

# First and Foremost

## Understanding and optimising the electoral participation of first time voters

Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison



Israeli teenager with campaign stickers and symbols during the September 2019 election

### Introduction

First and Foremost aims to capitalise on first time voters' excitement about their "First Time" to increase their turnout and their satisfaction. Using panel-study surveys, inter-generational focus groups alongside field and lab experiments, we will capture what factors could lead more young people to enjoy their first electoral experience and thus vote again. In collaboration with Electoral Commissions, initiatives will be tested during election periods to optimise turnout, satisfaction, and experience in countries including the UK, US, South Africa, Australia, and Israel.



COUNTRIES TESTED DURING ELECTION PERIOD

### Main Findings

A first vote is a unique experience, a "first time" among the many experienced by teenagers. It is often highly emotional and something that young people anticipate eagerly. 75 per cent of those who vote say that it is because they are excited about the idea of voting, 31 per cent to experience what it is like, and 20 per cent for fun. A first vote – electoral or not – is something intriguing, mysterious, exciting, and sometimes a little bit scary, a rite of passage into adulthood that many teenagers are anxious to imagine and then try.

In recent research, we have found that if they vote in the first two elections of their lives, young people are likely to become chronic voters, if not, likely to become life-long abstentionists. We also find that as they vote, young people feel

more emotional – and their emotions are more powerful and more positive – than those of the rest of the population.

Years after that first election, a majority of voters remember their first vote experience (82 per cent of Americans do for instance). Remembering that first election impact citizens' memory, emotions, and attitudes to elections throughout their lives as well as their long term turnout and likelihood to experience electoral resolution from a vote. 69 per cent of young people also believe that citizens' participation is crucial to democracy and most that elections cannot be replaced so somehow, it is crucial to find a way to reconcile young people with their first electoral experience and to emphasise its exciting and intriguing aspects.



**75%** FIRST TIME VOTERS EXCITED ABOUT VOTING



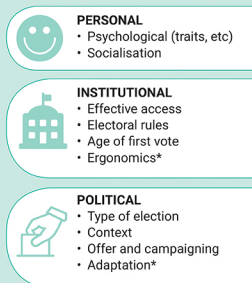
**82%** AMERICANS THAT REMEMBER THEIR FIRST VOTING EXPERIENCE



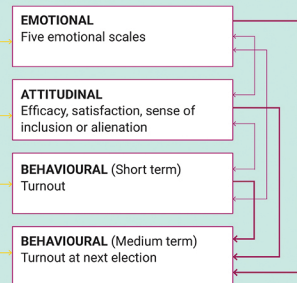
**69%** YOUNG PEOPLE THAT BELIEVE CITIZENS PARTICIPATION IS CRUCIAL TO DEMOCRACY

### Model of the First Vote Experience

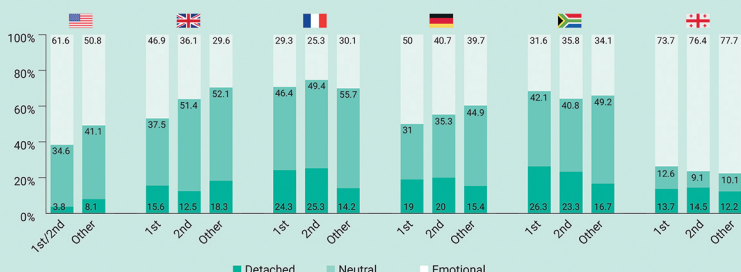
#### DETERMINANTS



#### CONSEQUENCES



### Electoral emotionality for first time, second time and other voters



### Impact

We contributed to the All Party Parliamentary Group Report on lowering the voting age to 16.

Our work led to the introduction of a first time voters' award for the international Election Stakeholders Awards.

We have collaborated with several Electoral Commissions and Electoral Management Bodies from the UK and Australia to South Africa, Georgia, and LA County.

### Publications

*Inside the Mind of a Voter* (M.Bruter and S. Harrison, 2020. Princeton University Press)

*All Party Parliamentary Group on the vote at 16: Campaign Report* (M.Bruter and S. Harrison, 2019)

*Youth Participation in Democratic Life* (B. Cammaerts, M. Bruter, S. Banaji, S. Harrison, N. Anstead, Palgrave)

[lse.ac.uk/government](http://lse.ac.uk/government)  
#LSEGovernment

**Funding body**  
Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

**Funding amount**  
£715,000