



Psychological and Behavioural Science

Increasing Youth Voter Turnout

**Nienke Derksen
Filippo Muzi Falconi
Sarah Jayme
Camille Worsech**

**London School of Economics and Political Science
PB403 Psychology of Economic Life
Summative coursework
December 2018**

**Course convenors: Dr. Fred Basso & Prof. Saadi Lahlou
Other teachers: Dr. Kate Laffan, Mr. Maxi Heitmayer**

Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary
II.	Background
III.	Introduction
IV.	Stakeholder Analysis
V.	Problem Analysis Overview
VI.	Problem Analysis Experienced Barriers to Voting Registration
VII.	Problem Analysis Political Literacy and Efficacy
VIII.	Problem Analysis Perceived Community Detachment
IX.	Proposed Intervention: Overview
X.	Proposed Intervention: Reducing Barriers to Registration
XI.	Proposed Intervention: Civic Workshops: Increasing Political Literacy and Efficacy
XII.	Proposed Intervention: Field Trips to the Polls: Reconnecting with the Community
XIII.	Proposed Intervention: Graduation: Ensuring Commitment and First Vote
XIV.	Limitations
XV.	Conclusion
XVI.	References
XVII.	Appendix

I. Executive Summary

This paper addresses the problem of low voting turnout among young people in the UK. Young people are disengaged from a political system that in turn does not represent them, driving an intergenerational social divide (Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005). The underlying problems of low political participation that we analyse are procedural barriers to voting, low political literacy and efficacy, and perceived community disengagement. Based on our analysis, we aim at encouraging young people in the UK to engage in political life and vote by proposing a fourfold behavioral intervention. The intervention entails (a) Reducing Barriers to Registration, (b) Civic and Political workshops: Increasing Political Literacy and Efficacy, (c) Field Trips to the Polls: Reconnecting with the Community, and (d) Graduation: Ensuring Commitment and First Vote. The target population addressed is 16-18 year old students, within the context of the school and of their broader local community.

II. Background

Voting is an accessible method of civic engagement used for collective political decision making (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017). The mechanism of voting serves to ensure that governmental policy reflects the demands of the public (Birch, Glenn, & Lodge, 2013), and that the public can hold elected representatives accountable (Bechtel, Hangartner, & Schmid, 2017). Voting turnout rates (the number of people who exercise their right to vote in a given election) serve to legitimize elected officials and public policies (Hasen, 1996). It is thus no surprise that the topic of turnout rates, particularly that of low turnout rates, has been vastly studied by political scientists.

In the United Kingdom (UK), as well as in other western democracies, the turnout rates in elections have been decreasing since the 1990s (Dempsey, 2017). Turnout rates at general elections in the UK steadily increased in the first half of the twentieth century, reaching historically high rates of 80% turnout in the 1950s (Dempsey, 2017). Since 1997 rates in the UK have sharply fallen, reaching an all time low in 2001 at 59% (Dempsey, 2017). Although the voter turnout at the last general election in 2017 was 66.8%, showing an improvement in voting rates since 2001, this rate remains below the average turnout rates seen in the UK in the twentieth century (Dempsey, 2017). Voting inequality is an important issue to note, as it creates a great power imbalance among members of the electorate (Birch et al., 2013). For example, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) reports that the 2010 spending cut by the UK government was distributed differently among these two groups, with non-voters bearing almost double the costs of voters (Birch et al., 2013).

Research has shown that turnout rates vary along individual traits, such as ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and education (Gerber, Green, & Shachar, 2003). This segmentation of voter turnout threatens democratic institutions. As Gilens (2012) notes, political equality is central to a democracy, and political equality is only achieved when every individual in society influences the political process equally. When voting turnout is distributed unequally among particular members of society, political representation becomes skewed (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017). One group in the population which is noted to have a particularly low rate of voting turnout is the youth (Flickinger & Studlar, 1992; Gray & Caul, 2000).

According to a 2013 report by IPPR, the United Kingdom has one of the most pronounced voting disparities among young and old voters (Birch et al., 2013). Since the 1960s, turnout rates for the age groups of 18-24 and 25-35 year-olds have been consistently lower than those of older age groups. This disparity has grown since the 1990s (Dempsey, 2017). In 2001, turnout at general elections for the age groups 18-24 and 25-34 was 40.4% and 45.0% respectively (Dempsey, 2017). In 2005, turnout decreased to a mere 38.2% for voters between the ages of 18-24 and 47.7% for voters between the ages of 24-35 (Dempsey, 2017). Since 2005, turnout at elections for young adults has steadily increased, reaching rates between 62.8% and 64.7% for both age groups (Dempsey, 2017).

Research has looked at political events to understand youth engagement in politics. The sharp decline in turnout at elections in the late 1990s is linked to major political events that strongly resonated with young people (Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, & Scullion, 2010). The United Kingdom's involvement in multiple wars (the Gulf War, the Iraq War, and the War in Afghanistan) and the increasing cost of higher-education led to young people's disillusionment with the government (Dermody et al., 2010; Sloam, 2007). Since 2005, young people's turnout rates have been steadily increasing (Dempsey, 2017). This can be attributed in part to political parties' efforts to re-engage with young voters (Therrien, 2017). In particular, the Labour party has been actively addressing young people and supporting issues that have been popular among young voters, such as scrapping higher-education tuition fees and supporting anti-war campaigns (Therrien, 2017).

Since the sharp decrease in young people's political engagement in the 1990s, the government undertook different measures to re-engage the young electorate. Since 2001, the electoral procedures were simplified by allowing people to vote by post (Henn et al., 2005). However, despite the success of this measure in increasing adult turnout, it did not have an impact on young voters (Henn et al., 2005). In 2002, the government sought to civically re-engage young people by introducing citizenship education as a statutory subject in the national curriculum to all pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 (Fahmy, 2004). Measures to increase young people's turnout were also taken outside of school. Since the 1990s, the British Youth Council, a government founded charity, focused its agenda particularly on getting young people to register and vote, and other youth organisations, such as UK Youth Parliament, were established (Sloam, 2007).

Although turnout rates among the youth have picked up more recently, they are still lower in relation to older age groups (Dempsey, 2017), meaning that voting inequality still permeates the British political sphere. Political parties' outreach campaigns and past government interventions have thus not been adequate enough to reconcile the issue of low voting turnout among the British youth.

III. Introduction

Voting absenteeism of British youth must be addressed, as their political interests are often in opposition to older voters, leading to the political underrepresentation of a large demographic. For example, in the 2016 British referendum, in which citizens voted for the UK to either 'remain' or 'leave' the EU, young voters overwhelmingly voted 'remain' (Becker, Fetzer, & Novy, 2017). Reports show that the likelihood that an individual would vote 'leave' increased as the age of the voter increased (Becker et al., 2017). Though it is a matter of debate whether a higher youth turnout would have changed the results of the referendum, it is still worrisome that young voters had a much lower voting turnout than older voting groups (Becker et al., 2017). The low turnout

of the British youth has been expected to decrease further with each new generation of young voters, suggesting that age-based turnout inequality will continue to worsen (Birch et al., 2013). To ensure that the British political system is representative of the whole population, it is pivotal to understand the mechanisms that drive British youth away from the polls.

Research has suggested that voting behavior is a habit, as voting in one election substantially increases the likelihood that an individual will vote in a future election (Gerber et al., 2003). Plutzer (2002) stipulates that civic development is a path-dependent process. Voting behavior development can be understood through a framework that models an individual's propensity to settle into either voting or non-voting habits through identified variables that affect turnout (Plutzer, 2002). It is therefore important to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that are keeping the British youth from turning out to vote, and thus keeping them from becoming habitual voters. In this paper we seek to answer the research question: What are the main factors that influence youth voting turnout in the UK, and how can they all be addressed through a holistic behavioral intervention?

To develop such an intervention, we first identify the different stakeholders involved. We then explain, through the use of psychological theories, how procedural barriers to registration, political literacy and efficacy, and community detachment may influence low turnout rates among the youth. By drawing upon our analysis and the relevant stakeholders involved, we suggest a holistic intervention to tackle the problem of youth turnout. The intervention consists of four sections: framing voter registration as a rite of passage, civic and political workshops, field trips to polling stations at elections, and email reminders to vote.

IV. Stakeholder Analysis

Before analysing the underlying factors that drive young people's low voting turnout, we will examine the broader environment that encompasses this issue. We will look into the different agents of political socialisation and how they contribute to the process in which young people acquire their attitudes, beliefs, and values relating to the political system (Greenberg, 1970). We will look at agents of both primary political socialisation and secondary political socialisation, since young people find themselves at a point in time in their path of political learning where both are relevant (Laible, Thompson, Grusec, & Hastings, 2007; Langton, 1969). These being the school and peer groups for the former and the community for the latter (the analysis of the following stakeholders can be found in the appendix A since they are not in the scope of this paper: The family, media, political parties and the government).

Through this preliminary analysis, we will define the scope of our intervention and identify the key stakeholders to address. Furthermore, it will enable us to better understand how to leverage their modes of influence in order to tackle the crux of this research, that of finding a solution to young people's low voting turnout.

The school is also an important agent of primary political socialisation. It inculcates political beliefs through formal instruction, such as civic education (Langton, 1969). Yet the actual impact of formal instruction seems to be uncertain (Almond & Verba, 2015; Langton, 1969), as it cannot be clearly distinguished from the informal context of the school, which also seems to have an influence on young people's political socialisation (Langton, 1969).

Peer Groups can be identified as groups of individuals who are similar in age and social class. Peer groups provide individuals with a feeling of integration and influence how individuals, namely young people,

develop opinions by establishing social norms and aspirations (Newcomb, 1962). Moreover, peer groups transmit and reinforce the political culture of the wider society they are part of (Langton, 1969). However, peer groups can also transmit social norms that are deviant to prosocial behaviour, interfering with the political socialisation of other agents, such as the school and the family (Nurco & Lerner, 1999).

The community as an agent of socialisation represents the larger social network or context in which young people develop and become members of as they transition into adulthood (Settle, Bond, & Levitt, 2011). On one hand, communities can foster the development of political participation and orientation as social norms (Settle et al., 2011). On the other, the perception of being integrated into a community has positive implications for political and civic engagement (Settle et al., 2011).

Adolescence, in particular, is considered to be a key stage in an individual's political socialisation and has strong implications for voting behaviour (Langton, 1969; Easton and Dennis, 1969; Greenberg, 1970). A young citizen's first election is also considered to be an important step in his or her path of political learning as it can develop into a habit of voting (Plutzer, 2002). It is therefore important to focus on adolescents that are about to become eligible to vote and support them throughout their development. For this reason, we will address young people between the ages of 16 and 18.

Given the age group of the population we will focus on, peer groups, schools and the local community since they are the most relevant stakeholders to address. On one hand, both the school and peer groups are the main agents of political socialisation during late adolescence and both their spheres of influence are mainly located within the context of the school (Langton, 1969). On the other hand, the local community is the wider social group that young people will integrate once they graduate and leave school, thus representing their immediate agent of political socialisation (Settle et al., 2011).

V. Problem Analysis: Overview

Based on the scope of our research, we will analyse three main issues that underlie low youth voting turnout. Through the course of an adolescent's transition to adulthood, voting turnout is affected by procedural barriers to voting, a lack of political literacy, and a perceived detachment to the local community. In the following sections we will attempt to uncover the underlying psychological mechanisms to these issues.

VI. Problem Analysis: Experienced Barriers to Voting Registration

Registering to vote is the first procedural step to voting for young people in the UK. Despite simplifying the registration procedure and making it feasible online, the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) reform, issued in 2014, has led to a substantial drop in young voter registration (Wheeler, 2015; Wintour, 2015). Prior to the reform, registration was done at the household level, generally by parents, whereas young people are now expected to register individually (Wheeler, 2015). What was supposed to improve the registration process has in practice decreased the rate of young registered voters (Wintour, 2015). Low youth registration has negative implications for voting turnout (Henn et al., 2005; Plutzer, 2002; Sloam, 2007). Analysing this issue through a psychological lens can shed light on the reasons why the Individual Electoral Registration reform has led to contradictory results.

The Individual Electoral Registration reform has shifted the responsibility of registering from the head of the household to the adolescent. Since registering the entire household was considered part of the parents' role,

this shift can lead parents to reaffirm their legitimate power (Davis, 1976). In other words, and especially in authoritative families, parents can reaffirm their power by instructing adolescents to register. Such authoritative instruction can be perceived as a threat to an individual's freedom, generating a counter-behavioral outcome known as psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966). Psychological reactance is the idea that when someone perceives their freedom being limited by the instruction or act of someone else, they will act contrary to this instruction (Brehm, 1966). In this case, an adolescent who is told to register by an authority figure, namely a parent, would not do so.

Finally, voting registration is an altruistic and private act, making it less likely that young people register than if it were public. Registering to vote is altruistic, it costs people time and effort, but does not offer any immediate returns (Fowler, 2006). Registration is also typically done in private, either at a computer or via mail. The private and altruistic nature of registration is problematic, as studies in behavioral science demonstrate that people are less likely to engage in altruistic behavior in private than in public (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Jung, Nelson, Gneezy, & Gneezy, 2014). There are many potential explanations for this, but nearly all studies on this phenomenon suggest that social norms and social signaling motives play a large role (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Funk, 2010; Jung et al., 2014). As a society, we value altruism, and as individuals we want to conform to this social norm and signal to others that we too hold this virtue (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Funk, 2010). One particularly relevant study for our analysis of voting in public vs. private spaces was conducted in Switzerland, by Funk (2010) on the effect of mail-in voting. She found that when mail-in voting was introduced, turnout rates decreased, because though the 'cost' of voting decreased, the salience of the social norms and resulting pressure to vote decreased (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Funk, 2010). Applying this to our current analysis of UK student registration rates, we believe that UK students may not act as altruistically when voting registration is private as compared to if it were a public, collective behavior.

In addition to the experienced barrier to voting set by the registration process, young people's political disengagement is also affected by their lack in political literacy and efficacy, as the following section will look into.

VII. Problem Analysis: Political Literacy and Efficacy

One of the problems that contributes to low voting turnout among young people in the UK is a lack of political literacy and efficacy. According to research most young people in the UK only have a basic understanding of politics and believe that they cannot influence the political system (O'Toole, Marsh, & Jones, 2003). Qualitative research has observed that they feel frustrated and powerless and believe that their vote does not make a difference, and thus do not engage in political life (Sloam, 2007).

Bandura's (1993) concept of self-efficacy is useful to analyse how young people's lack of political literacy leads to political disengagement. People with low levels of self-efficacy believe less in their abilities and thus commit themselves less when pursuing a goal (Bandura, 1993). Similarly, the theory of political efficacy argues that citizens are more likely to participate in politics when they either have internal efficacy or external efficacy. In other words, when they consider themselves competent and influential or if they feel confident that the system is responsive to them (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). With overall low levels of political efficacy, citizens feel disempowered and do not participate in political life (Campbell et al., 1954). We argue that young people's

political disengagement is due to low levels of political efficacy. It is therefore crucial to improve political literacy in a way that translates knowledge into actual political participation (Mycock & Tonge, 2014).

Although the educational system in the U.K. does provide a basic level of political literacy through mandatory citizenship education, it fails at developing the necessary internal political efficacy that leads to political participation. According to Langton (1969) civic education in school has little effect. The hierarchical structure of the school and the authoritarian approach to civic education discourages democratic practice and thought (Battistoni, 1985). Rather, students seem to develop political knowledge through the informal context of the school, by socialising with peers or teacher (Langton, 1969). According to the theory of situated learning, learning is a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed, as opposed to an acquisition of knowledge. The process of learning is embedded within a particular social and physical environment where a novice gradually builds know-how by participating to given activities within this environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Taken together, situated learning theories point to a more collaborative, practical, and hands-on approach to civic education to mobilize young people to participate politically.

In addition to a lack of political literacy and efficacy, young people's political engagement has also been affected by social changes which have eroded community ties, as the following section analyses.

VIII. Problem Analysis: Perceived Community Detachment

Broader social changes have weakened young people's sense of belonging to a community, which in turn has exacerbated their political disengagement (Kimberlee, 2002). According to Kimberlee (2002), recent generations have been brought up in a society that is more individualistic and lacks traditional sources of reference, such as the family, the community, or social class. Contemporary society has failed to prepare young people for community life (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). These intergenerational social changes have in turn weakened young people's affective attachment to their local community (Jarrett et al., 2005; Kimberlee, 2002; Sloam, 2007).

Understanding how solidarity and community ties are generated can shed light onto this issue. Lawler's affective theory of social exchange (2001) provides a socio-psychological lens to analyse young people's perceived detachment from their local community. According to Lawler (2001), solidarity and group ties arise when actors engage in social exchanges of high interdependency. Such exchanges generate positive emotions that can then be attributed to wider social units, such as groups or networks, thus creating solidarity. The forms of social exchange which generate the most affective attachment to groups and solidarity are those that bring actors together around a common endeavour (Lawler, 2001). We can argue that young people's affective detachment to the local community is due to a lack of such social exchanges with their local community. Indeed, Jarrett et al. (2005) observed that young people who are members of youth organisations engage in social relationships with adult members of their local community and develop social trust and affective attachment to their community.

Young people's perceived detachment from their local community has strong negative implications for political participation. According to Putnam, societies that have high social capital, characterized by dense social networks of mutual trust, social norms and reciprocities, have higher degrees of solidarity, collaboration and political engagement (Putnam, 2001). Whereas, individuals who are isolated from social networks and wider society have lower levels of trust in others and in the political system and are less politically engaged (Henn, Weinstein, & Hodgkinson, 2007). Studies have observed that young people's low social capital has been a driver

of their political disengagement in Britain (Fahmy, 2004; Henn et al., 2007). Promoting social exchanges and developing young people's social networks can thus positively affect voting behaviour.

IX. Proposed Intervention: Overview

The problem analysis has shown that the reasons for decreasing political participation among young people in the UK are multifaceted. To address these reasons, a fourfold intervention is proposed. Every section of the intervention addresses different aspects of the overall problem of decreasing voting participation among UK youth. Even though the intervention entails four parts, these should not be seen as distinct, but rather as interlinked since the different parts of the solution built upon each other.

To change young people's voting behavior in a sustainable way, the solutions should be implemented in the following order:



X. Proposed Intervention: Reducing Barriers to Registration

To address the procedural and emotional barriers to voting, we propose that the educational system adapt school wide voting registration as a 'rite of passage.' This aspect of our behavioral voting intervention would address the procedural barriers to voting, their associated reactance effect, and issues related to social norms. Upon turning 16, the teacher would invite the student to register in front of the class, thus framing it as a key transition from childhood to adulthood, or 'rite of passage'. The student would then either voluntarily accept to register, also benefiting from access to assistance throughout the process, or publicly decline and not fulfil what would be perceived as their 'rite of passage.'

This 'registration as rite of passage' component to our intervention would counter the reactance effect (Brehm, 1966) by framing voting registration as a mature adult activity and portraying people who do not register as childish and naive. In a study on cigarette smoking behavior in young adults, researchers found that by framing smoking as something done by a "sucker," someone who is taken advantage of by big institutions, they could reduce smoking without an authoritative message (Basso & Oullier, 2011). As these students would have already learned about the power of voting in the political literacy workshops (introduced in Part XI), students who do not register would appear naive and childish, making them a 'sucker' (Basso & Oullier, 2011). By not forcing young people to vote, which would generate a counter effect, but rather signaling to them in a social environment that if they do not vote then they are childish, we would increase the amount of young voter registration.

Finally, by making voting registration public, something which is done in a social setting amongst peer groups, we can utilize social influence and signaling motivations to encourage altruistic behavior. As discussed in the problem analysis, studies in behavioral science have shown that people are more likely to engage in altruistic behavior when their actions are public than when their actions are private (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Funk, 2010; Jung et al., 2014). By making the altruistic act of voting registration public, we can increase the rate of registration

among youth, similar to Funk's (2005) study on Swiss mail-in voting. As UK citizens must be registered in order to vote, this would reduce the number of unregistered young people and make voting easier for young UK voters.

XI. Proposed Intervention: Civic Workshops: Increasing Political Literacy and Efficacy

The second section of the intervention consists of a series of civic and political workshops. Following the voting registration initiative, the workshops would be held on a regular basis throughout the last two years of secondary school. The aim is to go beyond political literacy and develop young people's political self-efficacy.

As opposed to a common civics lesson, the format of the workshops requires students to engage in participative learning sessions. Rather than transmitting knowledge in a top-down manner, teachers would act as group discussion moderators and students as active participants. The workshops would be held outside of the usual classrooms and in more informal spaces within the school. As such, it would detach students from the environmental cues of an authoritarian teaching approach. Throughout these workshops, students would explore different topics related to civic and political issues through open group discussions. In parallel, groups of students would pick a topic of their choice to serve as the focus of a 'senior project'. As part of the 'senior project', they would choose a charity relevant to their topic for which they will collect donations during their field trip to the polling stations (see Part XII). At the end of the year, students would present their project to their peers and parents, and the best project would be elected democratically.

Based on the theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the format of the workshops would enable students to learn through co-participation and socially negotiate meaning of the given issues among peers. Moreover, by learning through a process of participation, one becomes a member of a given social group, which in turn shapes one's identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). We can argue that through the process of the workshops, students will not merely internalise knowledge, but acquire confidence and ownership of political issues, thus developing what Campbell et al. (1954) refer to as internal political efficacy. In turn, a heightened internal self-efficacy has positive implications for political participation.

Moreover, the workshops, as group based activities, can facilitate changes in students' attitudes with respect to their civic and political engagement. Group based changes are easier to achieve than changes aimed at the individual (Lewin, 1961). This can be explained by people not wanting to deviate from the group norm (Lewin, 1961). When looking at how to change young people's engagement in politics, it is better to address them as groups rather than individually, since people want to be part of the group and adhere to their norms.

Overall, the civic and political workshops would develop student's political self-efficacy and encourage their political participation by addressing them as a group. In doing so, they work toward the next step of the intervention: a field trip to the polls.

XII. Proposed Intervention: Field Trips to the Polls: Reconnecting with the Community

The third section of the intervention consists of student field trips to polling stations during elections. This would primarily involve students and the local community. It aims at both developing student's affective attachment to their local community and their political literacy. Throughout the last two years of secondary school, students who participate in the workshops are invited to go on a field trip to the polling stations. As part of the project, students are given the opportunity to organise a number of collective activities at the polling stations.

The first activity would be to organise charity bake stalls at the polling station. Along with the support of the school or other institutions, students would set up stalls at the polling station. Unlike a typical student bake sale, the charity bake stalls would not entail a direct economic exchange. Rather, students would offer voters free cakes, tea, or other refreshments. At their respective stalls, students would advertise the charity which they selected during their senior project, collecting donations from voters on a “give what you want” basis. The idea behind the charity bake stalls is to add a social dimension to voting by organising social exchanges between students and voters from the same community. Drawing from the affective theory of social exchange (Lawler, 2001), this activity would enable students and voters to engage in a social exchange that would require actors to combine resources to achieve the common endeavour of supporting a charity. Such a form of exchange entails high degrees of interdependency and shared positive emotions between actors, which in turn would generate solidarity (Lawler, 2001).

The second field trip activity is a voting simulation. The voting simulation would run simultaneously with the charity bake stalls at the polling station. It would be designed as an amusing experience that enables students to practice voting. According to the theory of situated learning, learning is embedded in a social and physical context and novices learn by gradually undertaking activities that are peripheral to a given central practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This activity would complement the workshops as it would offer students the opportunity to situate their learning within the authentic physical context of a polling station. In addition, by engaging in a voting simulation activity, students would be able to gradually build knowhow related to the act of voting.

XIII. Proposed Intervention: Graduation: Ensuring Commitment and First Vote

The last part of the proposed four-step intervention addresses concerns that might arise when viewing voting as a habitual behavior. Our investigation has not focused on addressing youth voting turnout through a habitual behavioral lens, as papers on voting habits indicate that factors such as political knowledge, political literacy, and social reinforcement by peer groups are more effective in combating first time voting inertia (Plutzer, 2002). Therefore, by addressing psychological factors instead of habitual behaviors, young people will be more likely to vote, creating good voting habits early in life. Nonetheless, this last step of the intervention includes a proposed solution to address concerns about students actually voting in the first election in which they are eligible to vote.

This last step of the intervention is two-fold. Before they graduate, students will be encouraged to voluntarily sign a document agreeing to be civically engaged through voting. Upon approaching the first election in which they are eligible to vote, the students will receive an email reminding them of their commitment to vote in the upcoming election. This part of the intervention is based on the Foot-in-the-door (FITD) compliance technique. Research on FITD has suggested that when individuals are asked to perform a small request (like signing a commitment to vote) they will be more likely to comply later on with a bigger request (like voting) (Burger, 1999). This FITD also works by reminding students of their past commitment and urging them to remain consistent with their actions (Burger, 1999).

Secondly, the email will provide a template for creating implementation intentions for voting in the upcoming election. Implementation intentions are used to specify the when, where, and how of behavior related to the attainment of a specified goal (Gollwitzer, 1999). Implementation intentions pass the personal control of

goal directed behavior to the environment (Gollwitzer, 1999). Research has shown that creating implementation intentions increases an individual's goal attainment (Gollwitzer, 1999). These intentions provide attentional benefits by allowing for heightened activation of goal-directed cues, thereby addressing the attentional limits of individuals (Gollwitzer, 1999). Implementation intentions allow for initiation of goal directed behavior to become an automatized response. Creating an implementation intention will further increase the chance that students go out and vote, thereby starting the formation of habitual voting behaviors.

XIV. Limitations

Although we have noted some of the main influences on youth voting behavior, the issue of voter turnout remains highly complex. The scope chosen for this paper and the intricacies of the UK youth's voting behaviors limit our analysis and suggested solution.

Firstly, we have chosen to target our interventions towards students who are 16-18 years old. The age group was chosen due to civically salient procedures that occur around that age (like becoming a registered voter). However, it is important to note that, in the UK, school is only compulsory until the age of 16. Since the intervention starts when students turn 16, the age at which they can drop out, the intervention will not be helpful at increasing the turnout rate of some groups of the British youth electorate, particularly those who drop out from school at age 16.

Secondly, this paper does not analyze the issue of political alienation. As political science research notes, young people are interested in issues of political nature, however, they feel alienated by the political system (Henn et al., 2005; Henn, Weinstein, & Wring, 2002; Sloam, 2007). We assume that if our intervention succeeds at increasing the turnout rate, then political candidates and parties will become more engaged with the youth group, thus addressing alienation. However, this paper is limited in that political parties have not been considered when creating the school interventions out of concern for neutrality, but, if cautiously included, they could be valuable stakeholders.

Lastly, this paper is limited in addressing voting habit formation. We postulate that our intervention increases the likelihood that individuals will vote in their first elections, which should then initiate the process of voting habit formation. Our fourth step tries to ensure that students vote when they are eligible to do so, however, we cannot fully guarantee that individuals turnout to vote, which may delay voting habit formation. We propose that future research should focus on creating interventions that shift the implantation environment from schools to where 18 year-olds are likely to be, such as universities or entry-level jobs. Alternatively, we would suggest that to address this issue, the legal voting age, if possible, should be lowered to age 16 or 15. Schools could then ensure that all students vote in their first election, and effectively lower the age at which individuals in the youth group start becoming habitual voters.

XV. Conclusion

Low levels of political participation among British youth is a serious problem. When low voter turnout rates are unequally distributed among members of the electorate, election results are not representative of society. This paper has investigated three main reasons for low political participation among UK students. Barriers to

registration, levels of political literacy and efficacy, and perceived community detachment have been analyzed through the use of psychological and behavioral theories. We argue that our methodology has allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the youth's voting experience, which has been missing from the political science literature that traditionally studies voter turnout.

As voting turnout is a complex problem, we suggest a multi-step intervention that simultaneously tackles the three main behavioral voting problems analyzed. Our intervention focuses on educating and providing high school students with tools that would serve to increase their chances of voting when they become eligible. We are mindful of the fact that our analysis is limited. We do not provide an understanding of family related factors that might influence voter turnout prior to secondary school, nor do we suggest a fail-proof plan to ensure UK students vote once they graduate from secondary school. These limitations should be taken into consideration by future researchers. Nonetheless, we are confident that our proposed intervention can help to increase turnout rates among young voters. Our hope is that future British electoral outcomes will, as a result, become more representative of traditionally underrepresented groups such as young voters.

XVI. References

- Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (2015). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*: Princeton university press.
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational psychologist*, 28(2), 117-148.
- Basso, F., & Oullier, O. (2011). Smokers are suckers: should incongruous metaphors be used in public health prevention? *American journal of public health*, 101(2), 203.
- Battistoni, R. M. (1985). *Public schooling and the education of democratic citizens*: Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Bechtel, M. M., Hangartner, D., & Schmid, L. (2017). Compulsory voting, habit formation, and political participation. *Review of Economics and Statistics*(0).
- Becker, S. O., Fetzer, T., & Novy, D. (2017). Who voted for Brexit? A comprehensive district-level analysis. *Economic Policy*, 32(92), 601-650.
- Bénabou, R., & Tirole, J. (2006). Incentives and prosocial behavior. *American economic review*, 96(5), 1652-1678.
- Birch, S., Glenn, G., & Lodge, G. (2013). *Divided democracy: Political inequality in the UK and why it matters*: IPPR.
- Brehm, J. W. (1966). A theory of psychological reactance.
- Burger, J. M. (1999). The foot-in-the-door compliance procedure: A multiple-process analysis and review. *Personality and social psychology review*, 3(4), 303-325.
- Campbell, A., Gurin, G., & Miller, W. E. (1954). The voter decides.
- Chaffee SH, J.-B. M., Durall J and Wilson D. (1977). *Mass communication in political socialization* . In: SA (ed.) *Handbook of Political Socialization* New York and London: Free Press.
- Davis, H. L. (1976). Decision making within the household. *Journal of consumer research*, 2(4), 241-260.
- Dempsey, N. (2017). House of Commons Library: Briefing paper: Number 8060, 26 July 2017: Turnout at Election.
- Dennis, J., Easton, D., & Easton, S. (1969). Children in the political system: Origins of political legitimacy.

McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York (États-Unis), 27, 77.

- Dermody, J., Hanmer-Lloyd, S., & Scullion, R. (2010). Young people and voting behaviour: alienated youth and (or) an interested and critical citizenry? *European Journal of Marketing*, 44(3/4), 421-435.
- Dermody, J., & Hanmerlloyd, S. (2005). Safeguarding the Future of Democracy: (Re) Building Young People's Trust in Parliamentary Politics. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 4(2-3), 115-133.
- Fahmy, E. (2004). Youth, social capital and civic engagement in Britain: evidence from the 2000/01 General Household Survey. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Flickinger, R. S., & Studlar, D. T. (1992). The disappearing voters? Exploring declining turnout in Western European elections. *West European Politics*, 15(2), 1-16.
- Fowler, J. H. (2006). Altruism and turnout. *Journal of politics*, 68(3), 674-683.
- Funk, P. (2010). Social incentives and voter turnout: evidence from the Swiss mail ballot system. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 8(5), 1077-1103.
- Gerber, A. S., Green, D. P., & Shachar, R. (2003). Voting may be habit-forming: evidence from a randomized field experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(3), 540-550.
- Gilens, M. (2012). *Affluence and influence: Economic inequality and political power in America*: Princeton University Press.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54(7), 493.
- Gray, M., & Caul, M. (2000). Declining voter turnout in advanced industrial democracies, 1950 to 1997: The effects of declining group mobilization. *Comparative political studies*, 33(9), 1091-1122.
- Greenberg, E. (1970). *Political socialization*(1st ed.). New York: Atherton Press.
- Hasen, R. L. (1996). Voting without law? *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 144(5), 2135-2179.
- Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Forrest, S. (2005). Uninterested youth? Young people's attitudes towards party politics in Britain. *Political studies*, 53(3), 556-578.
- Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Hodgkinson, S. (2007). Social capital and political participation: understanding the dynamics of young people's political disengagement in contemporary Britain. *Social Policy and Society*, 6(4), 467-479.
- Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Wring, D. (2002). A generation apart? Youth and political participation in Britain. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 4(2), 167-192.
- Jarrett, R. L., Sullivan, P. J., & Watkins, N. D. (2005). Developing social capital through participation in organized youth programs: Qualitative insights from three programs. *Journal of community psychology*, 33(1), 41-55.
- Jung, M. H., Nelson, L. D., Gneezy, A., & Gneezy, U. (2014). Paying more when paying for others. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 107(3), 414.
- Kimberlee, R. H. (2002). Why don't British young people vote at general elections? *Journal of youth studies*, 5(1), 85-98.
- Kononova, A., Alhabash, S., & Cropp, F. (2011). The role of media in the process of socialization to American politics among international students. *International Communication Gazette*, 73(4), 302-321.
- Laible, D., Thompson, R. A., Grusec, J. E., & Hastings, P. D. (2007). Handbook of socialization: Theory and research.
- Langton, K. P. (1969). *Political socialization*: New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation (Vol. 521423740).

Cambridge: Cambridge university press.

- Lawler, E. J. (2001). An affect theory of social exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(2), 321-352.
- Lewin, K. (1961). Quasi-stationary social equilibria and the problem of permanent change. *The planning of change*, 235-238.
- Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2014). *The networked young citizen: social media, political participation and civic engagement*: Taylor & Francis.
- Mycock, A., & Tonge, J. (2014). *Beyond the youth citizenship commission: Young people and politics*: Political Studies Association London.
- Newcomb, T. M. (1962). Student Peer-Group Influence. In N. Sanford (Ed.), *The American college: A psychological and social interpretation of the higher learning*, 469-488.
- Nordic Council of Ministers. (2017) *Youth, democracy, and democratic exclusion in the Nordic countries*. Retrieved from Copenhagen: <https://doi.org/10.6027/ANP2017-794>
- Nurco, D. N., & Lerner, M. (1999). A complementary perspective to primary socialization theory. *Substance use & misuse*, 34(7), 993-1003.
- O'Toole, T., Marsh, D., & Jones, S. (2003). Political literacy cuts both ways: The politics of non-participation among young people. *The political quarterly*, 74(3), 349-360.
- Plutzer, E. (2002). Becoming a habitual voter: Inertia, resources, and growth in young adulthood. *American political Science review*, 96(1), 41-56.
- Putnam, R. D. (2001). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*: Simon and Schuster.
- Settle, J. E., Bond, R., & Levitt, J. (2011). The social origins of adult political behavior. *American Politics Research*, 39(2), 239-263.
- Sloam, J. (2007). Rebooting democracy: Youth participation in politics in the UK. *Parliamentary affairs*, 60(4), 548-567.
- Therrien, A. (2017). General election 2017: What caused Labour's youth vote surge? Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-40244905>
- Wheeler, P. (2015). Britain's missing voters: why individual registration has been a disaster Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/feb/05/missing-voters-individual-electoral-registration-disaster>
- Wintour, P. (2015). 1m voters lost from electoral roll says Ed Miliband Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jan/16/ed-miliband-1m-voters-fallen-off-electoral-roll>

XVII. Appendix

A. Stakeholders Analysis - Stakeholders not directly addressed

The family is considered as one of the most important agents of primary political socialisation. Families can transmit to young people political knowledge, party identification, attachments to national identity, and other political values (Langton, 1969). Moreover, young people's experience of authority relationships within families influences how they relate to larger political systems (Langton, 1969). However, the family's power structure has strong implications on young people's political socialisation, as they can react to authority by either conforming or rebelling against it (Langton, 1969).

The media is a tool of political socialisation. it is both a source of political information and an influence on political attitudes, opinions, and values (Kononova, Alhabash, & Cropp, 2011). Media's influence can also

infuse into other agent's influence, such as the family and the school (Chaffee SH, 1977; Kononova et al., 2011). In particular, social media, as a social network platform, has become an increasingly dominant agent of political socialisation with respect to other agents, such as the family and the school (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

Political parties and the **government** are both agents of socialisation as they provide information to media outlets, engage in political campaigns and implement policies that aim at increasing young people's political engagement (Henn et al., 2005; Sloam, 2007). They seek to encourage political participation and influence political attitudes and opinions as they rely on the public's support and vote. However, people can be distrustful and cynical with regard to them, thus limiting their spheres of influence (Dermody & Hanmerlloyd, 2005; Henn et al., 2005; Sloam, 2007).