

What would have to change about 'democracy' in order to restore faith in democracy among young people?

Erosion of faith in the 'democratic' political system among young people has been a renowned crisis for over a decade. Young people are least likely to feel democracy serves them well: over a half proclaim it does not, contrary to the measly $\frac{1}{5}$ who remain faithful¹. The issue extends to low voting turnouts: in 2010, under $\frac{1}{2}$ of UK youth voted - the loss of young voters imperils democracy. Trust in political institutions and their processes can be regarded as a prerequisite for the stability of democratic political systems, meaning a swift resolution is paramount. What are the main elements driving the decline in faith in democratic politics, and how do we rekindle it? Concentrating on future generations rather than only the current cohort is imperative. Analysing the origins of this mistrust by evaluating the education system is a crucial technique to effectively problem-solve the issue, as simply treating the symptoms doesn't break the cycle. Additionally, the possibility emerges that young people feel the UK isn't democratic to their criteria, prompting them to vilify this version of 'democracy': they may feel the existing system doesn't sufficiently recognise public opinion or feel the Houses of Parliament exclude minority, state-educated or young politicians. Troubleshooting any inconsistencies is a steadfast approach to making modifications to restore morale - what changes might young people expect, and what do they value?

Age diversity in the government is a pertinent topic: most MPs elected in the 2019 General Election were 50-59-year-olds. Is the average age of MPs too high for young people's interests to be realised? We've ascertained that young people feel politically marginalised: researchers have uncovered that UK youth are "no less committed to political processes" than previous generations, though they perceive a "lack of genuine opportunities" to partake in political life and "feel alienated from formal public institutions"². Should Parliament accommodate young political talents by enforcing youth quotas? Young MPs would supply a distinctive stance when problem-solving changing subjects, such as housing

and employment. Various age cohorts maintain contrasting views³ - this should be echoed in Parliament to preserve the integrity of democracy. The ideal election process should be merit-based rather than quota-based, yet young people will encounter comparatively higher shares of long-term adverse developments of political short-termism than their seniors: some dispute that they possess a right to partake in decisions that directly influence their futures. Consequently, youth quotas in the House of Commons are integral in facilitating young interest and participation in democratic politics.

Following the 2019 General Election, under 1/10 of the House of Commons corresponded to non-White ethnic backgrounds⁴. To analogise, the minority proportion in the population of England and Wales is more than double this figure⁵, raising the idea that politics lacks adequate commensurate representation for marginalised groups, leading to a dearth of faith in the system from young people who find themselves encumbered by systemic small-mindedness. Although the ethnic diversity of the House of Commons has increased, this doesn't mean the fight is over: if the UK percentage were reflected, the current figure would be 30% greater⁶.

Given connections provided by social media, millennials naturally feel more vehemently about diversity and inclusion than their older counterparts: traditional agents (socioeconomic background, friends, and education) conduct political socialisation - a developmental process that takes place during adolescence. Unsurprisingly, research has indicated that social media could be an agent⁷. The mark of social media on political views is no mystery: there is a "strong positive correlation between political interest and content viewed online"⁸. This potent exposure to differing perspectives is unique to young people: millennials are the only generation that has fully endured the results of social media as an agent of political socialisation. Would young people regard the political system as more trustworthy if there were a much-needed upsurge in ethnic diversity in the House of Commons, and could this combat the inference that MPs are intransigent, with little cultural awareness?

Is there sufficient descriptive representation for the state-educated population - and could this affect perceptions of the political system? Perhaps - nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of 18-24-year-olds believe politicians are out of touch⁹, which corresponds with financial privilege and private education. The ratio of privately-educated MPs is nearly quadruple the overall figure¹⁰. Independent schools educate roughly 7% of UK citizens, so why do attendees monopolise 30% of Parliament¹¹? Little emphasis on political literacy in state schools threatens the proportion of state-educated representatives, as well: 1/5 of secondary schools in England don't teach politics¹².

A proposed solution was to confine the proportion of privately-educated MPs to free space for otherwise obstructed state-educated talents. Regardless, this is exclusionary and neglects to target the root of the problem: the disparity in political education between state and independent schools. In this case, the negatives outweigh the positives.

A superior resolution would be implementing an education focused on political literacy in state schools to improve accessibility to partake in politics. The delivery of A-level politics proves that politics can be taught in the classroom, and in-class debate sessions would stimulate an innovative mindset early on. Additionally, this is cohesive with the concept of political socialisation. Whilst biases held by individual teachers could be reflected onto students, posing a threat to political nonpartisanship, an impartial curriculum to meet would combat this. If young people are elected, they'll need experience with some partisanship regardless. This doesn't condone the exclusion of ideas on the other side of the aisle, however, the reality is that filtering out bias by removing the classroom from the equation would be unnatural. Furthermore, in contrast to social media, the likelihood of misinformation would be negligible, and more education on political literacy would provide teenagers the resources they need to identify it.

Installing education as a controlled agent of political socialisation ensures this psychological process isn't disrupted by unpredictable social media, protecting future voters from factual inaccuracies.

A more politically focused curriculum battles political disengagement observed among young voters by reiterating the significance of voting and democracy. Lack of teaching on voting and politics in state schools compared to independent schools could cause disproportionate results in future elections: students who receive an education with a heavier emphasis on political literacy are more likely to vote, meaning that the voting turnout of the privately-educated would be higher than of the state-educated¹³. Research demonstrates that a "sizeable minority" of young people feel insecure in their knowledge of political parties when it comes to deciding how to vote at election times¹⁴: further cause for political enrichment.

Since education is a devolved issue and a policy area that devolved legislatures can legislate on, there are different curricula across the UK. Examining policy which emphasises political literacy in its curriculum can determine whether this hypothesis is practically sound; a notable specimen is Scotland. Research has established that education on political literacy enhances political engagement: pupils who take Modern Studies in Scotland exhibit more interest in politics than other students¹⁵, and Scottish voting turnouts in the 2019 General Election were the highest of all UK constituents. Furthermore, Scotland was the only constituent where turnout rose. Consequently, enforcing education on political literacy in the curricula of all UK constituents could enhance faith in democracy. Although GCSE citizenship is already taught, only 22,000¹⁶ (of the 5 million GCSE candidates annually¹⁷) sit the exam. A viable method to incentivise the delivery of GCSE citizenship is to give it a double-weighting (like English and Maths GCSEs) for English Baccalaureate scores.

To elaborate on education, could the decline in faith in democracy be solved by promoting an open classroom climate? This strategy takes advantage of political socialisation by creating a student-centred learning environment - a cohort of students of varying skill levels and several educators among them. According to research, such experiences have "strong and persistent positive effects"¹⁸ on political trust, proving to be a "much stronger" classroom model than the one from direct civic education classes. Furthermore, evidence has shown that re-adjusting the environment in schools towards an open classroom climate fosters political engagement¹⁹.

Political campaigners have little incentive to acknowledge the interests of young people: the voting power of over-55s is almost quadruple that of 18-34-year-olds²⁰. Opinionated individuals must passively observe campaigns not aligned with their interests, causing a deficit of substantive representation for young people and diminishing faith in the system. Another facet of democracy - suffrage - is compulsory to analyse, prompting the debate on enfranchisement of 16-18-year-olds, following the lead of Scotland and Wales. Could lessening the voting age to 16 solve this neglect of young people's interests? Teenagers have proved their political capacity: in the Scottish Independence Referendum, 100000 16 and 17-year-olds voted. Research demonstrates a positive correlation between political engagement and faith in the government in students²¹, however, opinions are split. Counter-arguments to this proposition cite lack of knowledge (therefore an inability to take informed stances) - consequently, enfranchisement of 16-18-year-olds should be conditional on placing more emphasis on political literacy in education²². In conjunction with each other, improving voting accessibility and lowering the voting age would ensure young peoples' needs were met, motivating political campaigners to account for young people.

For young individuals to have confidence in 'democracy', they first must maintain an unvarnished vision of how it functions - unfortunately, the present system doesn't fully echo such a

notion. Increasing socioeconomic diversity in the government subjugates mistrusts embedded in systemic bigotry and classism in politics and assembles an authentic reflection of the general public sentiment - negating the concept that a specific race or class governs politics, accordingly navigating the UK towards a more inclusive and democratic environment. Considering political socialisation ceases at 25, it is not too late to take action to cultivate current 18-24-year-olds' faith in democratic politics. With an emphasis on formally taught political literacy and an open classroom climate, the UK can ensure that subsequent generations are equipped with the knowledge necessary to cast an informed vote, thus reinvigorating and maintaining the health of its democracy.

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