically more confident in their cognitive abilities being transferable from their academic and life pursuits into electoral activity, whether they are wholly politically informed or not.<sup>46</sup> There is therefore a potential exacerbating effect related to internal political efficacy.

Individuals might also make assessments of their influence in the political system itself on the basis of their relative position. For example, they can draw on experiences of success (or failure) in influencing others alongside how much control they hold over situations important to them. Young people lacking their own political history must look to non-political life experiences, such as how effective they are in their local communities, workplaces, and colleges to determine how efficacious they feel.<sup>47</sup> Those with HE experience tend to enjoy greater attention from elites and experience more opportunities for engagement in decision-making more generally, thus increasing their sense of influence. Their high social status can also ensure that they feel in possession of political voice, adopting “upwardly mobile” thinking based on expectations of future position.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, individuals without HE experience, as a marginalised group, may feel they lack voice given their distance from important decision-making networks.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, with the demographic profile of politicians reflecting societal trends and university qualifications seemingly having become almost a prerequisite,<sup>50</sup> they could also feel unrepresented. There is the potential for a “critical citizen” among disadvantaged groups, one who is cynical about politics’ openness and responsiveness to them as individuals of relatively lower social standing.<sup>51</sup>

## Data and methods

The following analysis employs cross-sectional data and causal modelling. As Persson states, “[i]f we have data on the causal mechanism it is possible to use cross-sectional data – without information about the contextual levels of education” to test relative education effects.<sup>52</sup> Based on the discussions above, my aim is to assess whether education operates through three hypothesised mechanisms – internal efficacy, external efficacy, and social network interactions – and equally if one carries

more explanatory power than another. Furthermore, how might these forces interact and vary in their effects across different educational groups? My dependent variable is individual turnout at the 2010 general election. While this is self-reported, methodological studies suggest that using this indicator is unlikely to significantly corrupt either the relationships between variables or their estimated effects in regression models.<sup>53</sup> To test this, the following analyses have been conducted both unweighted and using a youth turnout weight<sup>54</sup> to control for self-report biases. While absolute turnout levels demonstrate over-reporting, the strength and significance of relationships in the models appear unaffected.

“Young people lacking their own political history must look to non-political life experiences [...] to determine how efficacious they feel.”

The data are taken from the online component of the 2011 Citizens in Transition Study (CITS).<sup>55</sup> The survey received responses from 2,010 18-25 year olds across the UK to investigate attitudes and behaviours within civic engagement, including their political views, citizenship learning, and perceptions of “citizenship”.<sup>56</sup> Its youth focus is a major advantage with both a larger youth sample and wider array of youth-specific variables than usually found in other UK surveys of citizenship and political activity. This extends to a more nuanced record of current education status which can differentiate between HE and further education (FE),<sup>57</sup> for example. As a quota sample from a pre-existing panel community there are limits on the extent to which inferential techniques can be confidently applied.<sup>58</sup> Research in the field of political participation nevertheless suggests internet quota samples often compare favourably with those collected through in-person interviews and probability sampling.<sup>59</sup> It should not prevent robust analysis. Equally, to increase confidence in results’ representativeness respondents have been compared against available population statistics with satisfactory results.<sup>60</sup>

To study the proposed causal paths, I employ structural equation modelling (SEM) using IBM SPSS Amos 21 alongside logistic regression.<sup>61</sup> Such techniques have been used recently to test sorting model-type effects – specifically its traditional assumptions regarding social network centrality

– in Sweden,<sup>62</sup> suggesting it as a suitable method for this analysis. SEM also permits the testing and creation of latent indicators to capture the three key concepts thought to be mediating the role of education on turnout. In order to mitigate the possibility that not all respondents were eligible to have voted in 2010 due to their age, I exclude those who would not have been aged 18 at the time of the election.<sup>63</sup> Where age is subsequently referenced it refers to age at the time of the election. A five-category education scale variable is used in initial descriptive statistics (No HE or FE; FE student; HE undergraduate; HE postgraduate; HE graduate no longer studying), collapsed to what appears – as demonstrated by these initial summaries – a more useful three-category scale when modelling (No HE or FE; FE student; HE experience).

To establish if and how participation patterns can be explained through social positioning I use six variables, all measured on Likert scales of agreement (strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; strongly agree). These are displayed in Table 1 and cover the three mediating concepts. While social network interactions are not strictly measured in terms of

position and connections, the variables chosen reflect the degree to which young people themselves believe they interact within politicised circles, capturing the likelihood of political norms being transferred. A purely social network position indicator, by contrast, requires more assumptions about the level of politicisation attached to particular occupations or roles, and is less appropriate for young people who are yet to leave education and make similar formal connections. The external and internal efficacy variables consider the extent to which individuals believe they can influence politics and affect change, and how politically literate and capable they believe themselves to be, respectively. Each is coded between zero and one with reverse coding applied where relevant so a score of zero reflects a negative response and a score of one a positive response.

## Results

In a simple two-way test, turnout varies in the sample according to educational experiences and in such a way that supports traditional assumptions, including those within a relative education effects model (even if in the unweighted sample over-reporting is evident).<sup>64</sup> Graduates and postgraduates

**Table 1: Sorting model variables across educational groups and correlated with turnout at the 2010 UK General Election**

	Variable	% strongly agree and agree					Correlation with 2010 General Election turnout (Cramer's V)
		No HE/FE	FE	HE (UG)	HE (PG)	Grad.	
Social network interactions	My friends are not interested in politics ( <b>fnoint</b> )*	46.3 (606)	40.6 (202)	39.3 (453)	32.1 (187)	39.5 (296)	.084 (.017), Negative
	I often discuss politics with other people ( <b>discuss</b> )*	26.5 (654)	34.6 (208)	40.8 (465)	44.2 (190)	36.5 (304)	.219 (.000), Positive
External efficacy	People like me can have real influence on government if they get involved ( <b>infgov1</b> )*	29.0 (599)	32.3 (195)	40.8 (434)	39.8 (186)	37.2 (290)	.122 (.000), Positive
	When local people campaign together they can help to solve problems in the community ( <b>loccam1</b> )*	57.3 (613)	57.3 (197)	70.0 (438)	65.2 (187)	70.2 (295)	.082 (.023), Positive
Internal efficacy	Sometimes politics seems so complicated I cannot understand what's going on ( <b>complR1</b> )*	62.4 (650)	64.7 (207)	57.7 (461)	49.7 (189)	56.4 (305)	.139 (.000), Negative
	I know less about politics than most people my age ( <b>knowR1</b> )*	25.9 (627)	25.7 (202)	19.9 (449)	19.5 (189)	15.2 (295)	.193 (.000), Negative

Source: CITS 2011 (Online responses); youth turnout weight; total N for each educational group on each question from which to interpret; ages displayed in parentheses; \*Chi-square test p<.01

were most likely to report having voted in 2010 (75.5% and 72.3%), suggesting that completion of a degree, closer proximity to “adulthood”, and more years spent in education engenders greater turnout potential. Interestingly however, while HE undergraduates were unsurprisingly next – 63.4% – the least participative were those young people currently studying in FE. They voted at a rate of just 44.4% compared to 56.0% of young people not pursuing any post-compulsory schooling [ $\chi^2$  (4,  $n=1,845$ ) = 76.803,  $p = .000$ , Cramer’s  $V = .204$ ]. Therefore while an education advantage is clear for HE students and graduates, this is less apparent for those in FE. This starts to suggest that social position considerations attached to different types of education might be important and not only objective absolute education levels. FE, while in theory providing “more” education than experienced by the non-student group, is typically afforded less prestige.<sup>65</sup>

“Turnout varies in the sample according to educational experiences and in such a way that supports traditional assumptions [...]”

Table 1 presents summary statistics across each of the proposed positioning-effects variables. These demonstrate that social network interactions – specifically the likelihood of discussing politics with other people – has the strongest correlation with turnout in 2010. This supports the view that socio-political positioning and associated network experiences are especially important in determining whether an individual votes. However, simply being around politically interested individuals does not seem to be as significant, downplaying the probability that turnout is influenced by environmental positioning alone. Social network effects may need to be direct, overt, and forceful to support electoral recruitment; perhaps because young people are still in the process of forming political identities.

Individuals lacking post-compulsory education are most likely to agree that their friends are not interested in politics. This implies that any form of post-compulsory education can be important in determining whether individuals feel located in politically engaged networks. On discussing politics however, with on-course HE students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) being most likely to do so, there are suggestions

that universities themselves can be especially politicising and offer distinct opportunities for participation which are not necessarily enjoyed by other young people. Internal efficacy also appears related to voting; respondents strongly disagreeing with both statements, implying they feel confident in their political knowledge, are more likely to have voted in 2010. The correlation is marginally stronger when they are asked to make subjective comparisons against other young people (“I know less about politics than most people my age”). There are also indications from these variables that individuals alter their assessments of their own political understanding between absolute and relative measures. A quarter of young people with no HE experience strongly agreed and agreed with the statement “I know less about politics than most people my age” (25.9%). In contrast, just 18.3% of those respondents with HE experience (both current and past) strongly agreed and agreed with the statement [ $\chi^2$  (4,  $n=1,762$ ) = 24.619,  $p = .000$ ], despite 55.7% still claiming politics often feels too complicated for them to understand. FE students, despite ongoing education and skills development – albeit more vocational than academic – do not appear to perceive themselves as equal in political knowledge to young people attending university. This suggests that among the current generation of young people, post-compulsory education is only positively associated with increased confidence in political knowledge when pursued at the HE level.<sup>66</sup>

“Universities themselves can be especially politicising and offer distinct opportunities for participation which are not necessarily enjoyed by other young people.”

On external efficacy, the impact of the two component variables on turnout is comparatively weak, suggesting young people pay less attention to how they can affect politics and their perceptions of politics more broadly when deciding whether or not to vote than they do towards their own abilities. There is nevertheless a slightly greater chance of voting in respect of those individuals who believe they can influence politics, and this is also positively correlated with education. Young people with HE experiences are more likely than those without – again including FE students – to believe their participation can affect change. Thus indi-

viduals may still give weight to the prestige and status enjoyed by their different types of educational experience when assessing external efficacy with existing institutions,<sup>67</sup> even if this is less notable for turnout.

Logistic regression provides an initial exploration of how, when combined, the factors identified above contribute to young people’s turnout decisions (Table 2).<sup>68</sup> The first model includes all those variables discussed above, while the second includes further demographic controls to test whether the observed relationships remain after taking account of additional variation within the youth population. Education has been collapsed into three categories based on the distinctions identified within Table 1 between no post-compulsory education, FE, and HE. Comparing Models I and II, the inclusion of demographic controls results in only minor changes to the effect sizes of the mechanism variables and there is relative stability in whether these make significant contributions. There is improved model fit with an increased Nagelkerke  $R^2$ , both models correctly classifying just under two-thirds of cases and reporting good (non-significant) Hosmer-Lemeshow tests.

By studying Model II it is found that despite controlling for proposed relative education mechanisms, education continues to exert its own significant influence over turnout decisions. HE young people are more likely to have voted in 2010 than FE students and those individuals with no post-compulsory education. FE students are again the least likely educational group to have voted, being 60.5% less likely than HE individuals to turn out, whereas for young people with no HE or FE experience the probability of voting is only 40.4% lower. Therefore, despite FE students having experience of post-compulsory schooling and an arguably higher educational level than those never attending either an FE or HE institution, they are not more likely to vote. This reaffirms claims that absolute education may not tell us the whole story. It nevertheless also suggests positioning, at least through the concepts and indicators tested here, is also not solely responsible for the patterns we observe.

“Young people with HE experiences are more likely than those without to believe their participation can affect change.”

The results relating to the social positioning variables are mixed. Internal efficacy appears important but only when related to young people's subjective assessments of political literacy. If comparing themselves to other young people, individuals strongly disagreeing that they know less about politics than others are 1.8 times more likely to have voted in 2010 than those who strongly agree. This reflects propositions that relative education impacts on perceptions of self and ability through comparative reflection. External efficacy is only significant when thinking about political influence (and  $p < .1$ ). Young people believing they can influence government through their involvement are 1.5 times more likely to have voted in 2010 than those who do not. On the third proposed mechanism, that of the individual's experiences within their social networks, there is again strong support for suggesting individuals who discuss politics with others are more likely to vote. Here they are almost three times more likely to have voted than those who do not.

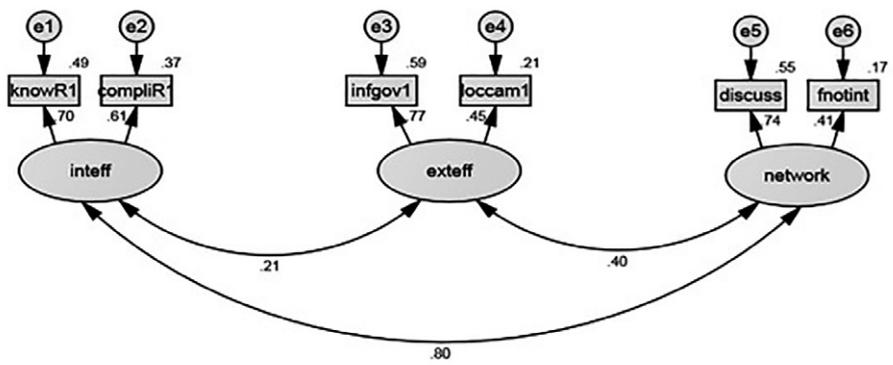


Figure 2: Confirmatory factor analysis: internal political efficacy, external political efficacy and social and political environment (standardised results). Chi-square 240.020 (6 d.f.),  $p = .000$ , RMSEA = .055, CFI = .974. Source: CITS 2011 (Online responses),  $n = 1,883$

What the logistic regression cannot tell us, however, is the extent to which the proposed mechanisms interact and mediate the effects of absolute individual-level education on turnout. SEM can be used to develop these investigations further (see Schreiber et al. 2006; Persson 2014). While SEM of the type which now follows typically requires a dependent variable measured at the interval

level, I use this as a way of testing potential interactions to be later reapplied, as discussed, within a logistic regression model. I have conducted an initial confirmatory factor analysis (Figure 2) to develop the three latent concepts of internal efficacy, external efficacy, and political interactions within social networks (RMSEA  $< .06$ , CFI  $> .95$ ). The total sample size is 1,883 with missing data handled by expectation-maximisation. After a process of model testing, Figures 3, 4 and 5 (below) appear most helpful for examining the issue, determined both by theory and model fit statistics. Building on the confirmatory factor analysis' suggestions of positive correlation between the three mediating latent variables, the path diagrams estimate not only their individual impacts on turnout, but also how they relate to each other. For instance, it may be that individuals who engage in political discussions can increase their political knowledge and understanding by doing so. Alternatively, individuals with high levels of political knowledge and understanding may seek out networks of politically engaged individuals. In reality, it is likely to be a bit of both with mutually reinforcing effects. However, adoption of relative education thinking – which is concerned more with environment – would suggest the former will be more significant, individuals assessing their levels of efficacy based not simply on absolute education but on social positioning also. Including paths of this nature in the models improved model fit (RMSEA  $< .06$ , CFI  $> .95$ ). They explain 11, 8 and 9% of the variance in turnout respectively. Each path diagram compares two specific educational groups and excludes the remaining third group. This is to test where variation across educational groups specifically emerges. Significant relationships are identified by bold arrows.

Table 2: Binary logistic regression: youth turnout at the 2010 General Election

	I		II	
	B (s.e)	Exp(B)	B (s.e)	Exp(B)
<b>Educational status (comparison = HE experience)</b>				
No post-compulsory education	.505 (.122)***	.603	-.517 (.135)***	.596
FE student	-.943 (.175)***	.389	-.929 (.186)***	.395
<b>Internal efficacy</b>				
Sometimes politics so complicated cannot understand (high = strongly disagree)	.300 (.237)	1.350	.293 (.258)	1.340
I know less about politics (high = strongly disagree)	.754 (.250)***	2.125	.583 (.266)**	1.791
<b>External efficacy</b>				
People like me can influence government by getting involved (high = strongly agree)	.165 (.227)	1.180	.398 (.240)*	1.490
Local people campaigning can solve problems (high = strongly agree)	.300 (.278)	1.351	.189 (.291)	1.208
<b>Social networks</b>				
My friends are not interested in politics (high = strongly disagree)	-.081 (.232)	.922	.123 (.248)	1.131
I often discuss politics with other people (high = strongly agree)	1.009 (.226)***	2.742	1.060 (.244)***	2.885
<b>Age (reference = 22-24 years)</b>				
18-19 years			-.401 (.149)***	.670
20-21 years			-.392 (.145)***	.676
<b>Gender (comparison = male)</b>				
			-.127 (.133)	.881
<b>Ethnicity (comparison = White British)</b>				
			-.928 (.146)***	.395
<b>Parent social class (reference = higher managerial)</b>				
Never worked/LT unemployed			.602 (.311)*	1.825
Routine and manual			-.283 (.152)*	.754
Intermediate			-.139 (.148)	.870
<b>Constant</b>	-.432 (.241)*		.092 (.294)	
<b>-2LL</b>	1890.225		1703.176	
<b>Model significance</b>	117.758***		165.595***	
<b>Hosmer-Lemeshow</b>	1.675		4.963	
<b>Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup></b>	.101		.150	
<b>% correctly classified</b>	65.2		67.7	
<b>N</b>	1528		1435	

Source: CITS 2011 (Online responses); unweighted; \*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .1$

In every instance, individual educational experience has a significant and positive effect on how politicised an individual's social networks are, which offers early support for a proposed social positioning role. This is strongest when distinguishing between HE individuals and those with no post-compulsory schooling; having HE experience generates a .22 standard deviation increase in being located among politically engaged social networks. Interestingly, this effect size is weakest when comparing only FE and HE individuals (a standardised coefficient of just .08), suggesting educational positioning variation in networks is less evident between young people who have at least some post-compulsory education. This is further observed where FE students have an increased probability of being positioned in political networks compared to those with no post-compulsory schooling (Figure 5).

“Young people believing they can influence government through their involvement are 1.5 times more likely to have voted in 2010 than those who do not.”

Thus positioning does appear to take effect in youth, and educational experiences can play an important role in determining this. Individuals with HE experience will nearly always encounter stronger political

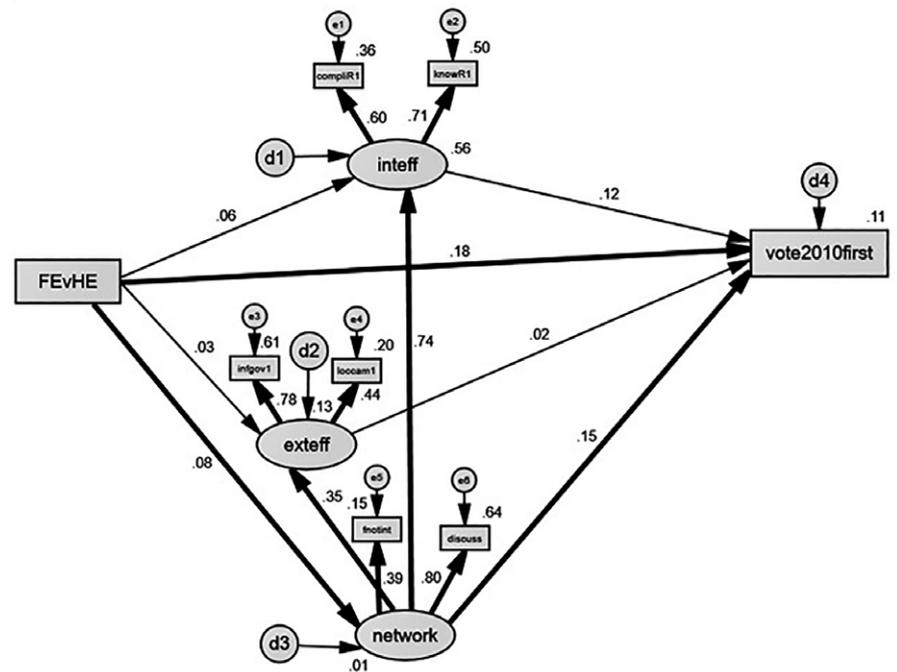


Figure 3: FE versus HE experience and 2010 turnout (standardised results); Chi-square 263.840 (13 d.f.),  $p=.000$ , RMSEA =.046, CFI =.965. Source: 2011 CITS (Online responses),  $n=1,883$

mobilisation forces within their social networks than any other young person, while those at the very bottom of the educational hierarchy, absent from any educational institution, face a disadvantage in this regard. FE students, while perhaps enjoying lower status than HE students, may still access

political groups, the UK's National Union of Students, for example, representing both educational sectors.

The effects of individual education on internal and external efficacy are by contrast much smaller and insignificant. Social networks are nevertheless found to have significant and positive relationships with internal and external efficacy constructs within each model. For example, by applying the causal direction implied by the sorting model, a one point increase in political network interactions leads to a .74 or .75 standard deviation increase in internal efficacy in each model. The average effect size on external efficacy is much smaller (only a standardised coefficient of .35). Absolute education may not therefore determine differences between young people on these latent constructs but their educationally-influenced socio-political interactions with others do, suggesting this effect of education is only ever indirect for these attitudinal characteristics. While this to some extent undermines expectations about efficacy, it reinforces and elaborates on the role of social networks in shaping how young people view their own political ability. It also implies educational positioning potentially operates through a two-stage process. First it situates young people within particular contexts, locations, and networks. It is then from this that they develop perceptions of their own ability to engage in and influence politics.

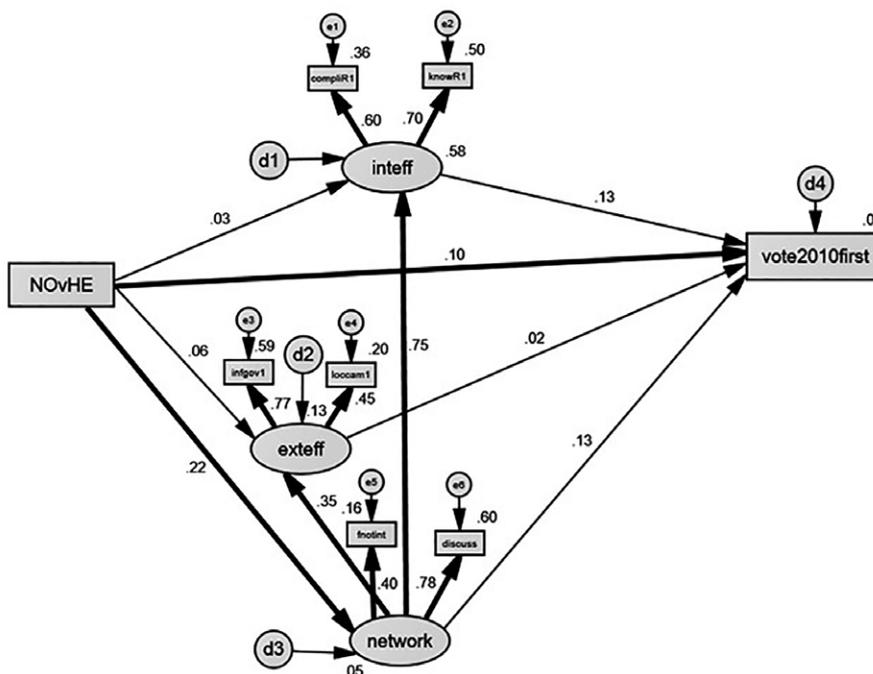


Figure 4: No compulsory schooling versus HE experience and 2010 turnout (standardised results); Chi-square 276.012 (13 d.f.),  $p=.000$ , RMSEA =.051, CFI =.958. Source: 2011 CITS (Online responses),  $n=1,883$

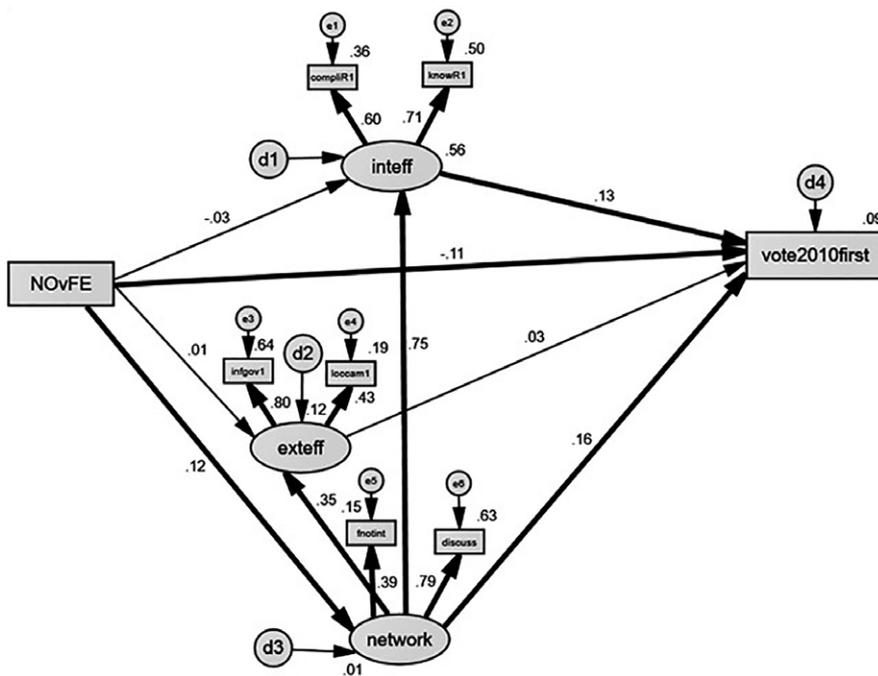


Figure 5: No compulsory schooling versus FE experience and 2010 turnout (standardised results); Chi-square 254.698 (13 d.f.),  $p=.000$ , RMSEA =.041, CFI =.971. Source: 2011 CITS (Online responses),  $n=1,883$

However, in agreement with the dominant emphasis on social networks in existing discussions of relative education effects, of the three latent constructs it is social networks which most consistently have a significant ( $p<.05$ ) direct impact on being a voter at the 2010 general election – binary turnout variable acting as scale between 0 and 1 for purposes of the SEM. This is evidenced both when comparing HE and FE (Figure 3) and no post-compulsory education and FE (Figure 5). The relationship is positive and supports recent research which has suggested social networks are more important for individuals with low levels of education when turnout decisions are made.<sup>69</sup> However, differing levels of perceived political ability, while also positively associated with greater turnout, is significant in just one model (Figure 5 – FE vs. no post-compulsory education). Thus the two-stage process, while often evident, may not in all instances be important for turnout. For individuals with HE experience, for example, it would seem social networks are more central, implying mobilisation and not perceived ability explains their higher level of turnout. Nevertheless, social networks are not a significant turnout indicator when comparing HE with no post-compulsory education.

The SEM approach, as with the logistic regression, additionally suggests that education acts through mechanisms not

covered by the chosen conceptualisations of relative education effects here. It has a significant direct effect on the turnout indicator in each model. Consequently, when controlling for concepts of perceived political understanding and social environment, we still find individuals with HE experiences

being closer to being a voter (a score of 1) than those without. This to some extent undermines the adoption of a solely relative education model. There may, for example, still be a rationale for assigning some role to a more absolute education concept, perhaps relating to objective indicators of knowledge and skill. However, absolute education has a negative association with turnout in Figure 5. It consequently suggests that the relationship is still not straightforward. Additional education, if only pursued at a FE level, does not provide a turnout advantage. The findings therefore offer some support for the view that one of education's most important roles in affecting turnout and preventing non-HE young people from voting at higher rates is in shaping the networks with which young people come into contact. The higher their level of their education, the higher the probability that they interact with others in a way which could be considered politically stimulating. Importantly, this then influences efficacy which can, on occasion, further strengthen this impact of positioning.

To explore the potential interaction effects further, I have conducted a second logistic regression model with an interaction term included between social networks and educational experiences. New variables have been computed for the three latent

Table 3: Binary logistic regression: youth turnout at the 2010 General Election (with interactions)		
	B (s.e)	Exp(B)
<b>Educational status (comparison = HE experience)</b>		
No post-compulsory education	-.801 (.300)***	.449
FE student	.229 (.442)	1.384
<b>Internal efficacy (high = highly efficacious)</b>		
	.990 (.307)***	2.691
<b>External efficacy (high = highly efficacious)</b>		
	.745 (.299)**	2.106
<b>Social networks (high = highly politicised networks)</b>		
	1.294 (.406)***	3.646
<b>Social networks*Educational status (comparison = HE experience)</b>		
Social networks*No post-compulsory education	.786 (.625)	2.194
Social networks* FE student	-2.506 (.839)***	.082
<b>Age (reference = 22-24 years)</b>		
18-19 years	-.403 (.150)***	.668
20-21 years	-.369 (.145)**	.692
<b>Gender (comparison = male)</b>		
	-.115 (.132)	.891
<b>Ethnicity (comparison = White British)</b>		
	-.957 (.145)***	.384
<b>Parent social class (reference = higher managerial)</b>		
Never worked/LT unemployed	.622 (.308)**	1.863
Routine and manual	-.288 (.153)*	.750
Intermediate	-.154 (.148)	.858
<b>Constant</b>		
	-.097 (.302)	
<b>-2LL</b>		
	1696.969	
<b>Model significance</b>		
	171.802***	
<b>Hosmer-Lemeshow</b>		
	8.453	
<b>Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup></b>		
	.155	
<b>% correctly classified</b>		
	67.8	
<b>N</b>		
	1435	

Source: CITS 2011 (Online responses); youth turnout weight, \*\*\* $p<.01$ , \*\* $p<.05$ , \* $p<.1$

variables by averaging each respondent's scores across the two component indicators. Demographic variables have also been re-introduced at this stage to ensure any variation is controlled for. The results (Table 3) suggest there are significant positive interaction effects between education and social networks. Figure 6 presents this interaction, showing that political social networks are particularly important for boosting turnout potential in HE and non-post-compulsory education groups. Both see turnout potential increase as the social networks score increases. This is most marked for individuals with no additional education, which suggests they may be particularly dependent on being mobilised by others to vote, whereas individuals with HE experience already have a stronger predisposition to do so. Interestingly however, social networks appear to have a negative impact on turnout for FE students. This suggests alternative factors may be intervening to lower their turnout potential and counteract any positive influence of politically engaged peers. Equally, it might be that as a (perceived to be) marginalised group, increased political awareness and discussions may in fact encourage greater cynicism and disaffection – a more critical citizen response – in which alternative participation preferences develop.<sup>70</sup>

## Discussion

The analysis in this paper makes a number of contributions to existing thinking on how relative education effects help explain persistent turnout inequalities in youth. These in turn offer thoughts for why the increase in young people's average education level on its own has so far failed to raise youth turnout and is unlikely to do so in the future. Of interest is that theories associated with relative education and social positioning do appear to be applicable to young people, at least in a UK context. Previous research on the sorting model has concentrated almost exclusively on those over the age of 25/6 years, arguing that by still being in the process of becoming educated, younger people do not present as comparable cases.<sup>71</sup>

“The findings therefore offer some support for the view that one of education's most important roles in affecting turnout [...] is in shaping the networks with which young people come into contact.”

Analysis here, however, suggests young people with HE experience, past or ongoing, are also more likely to report having interactions within politically engaged social networks than those without. This is true even against those young people with FE

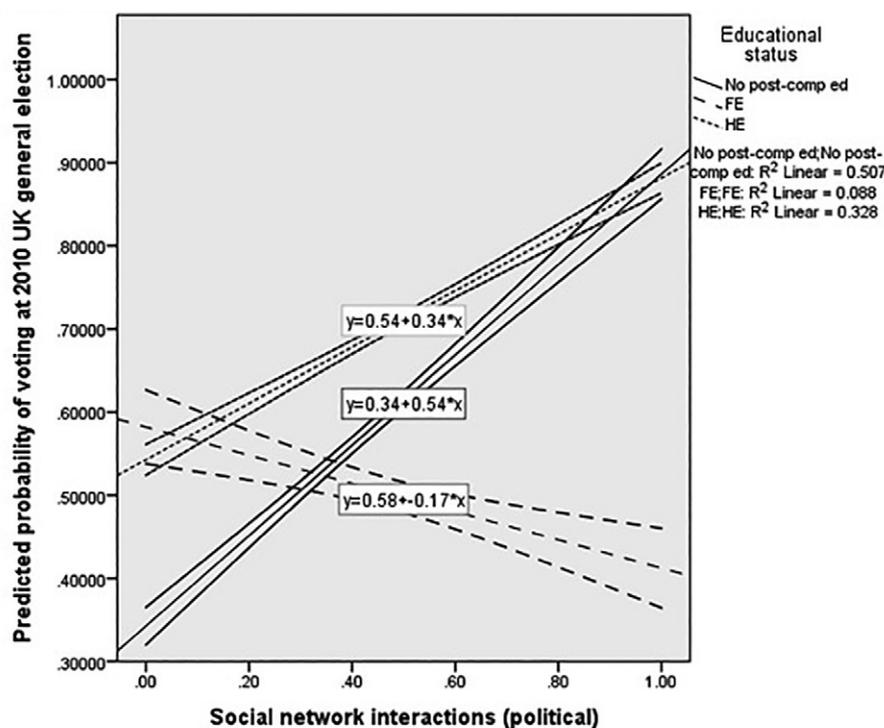


Figure 6: Mean predicted probability for 2010 General Election turnout by social network interactions and educational status

experience. The implication is that status and position attached to and/or derived from education can be especially important in determining the type and level of political socialisation an individual is subject to during their formative years. In addition, there is a positive association between this and whether or not an individual turns out. Therefore, education's positive effects on electoral participation appear to be mediated by the types of people individuals come into contact with through their educational experiences. Simply entering a university environment can boost turnout potential through these mechanisms.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, even if individuals outwith HE are staying at school longer and completing higher levels of qualification, they will not necessarily encounter pro-voting mobilising forces.

It must also be acknowledged that the positive impact of more political social networks is not universally felt across young people. It appears particularly important for young people without any post-compulsory education experience, implying that if political actors are to encourage their turnout, increasing mobilisation through network interactions will be key to any success. This might mean developing strategies which generate new and alternative forums for political discussion and encourage peer-to-peer debate. Lowering the voting age to increase the number of young people experiencing their first vote while still at school, in a politicising education environment, could offer one solution. They will enjoy encouragement and support irrespective of their post-compulsory education choices. Citizenship education as a remedy too may present such an opportunity, targeting young people before more noticeable educational distinctions emerge. However, with demographic variation across schools – and, we might assume, politicisation of students – as well as the freedom many schools can use to bypass the National Curriculum, it is at present limited in its potential effectiveness.

Moreover, FE students demonstrate falling turnout potential even when they come to interact in politicised social networks. For this group it appears not enough to hope that raising interest and awareness through social network activities will increase their propensity to vote. Thinking about their relative status, they may still engage in discussions of politics when opportunities for debate arise but, as Holmes and Manning<sup>73</sup> would suggest, they do so more

when perceiving themselves as marginalised or unrepresented. When around politicised individuals they may become more aware of their disadvantage and as such, more critical. It is also possible that they then direct political energy into alternative, non-electoral activities.<sup>74</sup> This remains something to be tested. Nevertheless, suggestions are that allowing young people the space to talk about politics will only sometimes boost turnout potential. In some cases, other interventions are required to channel this energy into voting specifically.

“Status and position attached to [...] or derived from education can be especially important in determining the type and level of political socialisation an individual is subject to during their formative years.”

Relative education's relationship with turnout appears to be not solely connected to social networks but also to internal efficacy, albeit indirectly. For instance, FE students are found to sit closer to individuals with no post-compulsory education on efficacy indicators despite their continued presence in educational institutions. This implies that feelings of political ability are not shaped purely by formal learning processes as is commonly assumed. While absolute education differences could undoubtedly influence the skills and knowledge transferred to individuals to facilitate or discourage political participation, suggestions within this analysis are that it is through the networks young people engage with, often resulting from their varied educational experiences, which lead them to develop different levels of political confidence. Being located within politically engaged circles can therefore heighten individuals' feelings of political comprehension and literacy, given how young people judge their capacity for participation against that of other young people. Where individuals feel and are excluded from political networks they report being less confident in their ability to participate and may subsequently envisage greater participation costs due to their perceived “deficiencies” or disadvantage. They will also likely encounter fewer opportunities to build their confidence in this area if they do not have the chance to converse with politically engaged individuals.

While internal efficacy is not always a significant determinant of turnout, it does appear to be important in the decision-making process of FE students. Thus strategies here

will need to consider how the political discussions many of these individuals appear to have can be supplemented by activities which will boost their political confidence. Citizenship education may again be a possible remedy, initiatives with a greater focus on *electoral* politics being integrated into existing conversations to ensure all young people are encouraged to make linkages between the politics they encounter in their daily lives and the formal political world. Finding non-educational institutions to deliver this training and support, so that no young person is disadvantaged, will also be important.<sup>75</sup> This may mean running sessions in youth offending institutes and/or finding ways to incorporate political learning into more vocational, apprenticeship training.

Significantly however, external efficacy is not a significant or powerful determinant of turnout, nor is it directly related to education. As with internal efficacy, social networks play some role in shaping perceptions of influence and power in politics – again providing possible evidence of relative education effects – and yet no educational group appears to decide their electoral behaviour on these considerations. This is interesting in that it suggests their abstention relates less to their demands of the political system and more to their position and experiences in politics and society. Thus for non-HE individuals, strategies would still appear best directed at improving their political socialisation and learning.

“Being located within politically engaged circles can [...] heighten individuals' feelings of political comprehension and literacy.”

Finally, we see that education has an effect on turnout beyond the proposed positioning mechanisms. It continues to exert a significant influence even controlling for efficacy and social networks. This suggests there are untested effects which our proposed and tested operationalization of a relative education model cannot adequately explain. These could relate to absolute education effects – for example, a more objective measure of political knowledge – as is frequently posited by a civic education hypothesis.<sup>76</sup> This would imply educational expansion may yet have a role to play in boosting youth turnout. However, there may also be other indicator variables reflective of relative education effects which

could develop the model, for example wider social environmental factors and alternative efficacy measures which are not available in the CITS.

What do these contributions mean for the youth turnout? Support is found for a view that youth turnout will fail to rise in line with education while access to political social networks continues to vary according to the type of education a young person has received and is receiving. HE today affords young people a much higher status than other types of education and consequently provides them with more opportunities to be mobilised and recruited into politics. Moreover, it can go on to shape young people's perceptions of their own understanding of politics and, it can be inferred, their overall ability to participate in politics. Individuals without HE, regardless of their absolute education level and how this corresponds to the education levels of earlier generations, are by contrast less likely to interact with political networks. The probabilities of their encountering direct encouragement and/or risking social costs by abstaining are therefore lower. Social inequalities will persist and in turn, so too will participation inequalities; average levels of education can be altered but the existence of a corresponding hierarchy appears entrenched. Educational settings may still provide a vehicle for politicisation and yet it will not be sufficient to rely on building a more educated electorate to increase turnout. Instead, remedies will require looking at those factors related to education in a relative sense – the networks it positions individuals in and the resultant internal efficacy this engenders – to overcome obstacles which remain to the (relatively) less well-educated youth participating.

## Notes

1 The author was supported through PhD studentship funding from the Economic and Social Research Council [ES/J500136/1].

2 Mayer 2011: 633.

3 Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger/Rosenstone 1980; Hillygus 2005; Berinsky/Lenz 2011; Mayer 2011; Burden 2009; Galston 2001; Dee 2004; Gallego 2009, 2010; Straughn/Andriot 2011; Tenn 2007.

4 Brody 1978.

5 UK education at degree-awarding institutions on courses where level of instruction is above GCE/VCE A Levels or SCE Highers/Advanced Highers (HESA 2012).

6 UCAS 2010.

- 7 Ipsos-MORI 2010.
- 8 Plutzer 2002.
- 9 Goerres 2008; Berry 2014.
- 10 Norris 2002, 2003; Dalton 2008.
- 11 Smets 2012.
- 12 Whiteley 2012: 48.
- 13 Nie et al. 1996.
- 14 Whiteley et al. 2013.
- 15 Dee 2004: 1713; see also Tenn 2007.
- 16 Hillygus 2005; Wolfinger/Rosenstone 1980; Verba et al. 1995.
- 17 Gallego 2009, 2010, 2015.
- 18 Henn/Foard 2012: 53-4.
- 19 Hillygus 2005.
- 20 See Keating et al. 2010; Whiteley 2014. Changes to education since this date, notably the creation of academies and free schools which operate under less government control and outside of the National Curriculum, alongside more general variability in teaching of citizenship education may have led to differential experiences of young people (Kerr 2014).
- 21 Cone et al. 2001: 6.
- 22 Alt et al. (no date), Clarke et al. (2003, 2006), Crewe et al. (no date a, no date b), Heath et al. (no date, 1993a), Heath et al. (1993b), Heath et al. (1999), Whiteley/Sanders (2014).
- 23 Nie et al. 1996.
- 24 Helliwell/Putnam 2007.
- 25 Nie et al. 1996; Campbell 2009; Persson 2011, 2013; Tenn 2005; Rolfe 2012.
- 26 Campbell 2009: 772; Tenn 2005; Nie et al. 1996; Furlong/Cartmel 2007.
- 27 Tenn 2005; Campbell 2009; Helliwell/Putnam 2007; Persson 2011, 2013.
- 28 Pattie and Johnston 2000: 44.
- 29 Persson 2014: 726.
- 30 Nie et al. 1996; Tenn 2005; Campbell 2009; Persson 2011.
- 31 Bennett 1991; Fieldhouse/Cutts 2012; Henn/Foard 2014; Munson 2010.
- 32 See Brennan/Osborne 2008.
- 33 1996; see also Persson 2014; Campbell 2009; Rolfe 2012.
- 34 Verba et al. 1995; Rosenstone/Hansen 1993.
- 35 Condon/Holleque 2013; Armingeon/Schädel 2015.
- 36 Ulbig/Waggener 2011.
- 37 Tenn 2005.
- 38 Flanagan et al. 2012; Gallego 2009; Wray-Lake/Hart 2012; Gray/Caul 2000; Furlong/Cartmel 2007; Armingeon/Schädel 2015.
- 39 Franklin 2004: 51; Blais 2000; Campbell 2013; Gerber et al. 2008.
- 40 Kenny 1992; Shulman/Levine 2012.
- 41 Campbell 2013; Pattie/Johnston 2000; Fieldhouse/Cutts 2012; Cutts/Fieldhouse 2009.
- 42 Levy 2013; Beaumont 2011; Condon/Holleque 2013; Henn/Foard 2012, 2014; Gecas 1989.
- 43 Gallego 2010; see also Nie et al. 1996: 11-94.
- 44 Keating et al. 2010; Whiteley 2014.
- 45 Tenn 2005.
- 46 Condon/Holleque 2013; Levy 2013; Gecas 1989; Collingwood 2012.
- 47 Condon/Holleque 2013; Gecas 1989; Levy 2013; Leighley 1995: 186.
- 48 Kaufmann/Feldman 2004: 482-483; Weakliem 1992: 153-155.
- 49 Levy 2013; Tenn 2005; Condon/Holleque 2013; Henn/Foard 2014; Wray-Lake/Hart 2012; Gecas 1989; Diemer/Li 2011.
- 50 Smith Institute 2010.
- 51 Holmes/Manning 2013; Diemer/Li 2011; Cammaerts et al. 2013; Furlong/Cartmel 2007; Henn/Foard 2014; Harris et al. 2010.
- 52 Persson 2014: 726,
- 53 Bernstein et al. 2001; Cassel 2003; Katosh/Traugott 1981; Sigelman 1982.
- 54 Based on 44% youth turnout in 2010 UK general election (Ipsos-MORI 2010).
- 55 Whiteley et al. 2013.
- 56 Sturman et al. 2012; see also Whiteley 2012a: 5-12.
- 57 Any study after secondary education that is not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree). (UK Government 2014).
- 58 Gschwend 2005: 89; Fowler 2009: 46; Schofield 2006: 36-37.
- 59 Sanders et al. 2007; Sapsford 2007; see Webb 2013: 751-752.
- 60 Sapsford 2007: 98; Gschwend 2005: 90.
- 61 To ensure consistency with the SEM, all reported statistics relate to unweighted data unless stated otherwise.
- 62 Persson 2014.
- 63 5 May 2010.
- 64 To ensure consistency with the SEM, all reported statistics relate to unweighted data unless stated otherwise.
- 65 Janmaat et al. 2014.
- 66 Henn/Foard 2014: 369.
- 67 Levy 2013: 369.
- 68 Binary logistic models using these variables were compared between youth turnout weighted and unweighted to reveal no noticeable disparities across coefficients – in magnitude, direction, and significance – or in model fit statistics.
- 69 Armingeon/Schädel 2015.
- 70 Norris 2011; Holmes/Manning 2013; Diemer/Li 2011.
- 71 Nie et al. 1996; Tenn 2005; Campbell 2009; Persson 2011.
- 72 Dee 2004; Tenn 2007.
- 73 Holmes/Manning 2013.
- 74 Norris 2002, 2003; Dalton 2008; Martin 2012.
- 75 See Flanagan et al. 2012.
- 76 Hillygus 2015.

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# Increasing Electoral Turnout Among the Young: Compulsory Voting or Financial Incentives?

by Thomas Tozer

**A**bstract: Low electoral turnout has led to a vicious circle for which the young do not vote and vote-seeking politicians ignore their needs. A powerful method is needed to address this in both the short-term and long-term. I consider two such methods: compulsory voting and a scheme of financial incentives for young voters. The financial incentive scheme that I consider would pay young people £30 if they attend an hour-long information session on the election, an hour-long discussion session, and then vote. I argue that my proposed financial incentive scheme is preferable to compulsory voting because it is more likely to lead young people to deliver reasoned, quality votes than compulsory voting, and it does not violate individual liberty.

## Introduction

In many different ways young people today are underrepresented by politics.<sup>1</sup> One important element of this underrepresentation, and the element with which this essay is concerned, is the low electoral turnout among the young. It is important to note from the start that there is no simple solution that could boost youth engagement in a single stroke,<sup>2</sup> and I aver that many different short-term and long-term strategies should be employed to increase electoral engagement among the young.<sup>3</sup>

However, this essay focuses on two contrasting strategies: a disincentive scheme for non-voters (i.e., compulsory voting), and a scheme of financial incentives for which young people receive a payment of £30 if they attend an hour-long information session on the election, an hour-long discussion session, and then vote. I argue that respect for liberty<sup>4</sup> and an understanding of the importance of a reasoned and engaged vote imply that, of these two, my proposed financial incentive scheme is preferable. It will, I contend, improve both the short-term and long-term political engagement of young people and lead to a virtuous circle for which they are better politically represented and more electorally engaged as a result.

The essay begins by analysing the effects of electoral turnout among the young in terms of vicious and virtuous circles. I then consider the merits of compulsory voting as a method to boost turnout and argue that compulsory voting infringes unacceptably upon our liberty and would not deliver reasoned votes. Hence, I introduce my proposed scheme of financial incentives for young people and argue that it is preferable to compulsory voting in both these respects: it violates no one's liberty and is more likely to deliver well-reasoned votes. Finally, I reply to some possible objections to the implementation of this scheme.

Why should my proposed scheme not be extended to all generations? There are four reasons. First, the electoral turnout among the young is significantly worse than that of other age-cohorts, so in the short-term there is more of a pressing need to raise electoral turnout among the young than among other age groups. Second, I hope that the benefits of the scheme, and in particular the force of habit, will lead young people to continue to vote as they get older, and thus in the long-term the benefits of the scheme will begin to influence the older generations too. Third, the expense of the scheme is significantly reduced by virtue of its applying only to young people, making it a more economically viable option.

"I argue that respect for liberty and an understanding of the importance of a reasoned and engaged vote imply that [...] my proposed financial incentive scheme is preferable."

Fourth, if the scheme applied to everyone then this would seem to suggest that the government always needs to bribe its populace to vote: the scheme would no longer seem merely like a means by which to boost the electoral engagement of the populace in response to their current level of engagement, since there would be no time when the payment scheme would cease to apply to the voter. The message that I intend for the government to send out to young people is rather: "We want to incentivise you

to develop a habit of and engagement with voting now, so that you are motivated to continue voting in the future even when this incentive scheme ceases for you." Now, I have no objection to the information and discussion sessions themselves (without any payment for attendance) being arranged for older generations too, if the government were happy to fund these. However, that is a different proposal and I cannot comment on it any further here.

Finally, I should note that in terms of background statistics and details such as the level of payment that I propose for my financial incentive scheme, this essay focuses principally on UK politics. However, the general arguments that I make are in no sense restricted to the UK, and the reasoning that I employ to arrive at this payment figure, for example, can easily be applied *mutatis mutandis* to other countries that are interested in increasing electoral turnout among the young.

## Young people's low electoral turnout: vicious and virtuous circles

Concerningly, the past decade has witnessed young people becoming increasingly disengaged with the political process and institutions, especially with formal politics such as voting.<sup>5</sup> In the 2010 British general election, the average turnout was 65%; of those aged 65 or above, the turnout averaged 76%; but of those aged 18-24, the average turnout was just 44%.<sup>6</sup> There is a similar comparative difference between the numbers of young and older people voting in America and Indonesia, with the comparative difference only slightly better in Japan.<sup>7</sup>

Yet before I continue I should respond to an objection that, if true, could invalidate the goals of this essay before it has even begun. This objection runs as follows: even if many young people do not vote at present, as they move into their middle age, finding themselves more affected by government policies and reaching a more mature stage of their political life-cycle, they will start to vote in greater numbers. It follows, so the objection

goes, that there is no need to worry about their low turnout now – this is something that will naturally be addressed over time. There are two reasons why this objection is fallacious. First, there is limited empirical evidence of this ageing effect, whereas there is strong evidence to suggest that in large part voting is a result of habit that is learnt in one's first few elections.<sup>8</sup> Second, even if it were the case that people will tend to vote in greater numbers as they get older, it is still of concern that many young people today do not vote, because voting helps to close the democratic deficit and ensure that representatives are accountable to the groups that they represent – self-interested vote-seeking politicians will not be motivated to represent the views of young people if the youth vote has only a very minimal impact on the politicians' election prospects.<sup>9</sup> Empirical analysis of government policies in recent years seems to confirm that politicians are more interested in the needs of young people's parents' generation than those of young people themselves.<sup>10</sup> This seems to have become something of a vicious circle whereby young people do not vote, politicians thus ignore the interests of young people, young people feel alienated from the political process so choose not to vote; and so forth. Young people not participating in electoral politics thus becomes self-reinforcing.<sup>11</sup>

**“The past decade has witnessed young people becoming increasingly disengaged with the political process and institutions, especially with formal politics such as voting.”**

To a large extent, the reasons why young people do not vote can be understood as a consequence of this vicious circle. For example, many young people may not vote due to disillusionment (a feeling that the outcome of an election does not matter); feeling that they lack political efficacy (thinking, for example, that an individual vote will not make any difference); or believing that they do not have enough knowledge to vote.<sup>12</sup> In a study quoted by Henn and Foard, 61% of the young people surveyed felt that the influence they had on decisions made on their behalf by politicians was little or none, and 64% of the young people surveyed said that they did not believe they had enough knowledge to vote.<sup>13</sup> If politicians were to take the needs and interests of young people seriously, however, then this would start to address and resolve their

feelings of disillusionment and lacking political efficacy. And if young people became more engaged in the political process then they would naturally develop more political knowledge, too. Indeed, if young people are encouraged to vote in great enough numbers then it is possible that a virtuous circle will result: politicians will jump to try to win over the now significant “youth vote” and so will listen to the views and concerns of young people, young people will feel represented by the political process and so will be motivated to vote for the politician who best represents their views and concerns, politicians will try to represent the needs of young people in order to win their vote; and so forth.

**“It is not enough for young people only to vote: they must also take the time to engage with the election so that their vote constitutes a reasoned expression of their political will.”**

However, there is little point in young people voting unless some degree of conscious decision-making underpins their vote. If self-interested vote-seeking politicians were to think that the votes of young people were somewhat random, perhaps because young people lacked interest in electoral politics and were voting only due to the threat of punishment under a system of compulsory voting, then they might continue to ignore the votes of young people since there would be no point in trying to win over the youth vote. Hence, the virtuous circle could not result. Therefore it is not enough for young people only to vote: they must also take the time to engage with the election so that their vote constitutes a reasoned expression of their political will.

Voting or not voting is also influenced by habit. A study by Gerber et al. involving 25,200 voters revealed that if considered in isolation the effect of habit, *ceteris paribus*, meant that a person's voting in one election would substantially increase the likelihood that that person would vote in the future.<sup>14</sup> Abstention, too, was found to be habit-forming: a person's tendency both to vote, and to not vote, is not merely the function of similar choices being made in similar circumstances. Thus, elections that do not stimulate high turnout among the young cause a “footprint” of low turnout in the electorate's age structure – many people who do not utilise their first opportunity to vote go on to fail to vote in subsequent elections too.<sup>15</sup> Hence, if young people are

persuaded to vote in their first few elections, the effect of habit suggests that that age cohort will continue to vote in large numbers as they get older, too.<sup>16</sup>

### **How to increase electoral participation among the young**

A short-term boost to the electoral turnout of young people may be all that is needed to start the virtuous circle rolling so that a more long-term solution to the low electoral turnout among the young also begins to emerge. A powerful and immediately impactful scheme is therefore required to encourage young people to vote. One obvious candidate is a disincentive scheme for not voting – this is the method of compulsory voting according to which people are legally required to vote and a failure to do so will (in theory) result in some form of penalty, such as a fine. However, while compulsory voting is common and its drawbacks and merits have been widely discussed, its opposite, a scheme that *encourages* people to vote by means of financial incentives, has received much less academic attention (although there do exist other propositions of a similar nature, such as Ackerman and Fishkin's proposal of paying people \$150 to take part in a day of deliberation two weeks before election day<sup>17</sup>). As far as I am aware, a scheme that pays people to vote has not been practiced anywhere in the world apart from Ancient Athens where, in the 4th century BCE, payment was introduced in order to boost electoral turnout.<sup>18</sup> Aristotle specifically connected the introduction of state payment with the difficulties of attaining a reasonable level of attendance at the Assembly.<sup>19</sup>

I compare compulsory voting with a financial incentive scheme as a method to encourage young people to vote in part to fill this academic gap, but also because it appears to offer a particularly powerful way to address the low electoral turnout of young people; or so I will argue. Furthermore, because compulsory voting is widely practiced and is already established as an effective means of raising turnout, it would undoubtedly be a powerful contender for addressing the low electoral turnout among the young. I therefore hope that if I can show my financial incentive scheme to be preferable to compulsory voting as a way to boost turnout, then it follows that my scheme merits serious consideration.

Compulsory voting has also been proposed as a strategy that could be applied only to

first-time voters, with the express intention of improving the political representation of young people. Birch et al. have proposed making voting compulsory for first time voters, and fining young people about £12 if they do not vote in their first election.<sup>20</sup> My arguments against compulsory voting are mostly general, but can also be seen as challenging specifically this sister proposal.

“Research suggests that turnout of younger generations may be comparatively better under compulsory voting than when voting is voluntary, since the impact of age on turnout is reduced.”

### Compulsory voting – a solution to young people’s low electoral turnout?

Compulsory voting is practiced in a number of countries all over the world including Cyprus, Belgium, Turkey, and Australia. The punishments for non-voters range from small fines to disenfranchisement, social sanctions and possible imprisonment, although the most common punishment is a small fine. In practice, however, enforcement is universally lax, despite the wide range of stated penalties; in Australia, perhaps 4% of non-voters actually incur a penalty of some type, and in Greece the penalty of jail time is apparently never imposed.<sup>21</sup> Various studies have shown that compulsory voting is an effective way to raise voter turnout: on average it raises voting turnout by 7-16 percentage points, which is significant when we consider that the punishments for not voting are very rarely enforced and are usually minimal.<sup>22</sup> When the Netherlands withdrew compulsory voting in 1967, turnout dropped by 10%; and it increased by 15% in Costa Rica when penalties for not voting were introduced.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, research suggests that the comparative difference between the turnout of younger generations and average turnout may be better under compulsory voting than when voting is voluntary, because the impact of age on turnout is reduced.<sup>24</sup>

Compulsory voting is also considered beneficial because it reduces the role of money in politics since voters do not need to be goaded to the polls; it may become an incentive for people to become better informed about the political options available to them; it forces parties to take seriously the vote of the poor, weak and marginalised who otherwise may not have voted; it produces policies more closely aligned to citizen prefer-

ences when rational citizens may otherwise have chosen to abstain; and it enables every adult to become an autonomous agent who makes as many decisions about their own life as any other adult.<sup>25</sup>

In practice, only the first of these benefits holds much weight – it is quite possible that the cost of elections for campaigning parties would be reduced. However, it is hard to imagine that being forced to vote will motivate citizens to learn about politics; on the contrary, it may actually discourage people’s interest in political education as they react against perceived oppression.<sup>26</sup> The Australian case, where compulsory voting is long established and extremely popular, demonstrates that increasing turnout does not force parties to compete for the votes of the poor, weak and marginalised since it is clear that the parties in Australia focus primarily on winning the votes of the middle class.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, far from supporting our autonomy in a way that legitimately addresses the problem of abstention, compulsory voting infringes unacceptably upon individual freedom. The great liberal writer Benjamin Constant wrote that “it is everyone’s right to exercise some influence on the administration of the government, either by electing all or particular officials, or through representations, petitions, demands to which the authorities are more or less compelled to pay heed”.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore crucial to our political liberty that we have the *right* to vote. However, it does not follow that we have a *duty* to vote.<sup>29</sup> And even if we were to have a duty to vote, it would not follow that this should be enforced by legal compulsion.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Mill explained that in order to defend our liberty, society should not interfere with someone unless what he is doing will cause harm to others (and, logically, that by interfering with him that harm will be reduced or prevented).<sup>31</sup> Thus, infringing upon individual liberty by forcing people to vote could be justified only if it were very likely to prevent such harm.<sup>32</sup> Otherwise, forcing someone to vote would constitute an unjustifiable violation of what Berlin described as our “negative freedom”<sup>33</sup> – our freedom not to be interfered with. Our liberty, or “negative freedom”, is intuitively valuable and so, to be justified, any proposal that will infringe upon it must be able to prove that it is of significant value.

Now, advocates of compulsory voting may take up this challenge, and argue that compulsory voting is able to prevent harm caused to others because, if no one were

to vote, this would lead to the collapse of democracy. However, as a defence of compulsory voting this seems somewhat implausible: electoral turnout may be low in a number of countries, but it is nowhere near low enough that enforcing compulsory voting would be required to prevent the collapse of democracy. Lijphart also defends compulsory voting, which he regards as a very small infringement upon our liberty, on the basis that many other problems of collective action are solved by government using obligations: jury service, paying taxes, school attendance and so forth – so why not voting too, which is far less burdensome than these?<sup>34</sup> Yet the answer to this objection is that it is precisely *because* voting is less burdensome than these other actions that the majority of people choose to vote without it having to be made compulsory. If paying taxes were not compulsory, then it is probable that very few people would pay them, and the country would incur serious problems as a result. Yet the same is not the case with voting: it is because the “cost” of voting is very minimal that many people choose to vote – there is no reason that it be made compulsory in the way that taxation and jury service are. Furthermore, it is because voting is not very burdensome that I believe my financial incentive scheme will be able to act as an effective incentive for people to vote despite the cost of voting.

The advocate of compulsory voting might object that I am responding here to a very thin concept of democracy that misses what is really at stake: perhaps it is true that absent a legal compulsion to vote there is minimal danger of an actual collapse of democracy, but there are nonetheless significant harms that a democratic society will incur as a result of individuals choosing not to vote. I have already argued that by virtue of the vicious circle the low electoral turnout on the part of a particular age cohort leads to political neglect; but if this is true, why should the importance of avoiding this vicious circle not trump an individual’s negative liberty not to be interfered with?

“It is clear that to some extent many young people choosing not to vote will harm others because it will lead self-interested politicians to neglect the needs and interests of young people.”

If the question were that clear cut (helping the individual and society versus protecting the individual’s negative liberty), then this

objection would undoubtedly have serious weight, for I do not pretend to defend an inviolable concern for liberty. However, the true picture is somewhat more nuanced. The virtuous circle of voting assumes that the voter casts a vote which represents a reasoned expression of her political will; otherwise, as argued above, politicians will still not be motivated to consider the interests of young people in an attempt to win over the “youth vote”. But the young people who vote only because it is compulsory (the group with whom we are primarily concerned here) will not vote in a way that gives a reasoned expression of their political will since it is not a reasoned view, but rather the threat of legal action, that motivates them to vote. Under compulsory voting, politicians will therefore be aware that young people are not delivering reasoned votes and so the virtuous circle will not result. The response that where compulsory voting is practiced there tend to be few blank votes, demonstrating that people are not unmotivated to deliver quality votes under a system compulsory voting,<sup>35</sup> misses the point: the fact that someone casts an actual, and not a blank, vote does not suffice to show that they have put any thought into it. Hence, neither the individual nor the society will benefit from infringing upon the individual’s liberty and legally requiring him to vote. Given that this is the case, the individual’s negative liberty not to be interfered with holds greater weight than a concern for the welfare of the individual and society.

Moreover, as John Rawls argued in his *Theory of Justice*, if a citizen is to vote then it is necessary for that citizen to first develop a willingness and aptitude for forming political opinions that will appeal to others, what he calls “education to public spirit”, before she can then “acquire an affirmative sense of political duty and obligation, that is, one that goes beyond the mere willingness to submit to law and government”.<sup>36</sup> Thus, affirmative political obligations cannot suffice as a justification for compulsory voting.<sup>37</sup> Rather, a sense of political duty arises in part from the way in which elections require citizens to develop political opinions that accord with public spirit – it cannot just be imposed upon citizens who are unwilling to engage in this process, and the legal enforcement of such an imposition is surely unjustifiable.

One final defence of compulsory voting is that the ability to cast a blank vote – or indeed to be able to choose an option that de-

notes one’s dissatisfaction with the political system or its available options, which seems to me a sensible way to allow voters who are dissatisfied with their political options to express this opinion – implies that compulsory voting does not violate autonomy in a strong paternalistic way.<sup>38</sup> Individuals are not being made to act in a way that will “protect” them, or “benefit” them from an informed choice of action. In fact, compulsory voting, according to Lacroix, does not even impose a “very minor restriction” on individual freedom,<sup>39</sup> (contrary to what Lijphart argued<sup>40</sup>). Rather, it is actually legitimated by autonomy and equal liberty – the very principles of political liberalism.<sup>41</sup> That is a misleading diagnosis. Compulsory voting violates our negative freedom not to be interfered with – the only question is whether this violation can be justified by the benefit that results from legally compelling people to vote, a position that I have argued against. In response to my worry about the quality of votes that compulsory voting will deliver, the advocate of compulsory voting could claim that under compulsory voting, people are *required* to develop well-informed political opinions; but this response, as well as being practically quite vacuous (how could this requirement be enforced?) this seems incompatible with the liberal perspective of respect for all attitudes in the world – attitudes that may value, perhaps, spontaneity, spiritual quest, or even a scepticism towards organised activity, all of which could lead someone to choose not to vote.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, I am not arguing that the choice not to vote should be encouraged. But a liberal respect for different opinions surely implies that people should be free to think in ways that may lead them not to want to vote, or indeed to want not to vote. Furthermore, the argument that the ability to cast a blank vote means that compulsory voting does not violate our autonomy is like saying that being forced to attend church but not to pray would not violate our conscience, which is clearly absurd.<sup>43</sup> Lacroix’s argument amounts to the proposition that forcing someone to turn up to a polling booth is an acceptable infringement upon someone’s liberty, but requiring them to vote once there is not. In saying this, Lacroix is prioritising the voter’s “freedom of thought”, and saying that as long as this particular freedom is not violated (which it is not, since the voter may choose not to vote), the voter’s “liberal rights” are not breached. But the voter’s liberal rights

extend beyond merely her freedom of thought, and her freedom of movement (or of non-movement, i.e. her freedom to stay at home that day) is a case in point. Thus, Lacroix’s argument implies that the value of the vote in supporting the principle of equal liberty<sup>44</sup> outweighs someone’s freedom (of (non-)movement) to stay at home, but does not outweigh that person’s freedom (of thought) not to vote.

“Compulsory voting violates our negative freedom not to be interfered with – the only question is whether this violation can be justified [...]”

However, this argument assumes that legally compelling people to vote will bring about valuable electoral outcomes that support principle of equal liberty but, as I argued above, it is not at all clear that such benefits of voting will accrue under a system of compulsory voting. Some people might not be interested or motivated to vote, but after having been forced to the polls, they may decide that they “might as well vote now”, and even though they will not cast a blank vote they nonetheless have no actual interest in voting and their vote will not constitute a reasoned expression of their political will. Thus, their vote will be of little or no value, and it will surely be of less value than the vote of someone who has freely chosen to turn up to vote, as I argue below. Therefore, since it seems unlikely that the benefits of voting will hold for those who vote only as a consequence of compulsory voting, a concern for people’s liberty (in this case the freedom of (non-)movement, and not of thought) trumps compulsory voting’s vacuous attempt to further “liberal equality” by forcing people to vote; the ability to cast a blank vote merely reduces, but certainly does not eliminate, the extent to which individual liberty is violated.

In sum, the violation of liberty that occurs under compulsory voting is motivated by a dubious attempt to bring about the benefits of voting – and I have argued that a concern for liberty outweighs these benefits because it seems unlikely that valuable, reasoned votes will be cast by the people who vote only because voting is compulsory (the very people whom the practice of compulsory voting primarily seeks to affect), and so the virtuous circle of voting will not hold. However, even if the reader objects to this claim, for my central thesis to go through all that I need to establish is the weaker claim that the benefits of voting are *more likely* to ac-

crue under my proposed incentive scheme than under compulsory voting. Ultimately, I am arguing that my proposed incentive scheme offers a better way to improve electoral turnout among the young than compulsory voting, and this argument does not hinge upon whether compulsory voting is unjustifiable (though my arguments tend to point in this direction).

“The contrasting alternative approach to boosting electoral turnout among the young [...] [is] an incentive scheme that will pay young people between the ages of 18 and 28 a small amount, I suggest £30 [...]”

### Encouraging young people to vote by financial inducement

I have argued that boosting electoral turnout by means of legal compulsion, which functions by giving people a disincentive for not voting, constitutes an unjustifiable violation of individual liberty. The contrasting alternative approach to boosting electoral turnout among the young that I consider now is an incentive system for young voters. I argue for an incentive scheme that will pay young people between the ages of 18 and 28 a small amount, I suggest £30, if they attend an hour's information session on the election, partake in an hour's discussion session on the election, both of which are arranged by an independent body without any political affiliations, and then cast their vote.

To be confident of the appropriate level of payment for this scheme, empirical research could be carried out into the minimum payment sufficient to act as an effective incentive for young voters, making a trade-off between maximising the chance of incentivizing young people to vote while minimizing expense. However, I suggest £30 because it is significantly more than the equivalent minimum wage payment for doing three hours of work (approximating the voting process to take about an hour), and therefore it would presumably make for an effective incentive for young people to vote. If it were much less than this then, especially if we also consider the time and expense that young people will require for getting to the sessions and to the election, it would surely fail to incentivise those young people who would prefer to spend this time engaged in leisure activities, or working in their normal job. But the payment is less than double the equivalent minimum wage

payment for three hours of work, so it would not constitute a huge expense. If anything, my suspicion is that to be an effective incentive for most young people (and, crucially, not just the young people who are already electorally motivated) to attend the sessions and vote, the payment would have to be at least £30; research might reveal that it would have to be more, perhaps £40. However, since £30 is significantly more than the equivalent minimum-wage payment for three hours of work, I assume for the remainder of this essay that it is enough to act as an effective incentive for the young people.

Of course, it is possible that the information and discussion sessions which I propose could be made a compulsory part of a scheme of compulsory voting in order to make it more likely that citizens cast a well-reasoned vote. But even if this happened, as well as constituting a larger violation of individual liberty (since now the person is forced not just to vote, but also to attend these two sessions), I do not believe that these sessions would lead to as much benefit as they would under my incentive scheme. People tend to be more interested in what they choose for themselves than what they are forced to do under threat of legal compulsion. Someone who freely chooses to work for the military, for example, is much more likely to be interested and engaged in his job than someone who does so only as a consequence of conscription. Therefore, even though I hope that the sessions will increase the attendees' political knowledge and engagement, it is likely to do so more effectively when the attendees are present at the sessions as a result of free choice than when they attend merely as a result of legal compulsion.

It could also be suggested that under compulsory voting these information and discussion sessions could nonetheless be offered without attendance being financially incentivised or legally enforced. Now, regardless of whether or not compulsory voting is in place, I agree that these sessions would be of value. However, by attracting people to the sessions who would not otherwise come, and incentivizing people to engage with the sessions by making payment conditional upon such engagement as my scheme proposes, the sessions are likely to be of more benefit under my scheme of financial incentives than under any other scheme.

It is perfectly possible that there will also be other relevant electoral events happening

between elections, such as referenda, begging the question of whether my scheme should, if applied to everyone aged 18-28, be extended to these events as well. Since, in the UK at least, such events are still quite rare, my answer would be yes: the total expense of my financial incentive scheme when it is extended to these events would still constitute a tiny fraction of government expenditure. For the expense to even amount to just 0.5% of government expenditure, there would have to be about 70 such events between every election<sup>45</sup> – this would still be a small expense even though the regularity of these events would be far more than the current frequency of electoral events in the UK.

Therefore, it seems entirely justifiable that for the near future this scheme should apply to all electoral events aside from the party elections – the expense will continue to be minimal. Only if referenda started to occur much more frequently than they do at present could the resultant level of expenditure justify the government's being selective about the events for which it offers financial inducement for the young people's attendance. However, even if, for whatever reason, policymakers were reluctant to extend the financial incentive scheme to other electoral events, and happy only to apply the scheme to the main election every four or five years, this would be of significant benefit; and it is very possible that the increased electoral engagement and force of habit that results from the scheme being applied with regards to young people voting in the party elections would spillover to their engagement in other electoral events anyway, even if the scheme did not also apply to these other electoral events.

### Some objections

Now, it could be objected that those who attend the sessions under my incentive scheme do not make an entirely “free choice” to do so, since many will be there only because of the financial incentive. However, although that is to some extent true, the attendees are nonetheless likely to have more interest in the sessions under my scheme than under compulsory voting, for two reasons. First, although they may be primarily financially motivated, those who attend the sessions are nonetheless making a conscious choice to spend their time and make their money in this way, rather than by doing anything else. Thus, their choice implies that they are at least relatively hap-

py to attend the sessions, having weighed up the value of their attendance against the value of doing otherwise – I am sure that far fewer people would turn up if similar levels of payment were offered to those prepared to clean the town's sewerage system, for example.<sup>46</sup> This would not be implied if the sessions were an obligatory part of a system of compulsory voting because attendees would have no choice as to whether they should attend the sessions.

**“It is very possible that the [...] force of habit that results from the scheme being applied with regards to young people voting in the party elections would spillover to their engagement in other electoral events.”**

Second, the payment, as I explain below, is conditional upon the young people demonstrating their engagement with the issues under discussion, thus motivating them to listen to and engage with the sessions. This extra motivation to engage that someone will experience once they are at the session could not apply without such an incentive scheme (unless, of course, the disturbing option of fining people who were not engaged in the sessions were to be used – but surely no one would accept the level of liberty-violation implied by this).

The benefits of such a scheme are plain. Providing the selective benefit of financial payment to voters is much more pleasing than fining non-voters, and this would be especially true for young people who want and need money, but this scheme also offers a powerful method by which to overcome abstention and reduce the democratic deficit, bringing government policies into closer alignment with citizen preferences.<sup>47</sup> It could accomplish the same function as compulsory voting without infringing upon individual freedom.<sup>48</sup>

Why would it offer such a powerful incentive for young people to vote? Very simply: because young people want, and need, money. Of course, this is true of everyone, and so if it were applied to all eligible voters then it would offer an effective incentive scheme for them too. But, plainly, young people tend to have and to earn less than older people. Also, for young people earning money may still have some novelty factor that has long since disappeared for the older generations. Furthermore, while the young people who work will tend to earn less than older generations, there are also many young people who are unable

to sustain a regular job because they are in full-time education or because they are suffering from the high level of youth unemployment. Therefore for both employed and unemployed young people even more than for the general voting population, the opportunity to earn a relatively significant sum of money quickly, and with relatively little effort, will surely be an enticing prospect and will offer a powerful incentive for attending these sessions and voting.

The most common objection to such a system is that it will incur the cost of incentivizing people to vote who would have voted anyway, a deadweight loss. Conversely, so the argument goes, “Fines for abstention would circumvent this problem and produce the same result – high turnout – more efficiently”, because fines would only apply to those who would not vote; rewarding people when turnout is already high will, for the most part, simply give rise to an unnecessary expense.<sup>49</sup>

Even though this is a legitimate objection to a scheme that pays all citizens to vote, its weight is minimal in the case of the scheme that I propose because, for this scheme, the expense of paying people to vote is limited to young people between the ages of 18 and 28, and will only arise once every few years when there is a general election. By limiting the scope of payment to people aged 18-28, the cost of this scheme is significantly reduced – at £30 per voter, with this expense arising once every five years, the cost of such a scheme would make up approximately 0.007% of British government expenditure over those five years,<sup>50</sup> a negligible price to pay for improving the electoral turnout of young people and reducing the democratic deficit.

Of course, arranging the information and discussion sessions might also constitute a significant expense – I make no attempt to estimate how much that could be. However, when we remember that elections occur just once every four or five years, and if we bear in mind the value of these sessions as a means by which to engage the political will of young people, and enable them to activate their virtuous circle of voting – hence improving democracy and reducing intergenerational injustice – such an expense seems entirely worthwhile. Furthermore, it might be possible that this expense could be avoided, or at least significantly reduced, by finding volunteers to run these sessions or requiring local authorities (run by people who would not expect to have their incomes “topped-up” upon helping with such a scheme) to hold them.

### Effects of implementing incentives

The reason that I propose payment for people between the ages of 18 and 28 (i.e., anyone below the age of 29 who is eligible to vote) is that with elections occurring once every four to five years, such a scheme guarantees that young people will be paid to vote in at least two elections. I hope that this will be sufficient to generate in young people the *habit* of voting, thus ensuring that they will continue to vote from the age of 29 onwards even after this incentive system ceases for them. The study cited above noted the significant effect on habit of voting in just one election, so voting in two (or three) elections will logically make this habit even stronger. Also, this age group makes up quite a significant portion of the population – it is, I hope, big enough to affect politicians' electoral prospects and so will be sufficient to begin to activate the virtuous circle of young people's political representation.

**“The opportunity to earn a relatively significant sum of money quickly, and with relatively little effort, will surely be an enticing prospect and will offer a powerful incentive for [...] voting.”**

However, I should note that if the government were particularly concerned about the cost of the scheme, or if it seemed as though being paid to vote in two or three elections would make the young person more likely to develop a habit of voting only when paid, rather than developing a general voting habit (an objection that I respond to below), then my scheme could perhaps be modified so as to apply only to first-time voters. Even though I argue in this essay for the scheme to apply to all those aged 18-28, it would certainly be preferable for the scheme to apply only to first-time voters than not to apply at all; and most of the arguments that I make for the scheme would apply equally to this alternative.

How exactly the information and discussion sessions should be arranged, the size of the group that should attend, and precisely what the sessions should consist of are questions that I make no attempt to address here. The basic principles that I would suggest for the sessions are very straightforward, however: the sessions should be arranged by an independent body with no political affiliations; the information session should be made simple and balanced, yet as informative and interesting as possible, offering a summary of what each party offers

but with an emphasis on how their policies differ, particularly with respect to what they offer young people; and the discussion session must be made simple and yet as engaging as possible, involving questions that unambiguously test the extent to which the individuals are engaged with the political issues at stake. It would probably be logical for the hour-long information session to be followed immediately by the hour-long discussion session so that the young people still have the information fresh in their minds for the discussion session, and so that traveling to and from the sessions is reduced.

Hasen argues in favour of compulsory voting over financial inducement as a method for raising electoral turnout because, so he suggests, a law implies moral authority or social consensus, as opposed to his analogous equivalent to financial incentives of half a dozen Yum-Yum doughnuts which “inspires an outcome-orientated calculus”, i.e. an election in which people vote because of the reward and not because they are actually electorally engaged.<sup>51</sup> It might, Hasen could continue, make people even less likely to vote after the rewards cease, because the voter will never have developed an attitude of engagement but rather will have voted only due to the financial incentive on offer. This is similar to the objection that paying people to vote might increase votes but these votes will not be of value because young people will vote only in order to receive money – they will not actually be electorally engaged and will not take the time to think seriously about whom to vote for. Indeed, it seems conceivable that young people, often having mastered in school the art of pretending to be engaged when really they are not, may not actually be engaged by the information and discussion sessions at all. They may, the objection might run, be entirely uninterested in the election and turn up only in order to receive payment. After two (or three) elections when this payment ceases for the young person, she may be even less inclined to vote than she was initially because now she expects to receive financial payment in return for voting and without this financial inducement she is unmotivated to engage in the election. Perhaps, it might be said, the “habit” of voting that the young people develop would simply be a habit of voting only when there is payment on offer.

Yet preventing this apathetical response to the sessions is precisely the task of the

discussion session: the young people must be asked questions which reveal whether they have indeed listened to what was presented in the information session, and they must be asked to respond to what they heard, and to each other’s responses to what was heard, in order to earn the £30. Whether they qualify as having been actively involved should be at the discretion of those running the sessions. The expectation of engagement should not be especially high, of course – I do not suggest this in order to reduce the number of people who qualify for payment. Rather, I suggest this simply to ensure that young people do not think that they can turn up and attempt to disrupt the sessions, or make no effort to engage with the discussion, and still get paid. As long as the young person has clearly tried his or her best to follow the information presented and to reflect on it, and on the opinions of others, that should be sufficient for payment.

“It seems conceivable that young people, often having mastered in school the art of pretending to be engaged when really they are not, may not actually be engaged by the information and discussion sessions at all.”

This then takes the bite out of the above objection, because even though it is plausible that a young person who sat in silence could pretend to be interested when really he is not, if engagement is judged by his verbal responses to particular questions and to others then he could not pretend to be engaged when really he is not – holding a face that looks half-interested when really we feel bored is one thing, but responding to questions about what is being discussed when we have not been listening to or thinking about what is being said is quite another.

Moreover, by virtue of the information and discussion sessions, the political engagement of the young people who attended the sessions will have increased, and they will have developed a taste for what Riker and Ordeshook describe as the psychic satisfaction that comes from voting.<sup>52</sup> This is significant: a citizen participation survey by Schlozman et al. revealed that it was the feeling of civic gratification (i.e., feeling good about doing one’s duty for society or helping the community, a feeling closely related to the “psychic satisfaction” that Riker and Ordeshook discuss) that voters

most commonly gained from voting (given in 93% of cases), above other gratifications such as social benefits or policy gratification.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, political interest and civic skills will both be enhanced by the information and discussion sessions, and the study of Brady et al. indicates that these are the key drivers behind people voting.<sup>54</sup> These sessions will also make the young people more likely to continue to participate in the political process because they also offer a form of civic education, albeit a minimal one, that will enhance the political knowledge of young people.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, because the young people never expected the payment to continue beyond their first two or three elections, it seems implausible that their habit of voting will have been skewed into a habit of voting only when payment is on offer. Imagine a child whose mother says to him “I’m going to give you some extra pocket money if you go to the homework club on Friday after school, but I’m only going to do this for two weeks because I can’t afford more than that.” Knowing that the payment will soon stop but that the sessions are valuable for him, he is likely to develop the habit of attending the sessions for their own sake rather than for the sake of the pocket money (even if they seem slightly less fun than going straight home) because he knows that the extra pocket money is only a temporary bonus. However, if his mother had instead said “I will give you extra pocket money every week that you go to the homework club,” then it seems plausible that, if this payment were suddenly to stop, the child might also stop attending the sessions, having got used to the idea that attending the sessions was his way of getting more money. In the same way, if the young people know from the start that the payment will be given only for their first two or three elections, and they find the sessions interesting and engaging, then they are more likely to develop a habit of attendance than a habit of attending in the expectation of getting paid.

In sum, the young people’s increased electoral interest, civic skills and political engagement, the psychic satisfaction and civic gratification that they obtain from voting, and the habit that they develop of voting (not merely of getting paid), having known all along that the payment would cease for them once they reached the age of 29, all make it likely that the young people will continue to vote after the payment stops for them.

A further objection might be that encouraging young people to vote by financial inducement is effectively a bribe: it implies the wrong attitude on the part of the government. My answer to this objection is that while more young people voting of their own volition would undoubtedly be a preferable solution, we need to be realistic about our situation. Indeed, empirical tests that reveal the influence of financial incentives on voters suggest that we should reconsider our normative bias against an incentive system, realizing that the result will be a more politically engaged and democratically representative government.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps there might come a time in the future when the political representation of the youth has improved as a result of the virtuous circle, and the democratic deficit reduced, to the extent that this scheme is no longer required in order to boost electoral turnout among the young. Be that as it may, in the present political environment with its worryingly low levels of electoral engagement among young people, there is no doubt that such a scheme would be of immense short-term and long-term value for improving the electoral turnout of the young and consequently improving their political representation, thereby also improving the quality of democracy and inter-generational justice.

“While more young people voting of their own volition would undoubtedly be a preferable solution, we need to be realistic about our situation.”

Indeed, I suggest that this scheme, in the same spirit as quotas, should ultimately intend to „make itself redundant“. For in addition to boosting young people’s electoral turnout in the short-term, it also aims to tackle the root causes of young people’s low electoral engagement. It will probably have spillover effects that improve the political representation of young people in other ways, too, although I do not have space to defend this further claim here. Furthermore, if my analysis so far has been sound, this scheme would be more likely than compulsory voting to bring about the benefits of voting. Therefore, if compulsory voting is taken to be a powerful possible method for boosting young people’s electoral turnout and producing the benefits of voting then it follows that my proposed scheme offers an especially compelling method by which to achieve this.

## Conclusion

Thus, encouraging young people to vote by financial inducement offers a powerful way to boost electoral turnout among the young without infringing upon their liberty, as compulsory voting would do. It would, I have argued, also be more likely to deliver reasoned, quality votes than compulsory voting. Given that it applies only to young people aged 18-28 at the time of the election, the expense of such a scheme will be negligible. The expense of arranging information and discussion sessions for young people might also require considerable cost, but this seems entirely worthwhile considering the effects it will have of boosting the political engagement levels of young people and reducing the democratic deficit. Furthermore, it might be possible to avoid this cost by finding volunteers who can run the sessions. By virtue of the virtuous circle, the information and discussion sessions, and the force of habit, as well as offering a short-term solution to the low level of young people’s political engagement, my proposed scheme also offers a longer-term solution: politicians will start to heed the views and needs of young people as they begin to vote in greater numbers, thus motivating the young to be more electorally engaged; young people’s interest in, and engagement with, politics will increase; and the force of habit will therefore make it likely that the young people will then continue to vote as they get older, even after this payment ceases for them. Encouraging young people by financial inducement, in accordance with the scheme that I outlined, should therefore be seriously considered by academics and policymakers as a radical but effective method by which to address the current worryingly low level of electoral engagement among young people.

## Notes

- 1 See Berry 2012: 44-65.
- 2 See Zukin et al. 2006.
- 3 For example, civic education, youth quotas in parliament, youth-led parties and, to boost electoral turnout, making voting more convenient for young people by developing a voting “app”.
- 4 Note that although useful distinctions can be made between them, this essay essentially treats liberty, autonomy and freedom as synonyms.
- 5 See Ministry of Justice 2007: 44, 54-56.
- 6 Ipsos MORI 2010.
- 7 The Economist 2016.

- 8 See Birch et al. 2013: 7; Dinas 2012; Gerber et al. 2003; Franklin 2004.
- 9 See Russell et al. 2002: 15.
- 10 See Howker/Malik 2013; Birch et al. 2013: 13-15; The Economist 2016.
- 11 See Sloam 2007: 565; Birch et al. 2013: 2, 16, 20.
- 12 See Whiteley et al. 2001; Russell et al. 2002: 6.
- 13 Henn/Foard 2012: 55.
- 14 Gerber et al. 2003.
- 15 See Franklin 2004; Dinas 2012.
- 16 This motivation for the scheme does not have to be in any way secretive: the government could explicitly tell young people that they are incentivizing them to vote because this will increase their likelihood of being well represented in politics both now and, through the force of habit and the virtuous circle, in the future.
- 17 Ackerman/Fishkin 2004.
- 18 See Hasen 1996: 2135, 2169, 2172; Stavely 1972: 78-82.
- 19 See Stavely 1972: 243 n.131.
- 20 Birch et al. 2013: 21-23.
- 21 See IDEA 2015; Hasen 1996: 2169-2170.
- 22 See Lijphart 1997: 8-10; Hasen 1996: 2170.
- 23 See Hasen 1996: 2172.
- 24 See Singh 2011: 104.
- 25 See Lijphart 1997: 10; Feeley 1974; Lacroix 2007: 192-193.
- 26 See IDEA 2015.
- 27 See Lever 2008: 63.
- 28 Constant 1988: 311.
- 29 See Jones 1974.
- 30 See Lever 2008: 62-63; Jones 1974.
- 30 Mill 1974: 141-163.
- 32 I set aside the classic problem of public choice theory that an individual vote is, in fact, incredibly unlikely to have any impact on the result of the election. For cogent attempts to explain and resolve this “paradox of participation” see Downs 1957; Riker/Ordeshook 1968; Verba et al. 2000.
- 33 Berlin 1969: 121-122.
- 34 Lijphart 1997: 11.
- 35 See Birch et al. 2013: 22.
- 36 Rawls 1999: 205-206.
- 37 See Lever 2008: 62.
- 38 See Lacroix 2007: 192-193.
- 39 Lacroix, 2007: 192-193.
- 40 Lijphart 1997: 11.
- 41 See Lacroix 2007: 192.
- 42 See Lever 2008: 62.
- 43 See Lever 2008: 64 n.4.
- 44 Lacroix 2007: 193-195.
- 45 Based on ONS (2015: 10) figures, the

population of people aged 18-28 in Britain can be roughly approximated at 9 million. If all these young people were to accept the incentive scheme, this would therefore cost the government about £270 million. Figures from 2014 give the government expenditure at £732 billion for that year (Inman/Arnett 2014). Based on these approximate figures, to arrive at the number of electoral events that could be funded by 0.5% of expenditure over five years, I divide 0.5% of government spending over five years (i.e., £732 billion x 5 x 0.5% = £18.3 billion) by the cost of the scheme, assuming that all young people use it (i.e., £270 million). The final calculation is therefore 18.3 billion divided by 270 million, which equals approximately 70.

46 Of course, for someone desperately short of money for the basic necessities of life and without any other way to get it, the choice may not be so “free” after all. But for most young people this would clearly not apply: some kind of cost-benefit calculation would be made before they decided to attend the sessions.

47 See Feeley 1974: 241.

48 See Feeley 1974: 241.

49 See Feeley 1974: 241.

50 Using the estimates given in footnote 45, I arrive at this figure by dividing the cost of the scheme, assuming that all young people use it (£270 million) by government spending over one year (£732 billion). Thus, I calculate: 270 million/732 billion, which equals approximately 0.00037. Thus, the cost of the scheme would constitute approximately 0.037% of government expenditure over one year: this is equivalent to roughly a 27th of a percentile, or one 2,700th of the expenditure. Hence, since elections occur only once every four or five years, over the course of an electoral term this expense would be much less again – it would constitute, over a five year term, approximately 0.007% of government spending.

51 Hasen 1996: 2172.

52 Riker/Ordeshook 1973.

53 Schlozman et al. 1995.

54 Brady et al. 1995.

55 See Galston 2001.

56 See La Raja/Schaffner 2013; Bassi et al. 2011; Ornstein 2012.

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## After Equality: Why a Decreasing Turnout Harms Democracy (Armin Schäfer: *Der Verlust politischer Gleichheit*)

*Reviewed by Anne Fock*

Democracy, it seems, is stuck in a crisis of self-discovery. Or at any rate, one might be forgiven for thinking so when taking a look at current turnout statistics. The problem of increasing numbers of voting abstentions is no longer only a concern for social scientists, since today the media and politicians are also preoccupied with what seems to be an inexorable decline in the casting of votes. Democratic processes still

abound, of course, yet many assert that they are undermined beyond recognition. Despite there being no one-and-only definition of democracy, but rather a wealth of theoretical models each at odds with one another, they all embrace the same central promise: that of political equality. It is this very promise to which Armin Schäfer, a researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, has dedicated his 2015 book *Der Verlust politischer*

*Gleichheit* (in German). By establishing a relationship between liberalisation on the one hand, and political inequality, poverty of resources and political commitment on the other hand, Schäfer seeks to find an answer to the question of whether democracy is actually suffering from a declining voter turnout and, if so, how a declining voter turnout is distributed among the different strata of society.

“The *Bourgeois* has his place in modern

society, but if he dislodges the *Citoyen*, then – from a neo-republican point of view – democracy itself becomes impoverished,” Schäfer argues (16). The concept of democracy is closely linked to the concept of freedom. While it is the greatest possible individual freedom for action which characterises the liberal notion of freedom, the republican definition is based rather on the equality of the exercise of rights, as Isaiah Berlin famously put it.

Schäfer in particular addresses the republican model of democracy and freedom, known for its focus on political participation as a precondition for individual freedom. Adhering to this model, he posits in chapter one (11-26) that a low turnout is always a socially unequal turnout – and expectably so, he insists, for the willingness to participate is unlikely to decrease equally among all social groups at the same time. From a neo-republican point of view, the unequal participation of social groups clearly constitutes a loss of democratic quality. In order to do justice to the notion of neo-republicanism, however, Schäfer distinguishes between the neo-Roman (“freedom as non-domination”) and neo-Athenian form of republicanism (“freedom as political participation”). It is the latter, in particular, which serves as a bogeyman to many liberal authors – or so he argues.

Ever since the 1980s, a clear trend towards liberalisation has been happening in the Western world, both in political as well as in economic terms. In order to understand the general progress of liberalisation, Schäfer summarises the development in 21 OECD countries over the period from 1980 to 2010. The result is what he calls a “process of double convergence” (72): not only do all countries appear to be developing in the same direction, but rather the previously least-regulated countries are liberalising particularly rapidly. At the same time, income distribution is becoming more and more unequal. The OECD explains this by pointing to deregulated product markets, low incidental labour costs, low labour replacement ratios, and weak unions.<sup>1</sup> Based on the correlation between liberalisation and income inequality, Schäfer proceeds to examine in the next chapter what he has already discussed at the beginning: the link between social and political inequality, that is, between income inequality and voter turnout. In fact, empirical studies suggest that with



an increasing income, the probability of political participation rises as well. Even though this correlation is controversial among scholars, Schäfer notes that citizens with lower incomes and less education exhibit the lowest participation rate. He points out, however, that this is not only due to a lack of resources but also a matter of personal motivation: once voters are excluded from social life, they feel that their voice will not be heard and therefore their vote cannot change anything. From a democratic perspective, these findings point towards a vicious circle which pushes socially weak and politically inactive citizens more and more into an offside position and into political resignation. Legal equality and political equality, therefore, are not simply the same.

Just as important, according to Schäfer, is the impact that the network of social relations has on voters. The voting behaviour of the neighbourhood, for example, is not to be underestimated; and the social segregation facilitated by the rental market is widening the gap between the resource-poor and higher earning sections of the population. It is therefore an illusion, Schäfer holds, to believe that non-voters have already arrived in the mainstream of society (121).

On the other hand, the individual election results of the parties are less influenced by the changes in voting behaviour, Schäfer argues: “How to vote depends less closely on the class situation than it used to, but whether one chooses to vote does so all the more,” as he puts it (123). Nevertheless,

there is evidence for a certain degree of alienation from the major political parties among the non-voters. It follows that protest parties enjoy more “goodwill” among abstainers.

The election campaign is another issue introduced by Schäfer. He begins by focusing on the target groups that are addressed by parties and candidates: Since most of the time, parties have less contact persons in socially disadvantaged areas and their budget is limited anyway, many of them tend to narrow down their campaigns to areas in which they have better chances of recruiting voters. In this context, Schäfer also addresses the private election expenses of candidates and comes to the conclusion that, without them, the chances of getting elected are extremely remote. This fact also contributes to the increasing academisation of the *Bundestag* as well as of the *Landtage* (state parliaments).

From all these points of critique, Schäfer concludes that the means of citizens to participate need to be expanded. He gives the example of cumulating and splitting votes (German: *kumulieren und panaschieren*), which was introduced in the last two decades in almost all German *Länder* (federate states). In this context, he also addresses direct democratic elections as they are championed by neo-Athenian republicans. However, Schäfer isn't oblivious to the risk posed by this form of democratic government: if only a privileged minority participates in the elections, it is hardly the majority opinion that is articulated. This risk, he argues in the penultimate chapter, can be mitigated only with compulsory voting (207-227). The obligation to vote could at least lead to a balanced turnout, even if other forms of participation, such as involvement in associations or parties, might not be affected. Based on surveys, Schäfer demonstrates successfully the equalising effect of compulsory voting that is reflected in the average increase of the citizens' likelihood to vote by 15 percentage points. However, anyone hoping for an increase in political interest is bound to be disappointed, he suggests.

In the eleventh and final chapter, Schäfer makes a diagnosis which locates the crisis of democracy in the loss of political equality and succinctly summarises possible reactions to it: from Schäfer's neo-republican view, it is necessary to identify the appropriate reforms that will allow maximising the freedom of the individual, for example

by preventing arbitrary domination. Among these reforms he counts an obligation to vote, which at least would provide for an evenly distributed turnout and force policymakers to include each and every citizen in their election campaign as part of a potential target audience. Furthermore, Schäfer envisions the struggle against segregation as a mandatory policy objective: The social context with its decisive influence on voting behaviour, as set out above, can be steered through specific urban planning in disadvantaged neighbourhoods or through increased investment in local schools. The same principle can be applied to parties, who are able to change the landscape in particular with regard to leadership positions. In addition, Schäfer alludes to more unconventional reform options, such as the formation of committees – based on the American model – whose members are drawn from the general public to discuss reform proposals.

However, all these reforms are subject to the “Republican dilemma”: “The more unequal political participation becomes, the less likely it is for reforms to resolve this disparity” (242). This vicious circle exposes the neo-republicanism to the common critique of giving a diagnosis without having a solution to offer. Schäfer puts all his hope in the public discourse. Realising the injustice that is happening to those who are socially excluded from collective self-determination could be an appropriate beginning.

In this book as well as in many others, Armin Schäfer argues against the popular misconception that non-voters are to be found particularly among the politically interested. Prominent people who profess publicly their abstinence from voting, for example the German television philosopher Richard David Precht or the former “Handelsblatt” chief editor Gabor Steingart, create the impression that non-voters mostly act out of protest. This book contributes to this debate by demonstrating, in a scientific manner, that these protest abstainers represent a vanishingly

small proportion of those who stay away from the ballot box. Working with many far-reaching surveys and statistics, Schäfer explains that it is rather the social exclusion that keeps especially socially disadvantaged groups from voting. “Why should a lawyer, a teacher, a public functionary or a professor represent the interests of workers better than a male deputy the interests of women?”<sup>2</sup> This quote from Rainer Geißler reflects, in a provocative manner, the basic statement of Schäfer about representative democracy losing its legitimacy to social division.

The structure of the book is well thought out and outlines Schäfer’s neo-republican criticism of the current situation of democracy comprehensibly. His portrayal of democracy as an “unfinished project” implies the need for a democratic progress that he believes can be divided into three different steps: first of all, the inclusion of groups previously excluded from democratic processes. This proposal, as it were, constitutes the more productive version of the exclamation by Rainer Geißler quoted above. Furthermore, Schäfer mentions the option to incorporate democratic principles in all decision-making processes, even within schools or enterprises. Finally, Schäfer recommends again and again to expand the options of citizens when it comes to determining their representatives. This goal-oriented attitude can be observed in the whole book, but unfortunately it goes out of sight in the conclusion of the last chapter. Even if, as the saying goes, “a fault confessed is half redressed”, one can blame Schäfer for the same reproach neo-republicanism is often criticised for: giving a diagnosis without naming the remedy. He analyses the problems of democracy with meticulous precision, but he addresses suitable solutions only superficially. The only attempt towards a solution which he treats in some detail is compulsory voting and its impact on the turnout. Even though Schäfer does not claim to have found solutions, but rather to have provided an analysis of the current situation, it still would have been interesting at

this point to get a closer insight into his thoughts. He barely elaborates on proposals in questions such as suffrage from the age of 16, enabling absentee voting or reforming party financing, which are for example mentioned by the Bertelsmann Foundation in its special edition of the “Future of Democracy” (German: “*Zukunft der Demokratie*”) 2016. This is unfortunate but nonetheless understandable, since focusing on social exclusion as a priority in the crisis of democracy is precisely what he had set out to do in the book. But his fixation on the idea of exclusion causes him to leave alternative explanatory models undressed. It seems inconceivable for Schäfer that many citizens might be dissatisfied with the options themselves, and that declining electoral participation could just be an augmentation of the established phrase “I choose the lesser of two evils.”

In the same context, he criticises the argument of several authors according to whom the socially selective turnout constitutes a “ruse of reason” (243) and amounts to the natural enforcement of competences. By contradicting this statement, he completes the circle of his book and delivers the answer to the question that is posed by its title: the social exclusion of collective self-determination does an injustice to the excluded, and therefore takes the legitimacy out of representative democracy.

## Notes

1 OECD (2008): *Divided we stand: Why inequality keeps rising*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 155.

2 Rainer Geißler (1996): *Kein Abschied von Klasse und Schicht: Ideologische Gefahren der deutschen Sozialstrukturanalyse*. In: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol. 48 (2/1996), 319-338.

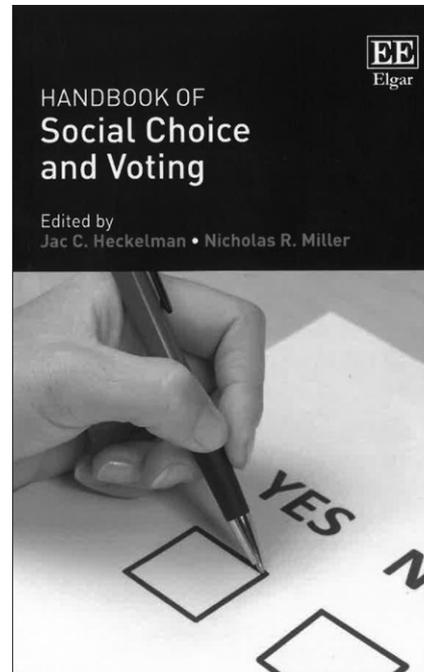
*Schäfer, Armin (2015): Der Verlust politischer Gleichheit: Warum die sinkende Wahlbeteiligung der Demokratie schadet. Frankfurt: Campus. 332 pages. ISBN: 978-3-593-50198-7. Price: €39,90.*

# Jac C. Heckelman and Nicholas R. Miller (eds.): Handbook of Social Choice and Voting

*Reviewed by Theresa Henn*

The process of collective decision-making is a crucial part of every democratic system. Whether in the case of voting for a candidate in a parliamentary election or when conducting a referendum, individual choices made by numerous citizens have to be aggregated into a single collective decision. However, generating group decisions on the basis of various individual preferences is not that easy. In a democracy, where every citizen has the right to express his or her preferences, the complex decision-making process requires clearly defined rules and has to lay out all available choices on the table. Nonetheless, different rules have different ways of accumulating preferences which, in turn, lead to varying outcomes. Social choice theory, commonly defined as the study of how to aggregate individual orders of preference, identifies and analyses these diverse rules of collective decision-making by applying logic and mathematics and retracing the core of the underlying concepts.

The *Handbook of Social Choice and Voting* by Jac C. Heckelman and Nicholas R. Miller addresses, as its title suggests, the wide field of social choice and attempts to provide an extensive overview of the subject. The title deliberately includes the additional aspect of “voting” to signal that it does not only cover the research in social choice theory in a narrow sense, but also expands it to broader questions of application. Since its early beginnings, this field of study has proven to be a particularly complex subfield of social science. Condorcet, Borda, Arrow and Sen – to name but a few – have occupied themselves with its numerous “paradoxes” and have had a major impact on today’s electoral studies. The Handbook seeks to break down the complex theories and ground-breaking logical derivations in an attempt to make this field of science accessible to an academic but non-specialist audience. While other volumes with similar titles exhibit a rather formalistic and theorem-proving



approach and focus on studies of public choice, this Handbook tries to cover a wider and more easily approachable set of issues in the field of social choice. It is composed of contributions from more than 20 different authors and subdivided into five major parts, beginning with the historic origins of social theory and concluding with empirical findings on current political voting paradoxes.

The first part, “Perspectives on Social Choice”, starts out historically with the early research in the field of social choice theory, dating back to the ancient Greeks. Ian McLean analyses the evolution of the approach and the puzzle of its steady disappearance and reappearance in the course of time (15). Subsequently, Randall Holcombe elaborates the connection between unanimous consent and what has come to be known as “constitutional economics” by critically analysing Buchanan’s pioneering approach to this field of study (35). “Constitutional economics” is commonly defined as the study of effective economic decisions within the binding framework of constitutional law. Holcombe’s normative-guided examination seeks to establish a

framework that can be used for evaluating constitutional rules and designing desirable laws to further individual and collective goals. The following essay, “Rational choice and the calculus of voting” by André Blais, shifts the focus to the rational choice aspects of social choice theory (54). Downs’s well-known rational choice approach had major theoretical impacts on later research concerning participation in democratic mass elections. Blais critically reviews Downs’s so-called “paradox of voting” and its continuously added amendments to explain the astonishing puzzle of why people take part in elections. Part one ends with a contribution by Robi Ragan scrutinising computational tools which analyse, apply, or extend traditional social choice models (67). This ground-breaking new technology enables the understanding of fundamental social choice problems the complexity of which could not be untangled with previous traditional tools.

After having established the outlines of social theory in the first part, the second part of the Handbook concentrates on practical implementations concerning pairwise voting choices. Majority rule is among the simplest methods for generating a decision and paradigmatic for social choice theory. Its easiest form is when having to decide between two alternatives whereby one alternative must receive the majority of votes. However, more often than not, there are more than two alternatives available, thus impeding the decision-making process. Scott Moser considers those more complex voting situations and focuses mainly on the Condorcet principle and May’s Theorem (83). In particular, he evaluates the mathematical structure and varying outcomes of so-called “tournaments” which apply when majority ties do not occur. Keith L. Dougherty further specifies this concept of majority rule and discusses a variation of different majority options. Overall, he elaborates on the importance of supermajority rules in social decision-making. Proceeding with the key

aspect of vote aggregation, Dan S. Felsen-thal and Moshé Machover measure “a priori voting power” in the following chapter (117). This concept evolves around the expectation that voting power may not be distributed equally, let alone proportionally, to the final voting outcome. Often, one vote does not carry the same weight as another (e.g. the vote of one shareholder who owns more than 50% of a company). Therefore, the widely accepted principle of “one person one vote” does not always apply. Part two concludes with a contribution discussing the “Condorcet Jury Theorem”. This theorem implies that a group which uses simple majority voting to generate a decision is more likely to make the correct choice than an individual all by him- or herself. This suggests that, as the saying goes, wisdom might indeed lie in the crowds.

The third part revolves around various spatial models of social choice. Its essential idea is that a geometrical approach is able to reflect the “space” of various policy alternatives, different candidates, and all other political decisions within a one- or multi-dimensional model. Based on this understanding, voters’ preferences are aligned and traceable at a political continuum, the ends of which represent alternatives to a particular decision. Voters reconcile their so-called “ideal points” with different political positions along this continuum and pick the alternatives closest to their own preferred outcome. The origin of the standard spatial model goes back to Duncan Black and was later advanced by Downs. Nicholas R. Miller picks up the most basic elements of this model in his essay “The spatial model of social choice and voting”. He distinguishes people locating themselves at the centre of the political continuum from the more extreme left- and right-wing political positions at both ends of the spectrum (163). Applying these basic approaches to an institutional level, Thomas H. Hammond discusses a newly developed unified spatial model of the American Congress. Essentially, this model provides guidance for understanding fundamental problems involving policy stability and the responsiveness of the US system. It also elaborates the tendency towards gridlocks inflicted by the constitution itself. However, in order to understand real world parties’ policy behaviour, another spatial model was introduced. The so-called “electoral competition spatial

model” – developed by Hotelling – originally analysed economic puzzles. However, Downs picked up its basic ideas and converted it for the purpose of political analysis. Today’s “Downsian spatial model” assumes that the motivations of politicians are simply office-seeking incentives, whereas voters are purely policy-oriented. This approach is further extended by Peter J. Coughlin and critically investigated in his essay “Probabilistic voting in models of electoral competition” (218). His expansion of the Hotelling-Downs model displays astonishing results regarding Nash equilibriums and voting behaviour as forecasted by the original model.

The Handbook having so far analysed pairwise social choice, part four continues with social choice from multiple alternatives. One of the most famous scholars to have dealt with various kinds of voting systems and the aggregation of individual preferences is Kenneth Arrow. His well-known “impossibility theorem” has uncovered the impracticality of all voting systems to simultaneously guarantee certain minimal conditions of fairness and sensibility when choosing between three or more alternatives. Elizabeth Maggie Penn seeks to get hold of this phenomenon and analyses other findings of scholars who have extended Arrow’s axioms. By concluding that one choice always seems to be deemed inferior to other possible options, Penn highlights the challenges and difficulties which – according to her – make a democratic system significant (260). Following these findings, Jac C. Heckelman addresses the “properties and paradoxes of common voting rules”. He compares the most commonly studied voting rules in which only one single winner is picked out of several options. Nicolaus Tideman, in his contribution, modifies this approach by dealing with voting rules that can be used for selecting multiple winners. To this end, he establishes five key categories for evaluating different voting systems. One of his crucial arguments is that the representation of a diverse population must be guaranteed by all voting systems. However, he concludes that a trade-off between greater representativeness and the convenience of the voting system will always prevail.

In order to combine social choice theory with empirical analysis, different measures must be applied for linking empirical findings to constructed concepts of social choice. The spatial model – described and

analysed in part three – has already given an insight into how geometrical approaches may simplify voting predictions and outcomes. Following up on this idea, Christopher Hare and Keith T. Poole try to get hold of ideological positions in the US Congress. To this end, they evaluate roll call voting data from US Congressmen and depict those decisions on a left-right continuum. Based on this approach, Hare and Pool employ the so-called “random utility model” which entails specific scaling procedures (333). This model tries to get hold of the utility one legislator gains from each of his or her roll call choices, implying that he or she will vote for whichever alternative is closest to his or her ideal point. The following chapter, “The uncovered set and its applications”, consists of many contributions specifying the so-called “uncovered set” (UCS) – a social choice set of alternatives which are not covered by any other alternatives (396). The authors use a newly developed “grid search algorithm” estimating uncovered sets in diverse environments under majority rule. Their findings show that policy choices are always constrained by other alternatives from the uncovered set. The final essay, by Marek M. Kaminski, discusses empirical examples of voting paradoxes that had serious political consequences in real life. One famous example is the US presidential election in 2000 in which George W. Bush defeated Al Gore, despite coming in second on the popular vote.

All in all, this Handbook can be described as well-written and fairly balanced. However, it is debatable whether it fulfils its general purpose as a Handbook of social choice and voting behaviour. By a universal definition, a Handbook should be a general compendium of information in a certain field of research which is comprehensively designed and provides quick answers for its covered subject. Heckelman and Miller pointed out that this was their reasoning as well: compiling a perspicuous composition of the wide field of social choice in order to break down the complex concepts for an academic but non-specialist audience. Evaluating this attempt, the selection of each chapter is logical and also the organisation of the chapters is coherent. Still, the essays themselves are quite technical and especially parts two and three (“Pairwise Social Choice” and “Spatial Models of Social Choice”) may not be understandable for readers unfamiliar with

the subject. Complex spatial models and intricate formulas may lead to confusion and a lack of understanding on the part of the audience which the editors wish to reach. Considering that Heckelman and Miller sought to compose an approachable Handbook which is distinct in this regard from other more expert books such as *The Elgar Companion to Public Choice* by Shugart and Razzolini, it is questionable whether they reached their goal. It may even be concluded that this Handbook is partially redundant, given other previously written books covering this field of research. Nevertheless, this Handbook seeks to assort a collection of all relevant social choice aspects and provides a good to very good insight of this field of science. Especially the detailed glossary and index are useful for a quick orientation. Another point of criticism is the fact that

many of the models analysed only apply to presidential systems using majority rule, such as that of the United States. A parliamentary system with proportional representation is often not included in the practical analysis and does not receive enough consideration. On the contrary, empirical findings refer most often to the US Congress (e.g. Chapter 18 “Measuring ideology in Congress”). The process of coalition formation and social choice theory on proportional voting systems is not covered at all, leaving several questions unanswered. How are coalitions formed and how does this affect the voting behaviour of citizens?

A greater use of “real life” examples – found in chapter five – would have increased the clarity of the Handbook especially for a non-specialist audience. Moreover, considering that the field of social choice is

constantly evolving, it might have been desirable to include a look at the future prospects of the field.

Nonetheless, the Handbook by Heckelman and Miller provides a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the vast and seemingly impenetrable field of social choice and voting. Written in a reasonably understandable technical style, the authors succeed in making complex issues relatively accessible to a non-expert audience. Therefore, the *Handbook of Social Choice and Voting* is a great addition to every bookshelf and recommended to all scholars who are interested in this field of study.

*Heckelman, Jac C. / Miller, Nicholas R. (eds.) (2015): Handbook of Social Choice and Voting. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. 424 pages. ISBN: 978-1-783-47072-3. Price: £140.*

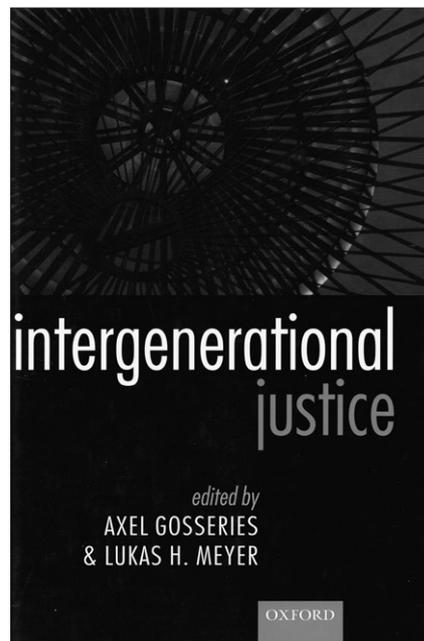
## Axel Gosseries and Lukas H. Meyer (eds.): Intergenerational Justice

*Reviewed by Laure Gillot-Assayag*

The future of subsequent generations is the subject of growing social concern as well as becoming a pressing question for economists and philosophers in the context of large-scale political, social and environmental upheaval (economic crises, pension schemes, environmental disasters...).

The purpose of *Intergenerational Justice* is to address this issue by providing a framework for philosophical reflection through sixteen articles by internationally recognised philosophers. It questions the content and the relevance of a theory for future generations. Do present generations have responsibilities or even obligations towards future individuals? Is it possible for generations to cooperate, even though they will never meet?

The book is intended primarily for readers well versed in the subject, witness its sometimes technical language and demonstrations. Clearly structured, it is divided into a theoretical part (“theory”) and an analysis of specific cases (“specific cases”). However, the present review will not follow this configuration, for both epistemological



(theory never goes without practice, synthesis without analysis) and organizational considerations (the articles’ content do not legitimise such a distinction). A thematic analysis will be privileged in order to synthesise the various contributions.

*Intergenerational Justice* exposes the theories

commonly used to analyse the problem of future generations: Communitarianism (J. Thompson), Libertarianism (H. Steiner, P. Vallentyne), Contractualism (S.M. Gardiner, D. Heyd, D. Attas, R. Kumar), Marxism (C. Bertram), Reciprocity (A. Gosseries), Sufficiencyarianism (L.H. Meyer, D. Roser, C. Wolf), Egalitarianism (G. Arrhenius) and Constitutionalism (V. M. Muniz-Fraticelli).

*Obligations regarding future generations create a clear partition between the different theories.* Do present generations have a duty towards non-contemporaries? For Thompson, the notion of obligation is both necessary and desirable: the “lifetime-transcending interests” concept (the existence of interests that remain after the death of the individual) allows the existence of a chain of intergenerational bonds. Our future demands will depend on future individuals. This expectation towards future generations justifies a duty of respect for all non-existent individuals – be it of the dead or of future individuals – and the development of a “trans-generational policy”. Unfortunately, the

practical implementation of this policy is not spelled out by Thompson. The author defines herself as partisan of a “weak communitarianism”, a patchwork of liberal and communitarian ideas promoting the rights of individuals and the existence of a common good. According to Thompson, the liberal approach is not relevant because it focuses on the interests of contemporaries, and leaves out the question of intergenerational bonds, relegating it as a marginal issue. On the other hand, “strong communitarianism” (the self as a communal structure) is contradicted by the empirical reality of growing multiculturalism, which makes it difficult to think of a common and interchangeable citizen identity.

The degrees of obligations for libertarianism, defined as invoking a strong respect for private property, vary depending on whether it is a right-wing libertarianism (agents can acquire full property of things not owned, like nature) or a left-wing libertarianism (natural resources collectively belong to everyone, so private ownership requires collective permission). Steiner and Vallentyne advocate a left-libertarianism: they consider that the value of the resources left, technology for instance, compensates for the excessive degradation of resources. For these authors, the “decent share proviso” (not giving more than a decent opportunity to use natural resources) is not sufficient, and thus one should apply an “egalitarian proviso” (the individual appropriates resources if and only if what is left provides equal opportunities for use). For L. H. Meyer and D. Roser, proponents of a sufficientiarist approach, a strict egalitarianism is both wrong (it demands degrading the state of the better-off for the sake of equality, even if this does not improve the state of the worse-off) and utopian, since it implies the suppression of all intergenerational differences. The authors advocate the obligation of a sufficient property legacy, but also point out that sufficientiarist theories often recommend giving below the necessary resources threshold. At the same time, Arrhenius demonstrates that claims of egalitarianism are not logically viable given population fluctuations.

*The question of intergenerational responsibility raises the possibility to harm future generations.* Bertram is little convinced by the relevance of the Marxist concept of exploitation applied to a future setting. If exploitation involves someone (an

exploiter) who secures an advantage by exploiting someone else (the exploited), it is impossible to make an informed judgment on future benefits or losses. However, the non-applicability of this concept does not exempt us from paying attention to potentially dangerous acts. This discussion highlights a “time bombs” problem: “time bombs” involve actions the negative effects of which are visible only on a deferred basis, therefore suffered by future generations. To meet the challenge of climate responsibility, one should, according to C. Wolf, apply a sufficientiarist approach using a two steps climate policy: the first one geared to austerity with specific targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and a second one labelled as “sustainable”, which seeks to maintain emissions at an acceptable rate.

Kumar strives to redefine the harm imposed on future generations with “Scanlonian contractualism”: even if there is no physical relationship with future humans, there is a legal relationship based on what is justifiable or not for someone. To illustrate this point, he states that the request advanced by African-Americans for symbolic as well as materialistic compensation for slavery is legitimate, even if the harm has been done to them only indirectly.

*Therefore, these theories towards future generations lead us to think not only in epistemic, but also in motivational terms.* What motivates this current generation to take care of the remote future? Birnbacher stresses motivation obstacles: the abstract character of recipients, referred to as invisible and faceless, would prevent the development of a “chain of love”, to quote Passmore. Other constraints are the uncertainty of success with actions undertaken (will these actions really make a difference for future generations?) as well as their cumulative nature (will these actions be followed by the next generations?). Bykvist also notes that future generations’ preferences are unpredictable.

For Birnbacher, only indirect motivations (over a maximum of two generations) can help solve the motivational problem. The author gives the example of parents who are naturally concerned for the future well-being of their children and also have an interest in ensuring their children’s support in case they depend on them at a certain age.

*Is it possible to establish a contract with future generations?* Gardiner acknowledges

that Rawls was one of the first to address the issue of future generations through an original contract. However, like Heyd, he doubts that Rawls’s contractarian approach can be extended to an intergenerational framework. Gardiner shows that the intergenerational jump involves a reevaluation of the design, structure, and rationale for cooperation: according to him, Rawls dismisses the initial generation’s problem, which remains a net contributor. Moreover, Rawls does not explain how generations internalise future generations’ concern. Heyd adds that, even without having the principles of justice based on a contractarian approach, there is always a value in justice that remains. Attas’s theory, on the contrary, seeks to exploit Rawlsian contractualism by adding amendments so as to extend it to all generations. He argues, however, that it is difficult to defend Rawls’s “two-stage approach”, i.e. the period of accumulation of wealth and the period needed to secure fair institutions, since the latter necessarily implies a zero increase in population.

For Gosseries, cooperation between generations lies in reciprocity theories. In some detail, he analyses the three models of reciprocity theories (ascending, descending, reciprocal). For him, the reciprocity requirement is justified not from a perspective of giving in return, but on the basis that it should not be seen as a self-indulgent generation, or a “free rider”, when compared to previous generations.

Muniz-Fraticelli, meanwhile, strongly defends the need for a perpetual constitution, differentiating himself from two approaches: that of Thomas Jefferson, for whom a constitution should expire after a certain time – and, according to James Madison, run the risk of degenerating into anarchy – and that of M. Otsuka, for whom the perpetual foundation of the constitution lies in the tacit consent of the youth expressed by their choice to remain voluntarily within the society. However, “tacit consent” is a vague assumption that does not allow the establishment of a hypothetical consent. Muniz-Fraticelli offers an alternative scheme: a perpetual constitution is necessary to ensure universal and eternal individual rights, but it is also legitimate to give citizens the right of amendment and interpretation so that they can choose the time to “reconstitute”, with respect to constitutionalism.

Some of this work’s limitations concern its style, which is sometimes unnecessarily

technical. The structure itself, consisting in a collection of articles, involves a juxtaposition of opinions which makes it difficult for the reader to develop an overview of the challenges for future generations. Furthermore, this leads to a certain repetition of themes – Rawls's contract theory is presented in four different articles. Some omissions are also regrettable, such as the

absence of utilitarianism, or the analysis of intergenerational justice toward non-human individuals. These criticisms are, however, minimal, given the scale of the issues covered by the authors. Without a doubt, *Intergenerational Justice* opens new avenues for reflection and action, particularly on the reductions of greenhouse gas emissions and on the possibility of a

perpetual constitution. The book reflects the urgent need to consider and propose solutions that can respond, even partially, to such a complex problem.

*Gosseries, Axel / Meyer, Lukas H. (eds.) (2009): Intergenerational Justice. New York: Oxford University Press. 432 pages. ISBN: 978-0-199-28295-1. Price: £70.*

## Call for Papers: Constitutions and Intergenerational Justice

The *Intergenerational Justice Review* (IGJR) has been published by the Stuttgart-based think tank Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) since 2002. The 2012 edition was published in cooperation with the London-based Intergenerational Foundation (IF), and likewise the 2015 edition. For the latter as well as for the 2016 editions, the FRFG and IF have been joined by the University of Tübingen. The 2016 (2) edition will have the additional help of Professor Bruce Auerbach of Albright College, Reading PA, who will be serving as a guest editor.

Founded in 1997, the FRFG has played a leading role in gathering and supporting research in intergenerational issues at the academic level – research that usually falls within the compass of university departments of law, politics and philosophy. The *Intergenerational Justice Review* reflects this academic focus. Articles, submitted by senior academics and researchers in the field, are peer-reviewed and published only on the recommendation of two reviewers. From 2016, there will be two editions of the IGJR annually. The topic of the second 2016 edition will be:

### “Constitutions and Intergenerational Justice”

We welcome submissions for this issue of the *Intergenerational Justice Review* that address the tension between constitutions and intergenerational justice, and how that tension can be resolved. How can constitutions be written to protect the rights and/or interests of future generations without at the same time becoming a barrier to future generations exercising full political sovereignty in the future?

We also welcome submissions that address creatively constitutions and intergenerational justice from other points of view, and from the perspective of other cultural and political traditions; and that test the feasibility of new ideas, such as a “permanent constitutional convention”, that reassess the current constitution every five years or so.

In addition to the above, other related questions include the following:

- How could a permanent constitutional convention (see above) be organised? What powers should it possess, and what should be its limitations? On the one hand such limitations should prevent a constitutional convention from being too dominant, while on the other its powers should be sufficient to ensure that it is more than merely symbolic.
- How can the legitimacy problems of such a constitutional convention be resolved? For example, parliaments, which usually propose constitutional amendments, are legitimised through elections.
- Are there any examples of countries where constitutions are regularly reviewed and amended? If so, how has this practice worked?
- What role should constitutional courts play? Are they the guardians of earlier regulations and therefore opponents of constitutional change?
- Are eternity clauses (clauses which prohibit changes to certain or all provisions of a constitution) generationally fair? To what extent do such guarantees take away from future generations the possibility to determine their own future?
- Where and how are young people actively engaged in debates about the constitution in force in their country? What les-

sons can be learnt from their experience?

Background: By their very nature, constitutions are intergenerational documents. With rare exceptions, they are meant to endure for many generations. They establish the basic institutions of government, enshrine the fundamental values of a people, and place certain questions beyond the reach of simple majorities. Constitutions, especially written ones, are often on purpose difficult to modify.

The question of constitutions and future generations has at least two different aspects. On the one hand, constitutions provide the opportunity to guarantee consideration of the rights of future generations, and may serve to protect future generations against the actions of current electoral majorities. On the other hand, the provisions of a constitution may become outmoded, restricting the ability of majorities in the future to respond to the real problems in ways they see as necessary and proper. We want constitutions to provide firm guarantees of fundamental rights, including those of future generations. But we do not want those same guarantees to become fetters on future generations, preventing them from exercising the same rights of sovereignty we enjoy.

Ideally, constitutions strike a balance between seeking to protect and perpetuate those values and rights the present generation understands to be fundamental, while ensuring the right of future generations to define for themselves the values and rights they see as essential, and to modify the institutions they have inherited in light of their own experience.

This tension between durability and flexibility finds expression in Edmund Burke's

concept of a constitution as an intergenerational covenant. It also informs the discussion among Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), James Madison (1751–1836) and Thomas Paine (1737–1809) in the course of founding the United States of America. Jefferson represented the position that every law and therefore every constitution should lose its validity after 19 years, so that every generation can organise itself, with a freedom comparable to the preceding one. Madison disagreed and referred to the uncertainty that would emerge from such an arrangement. Thomas Paine sided with Jefferson and formulated the following famous sentence: “Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the ages and generations which preceded it.” This statement, written in 1795, defended the right to engage in revolution. This right was even enshrined in the French Constitution of 1793. Article 28 stated: “*Un peuple a toujours le droit de revoir, de réformer et de changer sa Constitution. Une génération ne peut pas assujettir à ses lois les générations futures.*” (“A people always has the right to review, reform, and amend its constitution. One generation may not subject future generations to its laws.”)

The preservation of the same number of options and opportunities for action is also regarded as the one of most important elements of intergenerationally just behaviour in modern generational ethics. Edith Brown Weiss, for example, made such arguments, as have Gregory Kavka in “The Futurity Problem”, and Brian Barry in “Circumstances of Justice and Future Generations”.

**Size limit of each submission:** Up to 30,000 characters (including spaces, annotation etc.) For questions about style and presentation, please visit our website at [www.igjr.org](http://www.igjr.org) for our guidelines for authors.

**Deadline for submissions:** 1 August 2016

Proposed date of publication of IGJR 2016 (2): November 2016

**Articles may be submitted electronically to:** [editors@igjr.org](mailto:editors@igjr.org)

**Intergenerational Justice Prize 2015/16:**

Note that this topic is also be the subject of the Intergenerational Justice Prize 2015/16, promoted by the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) and the Intergenerational Foundation (IF), and endowed with a total sum of € 10.000. Young researchers may also wish to participate in this essay competition, and it is hoped that this edition of the IGJR will contain a selection of the best prize submissions in English. For more information, see [www.if.org.uk/prizes](http://www.if.org.uk/prizes).

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